

## **MTBPS MEDIA STATEMENT:**

**We dedicate this statement to the memory of our formidable co-founder Yoliswa Dwane, who led our research and Parliamentary work for years. Her contribution to the struggle for equity and justice in post-apartheid South Africa is undeniable, and we release this statement in gratitude for her life's work.**

**National Treasury must not continue to defund education! #MTBPS2022 must put money toward fixing South Africa's schooling crisis.**

On Wednesday 26 October 2022, Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana will table his Medium Term Budget Policy Statement (MTBPS), which sets out government's spending priorities over the next three years and any changes to this year's budget. While this MTBPS will be the first budget announcement since the end of the National State of Disaster, the story is not new - South Africa's basic education system is in crisis. Every day, learners across the country face harsh inequalities and indignities at school, denying them their constitutional right to basic education. Equal Education (EE) demands that this MTBPS not just be business as usual, but that schools get the money needed to tackle the many challenges they experience.

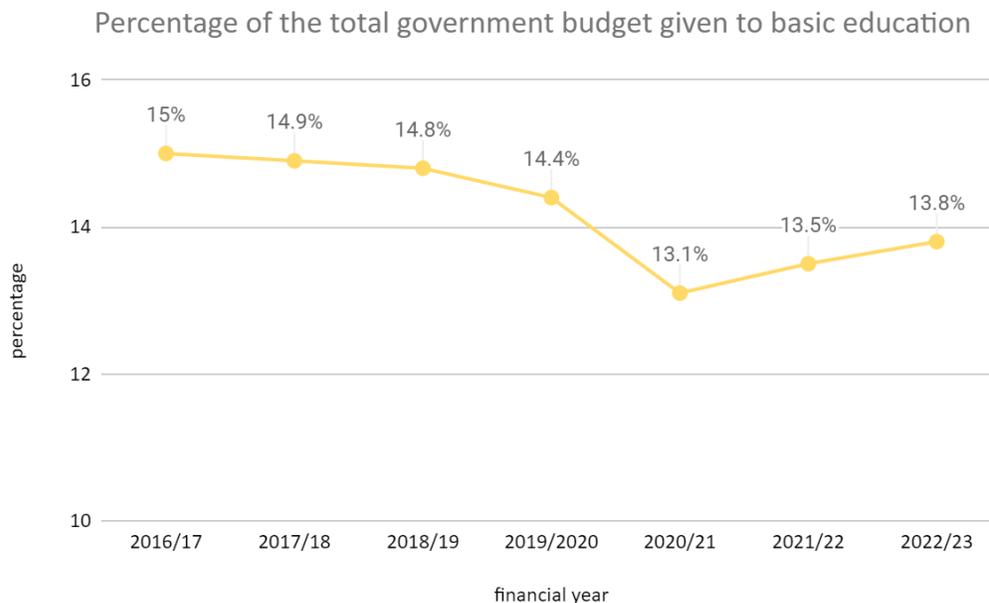
### A system in crisis

Although the problems in basic education are complex, the lack of safe and proper school infrastructure remains one of the biggest hurdles to teaching and learning. While important progress has been made since the end of apartheid, South Africa's public schooling system still suffers from a lack of access to basic services such as water and sanitation, and overcrowded classrooms. For instance, the latest Department of Basic Education (DBE) [statistics](#) show that 2 130 schools still have plain pit toilets as their only form of sanitation and 5 386 schools have an unreliable water supply. Despite the desperate need to reduce school infrastructure backlogs, the DBE has suggested shocking [changes](#) to the Regulations for Minimum Uniform Norms and Standards for Public School Infrastructure (school infrastructure law) that would remove all the deadlines for when schools must be provided with certain basic school infrastructure, making it harder to hold government accountable.

The DBE's proposal to remove the measures that ensure that the school infrastructure crisis is dealt with urgently is alarming. The COVID-19 pandemic, which kept learners out of the classroom for months and then affected how regularly they attended school, highlighted the critical need for safe and proper infrastructure. It also highlighted the inequalities in our schooling system. Even after schools reopened full time, learners in under-resourced schools were not able to return to class every day as their schools did not meet social distancing and hygiene standards. Teaching and learning suffered greatly as a result of these disruptions to in-person learning. It is mind blowing that the DBE and provincial education departments, while scrambling to ensure learners catch up on the significant learning losses, would also try and water down legislation that tries to fix these problems.

## The defunding of education

Despite the persistent problems, basic education seems to have fallen off government's priorities. While education continues to be one of government's [largest](#) spending items, between 2016 and 2020, basic education got an increasingly smaller share of government's [overall spending](#), with COVID-19 making things worse. Since 2021, after tireless campaigning by EE's members, other civil society organisations and by communities, basic education has started to get a slightly larger share again. This is an important victory! However these increases are not enough as the basic education budget has barely grown this year when taking inflation into account. On top of this, government has previously estimated that even less money will be available in 2023 as the total basic education budget is said to decrease by almost five percent.



Even though school infrastructure received an increase of R700 million in February's budget, more money will be needed to address the current school infrastructure backlog. For instance, the Minister of Basic Education stated earlier this year that an additional [R5 billion](#) is needed to address the current overcrowding crisis alone. Minister Motshekga highlighted that such funding is unavailable due to budget constraints. It is inexcusable that as COVID-19 nearly brought the education system to its knees because of poor infrastructure, National Treasury does not provide the funding needed to address this challenge.

## Finding a way forward

Despite the negative impact that budget cuts have had on the delivery of education projects and services, the sector also faces major challenges when it comes to spending the money that it does get. At

a briefing to Parliament by the Auditor-General of South Africa, the DBE was [named](#) as the government department with the third highest wasteful spending. In the last financial year alone over R1 billion was irregularly spent<sup>1</sup> by the DBE, almost all of which related to implementing agents - who build schools on behalf of government. This is money that could have helped fix our schools!

Although education departments have not always spent their money well, this cannot be used as an excuse to disinvest in schools. The importance of increased investment in basic education cannot be emphasised enough, and more effort is needed from national and provincial treasuries to ensure that the education departments not only have enough financial resources but that those resources are managed well, spent in line with the law, and on the right things.

Therefore, EE calls on National Treasury to live up to its constitutional responsibility by:

- Ensuring that the budget for basic education grows in line with inflation and learner enrollment;
- Ensuring that more money is given to basic education to deal with severe learning losses caused by lengthy school closures and disruptions to teaching and learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Ensuring more funding for school infrastructure specifically to address longstanding backlogs;
- Overseeing that the DBE and provincial education departments use their money efficiently and effectively; and
- Adopting a human rights-based budgeting approach that prioritises socio-economic rights like quality basic education.

Basic education is an “immediately realisable” constitutional right and should remain government’s top priority. This means that National Treasury **must** ensure that enough money is given to the schooling system so that all children are given the opportunity to receive an equal and quality basic education now. We have waited 28 years, we cannot wait any longer!

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<sup>1</sup> This means that government did not follow the law when spending taxpayers’ money.