



Democratic Alliance
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Debate on Budget Vote 16: Basic Education

Honourable Chairperson,
Honourable Minister,
Honourable Members, and
My fellow South Africans,

Good day.

“It takes a village to raise a child.”

Educating, supporting and empowering the youth is not an easy task. It is as multi-faceted as the human mind, even more so in the context of our complex environment. The children of South Africa face challenges likened to that of war-torn nations. From child-headed households to regular exposure to violence, neglect, hunger, abuse and intimidation.

Thus there is an increasing need for schools to be safe environments that protect children from society. Far too many schools struggle to provide this because of overcrowding, lack of access to transport, limited feeding schemes, GBV, teen pregnancies and politicised of School Governing Bodies. Either owing to limited resources or a lack of commitment to place children’s needs first.

Schools have needed to become “the village”, sadly this specific village is carrying a heavy burden: historic brutalities, since in 1910, of a schooling system that did not focus on children, rather on exclusionary-eugenic politics. And the subsequent maladministration, fraud and corruption perpetuated a system that does not put children first.

At SoNA 2025, the President spoke about an education system that leaves no child behind. What a wonderful goal. But, it will take time to achieve. It will take a village, the whole of society, to take hands and put the welfare of all children, regardless of any characteristic of birth, at the centre.

As with all Departments, we assess yearly progress to see whether steps have been implemented to achieve relevant goals. Then we consider the feasibility of the plan and the budget for the year ahead. At times this has been challenging, however Minister Gwarube and the Department of Basic Education have taken tangible steps that show results. Sustainable and real change only happens with small, consistent, strategic and vision-focused steps over time. In every programme there has been progression that is relevant to the on-the-ground impact in schools and communities.

The Minister started her term with the “Listening and Learning Tour” in every province, this was supplemented with additional school visits and stakeholders engagements. Allowing the Minister an in-depth knowledge of the challenges and how to address them.

As mentioned, improved access and quality of Early Childhood Development is being achieved; it is quintessential to redressing injustices of the past.



Pit latrines and infrastructure challenges are being tackled with marked success. Not only creating a safe environment, but this shows our children that we care enough to create schools that are safe.

With a focus on equipping future generations to compete in the third and fourth industrial revolution, the Department has improved literacy and numeracy for benchmark grades. A learner needs to read, write or do basic arithmetic to access opportunities.

Teachers, the bedrock of the village, have not been left behind. With a focus on school leadership and relevant teacher development; supporting teachers to develop young minds.

A quintile audits is underway, 30 years overdue, to ensure resources allocated by quintile are aligned with the needs of the school.

School safety and environment are improving, showing all children that they are worthy of protection and care.

The list of improvements is long, but by no means complete.

On Saturday, I spent time with a family in Thembelihle, Ward 8, JHB. A single mother who's eldest was unable to find a placement, because of her special needs. There is evidence of abuse from the community. And I was reminded of a terrible tendency; predators often target developing girls and boys with special needs so that they can misuse their disabilities to gaslight them should they speak up.

In the same region, schools like Altmont, Apex, Oakdale, Lenasia Secondary and Fred Norman (to name a few) are all over double capacity and have issues of bullying, violence and malnutrition.

Thankfully there are one or two schools in the region that show that it can be done, it only takes dedication. A school like St George's Primary in Ennerdale needs mentioning, I thought it was a private school, but it is a well-run public school.

Further out in Johannesburg, there is a reasonably newly built school to accommodate special needs children, with state-of-the-art facilities. However, the Select Committee found Nokuthula Centre and Special Needs School in dangerous disrepair.

These issues are not limited to Johannesburg, and the burden of care is heavy. It will take time and money well-spent to addresses the urgent needs like nutrition, sports at schools, psychosocial support, infrastructure, transport, curriculum, bullying and safety.

Based on the actual shifts over the past year, as the Democratic Alliance, we welcome this budget, as it places learners at the centre to address the greatest and most tragic inequalities.

Additionally, we urge education MECs (who report to their Premiers) to step up, it will take the whole of society.

The road ahead is clear, the burden is heavy. But we look forward to seeing the growth in this department as they fulfill their duty of care to the children of South Africa.



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I thank you.

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