

Education budget cuts mean poor learners will remain in the cycle of poverty and unemployment

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It is that time of the year again where the governing party comes to Parliament to deliver mediocre targets that do not offer tangible change to anyone's life on the ground. It is that time of year again where we are offered empty promises combined with shrinking budgets. It is that time of year again where this time, inefficiency and lack of funds will be blamed on Covid, rather than the grim reality of a failing department, funds being stolen by cadres, or money being thrown into empty pits of failed SOEs.

It is that time of the year again, where the Department aims to paint a different picture of South African realities and sell us fallacies of success and achievement. The reality is a stark contrast

to the one you and I live. The reality that our children live, is one where these promises only yield poverty and unemployment.

Government's capability is desolate, where they have grand plans of smart cities yet our children attend mud schools, or seek to develop bullet trains, yet our children are drowning in pit toilets, where they have plans of creating jobs yet more and more young people are unemployed and consigned to a lifetime of poverty. All of this, because of government's poor implementation of quality education policies, where teachers cannot pass the very same exam they set for their learners.

The largest obstacle to redressing the legacies of the past and creating a society of opportunity, irrespective of one's background, is repairing our failing education system and replacing its failing leaders.

In the coming weeks of June, many cadres will be boldly commemorating the youth of 1976, but I can't help but think of how you are spectacularly failing the legacy of the young people of 1976. We are failing those who bravely fought against Bantu Education by giving the youth of today poor-quality education that is irrelevant for industry, the job market, entrepreneurship and an education that is extremely behind on innovation.

Minister, you were supposed to free us from Bantu Education and instead you have sustained it, if not exacerbated it especially in the most rural and forgotten parts of our country.

As the ANC government you are carefully controlling our generation and those who come after us by not educating us, miseducating us, while at the same time creating high levels of dependency, all to achieve your agenda of control over us.

Outcome 4 of the departments APP refers to creating a schooling system that leaves youth more prepared to contribute to a prosperous South Africa. The reality is that 10 million “Educated or skilled South Africans” can’t find work. Over 60 percent of them are young people. This outcome for the ANC is a mere pipe dream. Outcome 3 of the APP seeks to better prepare the youth for studies beyond grade 9. Based on youth employability, we can see that this program has failed. Yet, we still boast about a 44.1 real matric pass rate. Of this, over half a million drop out of the education system to form part of the 8 million youth who are not in the education system, in employment or in skills training.

No matter how you look at it, the basic education system needs a different type of leadership, approach, budgeting and effective policy implementation that will tangibly change people’s lives for the better.

Minister, today you are here to deliver a speech filled with more promises yet the targets set in the previous APPs have not been fully met and there have been little to no changes on the ground on quality teaching, infrastructure, scholar transport, vandalism and high dropouts. Yet the budget has been significantly cut to save failing SOEs and many of the funds stolen through corruption and inefficiency.

In this budget vote there are massive budget cuts on Infrastructure, School Nutrition and Curriculum related Quality Teaching targets.

Yet;

1. Only 30 schools have been built and completed through the accelerated school infrastructure delivery initiative. Only 21 schools are predicted to be built for 2021/2022. Yet we have a school that has been excluded from the programme, such as ET Tabane in Ugie with dilapidated asbestos classrooms that is simply falling apart. It hosts 1800 learners as the only non-fee primary school in the town, yet it is not being prioritised because of tight budgets.
2. The department spends three times more money in building a school because of the risk of not paying on time and appointing contractors that cannot do the work. They end up paying inflated prices. For a school that costs R20 million the department pays R60 million, as we have seen in the ASIDI report.
3. We have Masinakane Special School in Mpumalanga where classrooms have been converted to a hostel, to not deny learners with disabilities their right to education, despite promises of a hostel being built. We have schools like Homevale in the Northern Cape with falling bridge walkways for learners. Not to even mention the multiple mud schools in the Harry Qwala district in Kwa-Zulu Natal. There are over 180 reported schools with infrastructure related issues yet only 30 are budgeted for. The Budget Vote

only makes provision for providing water to 125 schools and sanitation to 691 schools. What is most painful is that over R1 billion has been cut on building and maintaining schools just to bail out a failed airline like SAA.

4. The APP indicates that you only aim to target 1000 schools with pit toilets yet there are 2111 that have been reported despite your promises of eradicating these through the SAFE programme. No matter how you avoid addressing the issues, you cannot run away from the stench of unsafe toilets for the Grade R learners in Mmadikitsha primary school in Limpopo.
5. 7237 schools have no fencing, further contributing to the vandalism and theft we are experiencing in schools.
6. This Budget vote does not address vandalism, insecurity and theft of school property. This means that we are not protecting the current existing property and assets while burglaries rise, and classrooms being vandalised then we spend millions repairing what was there rather than replacing dilapidated mud and asbestos schools and pit toilets.
7. Outcome 5 of the APP focuses on creating a safe school physical infrastructure that encourages learners to learn. Based on the above-mentioned statistics, this program too has failed.
8. Nationally, 135 195 of eligible learners for scholar transport are not catered being catered, further exacerbating learner dropouts. Only two provinces cater for all eligible learners for school transport and that is the Western and Eastern Cape. Would you walk 10km to work as the children of Ixopo Minister?
9. There has been a reduction in the School Nutrition Program by R123.1 million. The effects of this are that the programme's extension to include breakfast and provide meals to selected learners in Q4 & 5 will be slower. Navels High School in the free State received 105 unplaced learners from poor backgrounds who depend on the school nutrition and budget. Budget cuts have left these learners without their daily meal.
10. The department is plagued with corruption and there is little consequence management to prevent this. Just this week, the Eastern Cape education officials have been arrested for defrauding the department of millions. Why must we lose millions to corruption before we take action?

And then, there's Covid:

- As if these challenges are not enough your cadres from Gauteng decided spend R431 million in just 3 months, for unnecessary "deep cleaning".
- Your cadres decided that surely they could do better by raking over R500 million on over-priced PPE in the Eastern Cape. The poor handling of the covid pandemic in schools further showed yesterday that you can take a taxi filled with people to go to school but can't get there and play netball or rugby.
- Through our oversight visits, all schools indicated that it will be impractical to complete the curriculum let alone get through half of it, yet the department is mum on teacher vaccinations, which is our only root to any sense of normality to cover the curriculum. I beg you, Minister, please release a clear plan on the vaccination of teachers, which is

the only solution to the Covid-19 pandemic. 1100 teachers already succumbed to the virus if not more.

The Democratic Alliance believes that education is the foundation of opportunity. And we propose the following solutions.

Chairperson, the DA believes that we can fix our education system. We can do so by fixing our failing administration, ensuring our budgets are spent on infrastructure such as pit toilets, asbestos/mud schools, access to water as the first line of defence to Covid and through improving teaching, learning and education outcomes through bold reforms.

South Africans should have access to education and training of the highest quality, leading to significantly improved learning outcomes.

- Engage national treasury on the Asidi programme or other sources of funding to ensure that dilapidated mud and asbestos classrooms are eradicated.
- Fast track the SAFE programme so as to ensure that no child drowns at a pit toilet by increasing targets to get rid of all of them by the end of this financial year.
- The Department should ensure that with regards to infrastructure backlogs, that the implementing agents are held accountable to the extent that those that are unreliable are taken off the system so that they cannot continue and they should be – deregistered. I encourage you to look at the collaboration schools model in the Western Cape that sees public-private partnerships in building schools in poor communities with a specific focus on skills development based on economic opportunities in the area. Eg: Jakes Gerwel.
- Establish a schools vandalism protection unit with public works and law enforcement agencies to protect already existing buildings to avoid spending money on repairs rather than improvements at schools.
- Reconsider the School Nutrition budget in order to cater for breakfast and lunch while including learners who can't afford in quantile 4/5 schools as we came across at in the Free State.
- Strengthen consequence management controls of civil servants by dealing quicker with. Cases of corruption, inefficiencies and offences committed by officials.
- SACE to ensure that they bring online registration of teachers and vetting of registered educators on board including teachers in remote /rural areas. Further include quality control measures such as additional evaluations to ensure quality teaching.
- The Minister to strengthen her oversight on provinces on quality teaching, infrastructure delivery, accessible scholar transport, efficient school nutrition programme and corruption.
- Most importantly increase your targets to not only monitor provinces but visit problematic districts and circuits across the country to nip non-performance in the bud.
- A mechanisms for value for money must be established to preserve costs to build more schools with quality infrastructure affordability.

I have no doubt that your government will continue to try and blame all of its failures solely on colonialism and apartheid and the more recent excuse of Covid. However, we must come to learn that, whilst colonialism and apartheid placed South Africans in a state of economic disempowerment, it's your government that has kept them there, if not worsened their chances at any economic prosperity.

Minister, as the DA, we aim to tangibly change young people's lives for the better through education, we go see the reality for ourselves on the ground in communities, we come to this house to present you with the issues and solutions, and we encourage you to use them for the sake of the future of our children.

Without a decent education, any form of economic empowerment opportunities for South Africans will remain *elusive*.

For it was Madiba that said that *"no country can really develop unless its citizens are educated"*, and that it is *"through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mineworker can become the head of the mine, that a child of farm workers can become the president of a great nation."*

Chairperson, our generation deserves more.