



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.

Education is not just about memorising facts. It's about building a future where every child is empowered to

- think critically,
- question boldly, and
- innovate courageously.

As Einstein said: "Education is not the learning of facts, but the training of the mind to think."

But to think, learn, and thrive at school, children need more than textbooks. They need safe and supportive environments, proper nutrition, and a system that believes in their potential and growth.

Safety means proper infrastructure – yet too many children have lost their lives drowning in pit toilets, a tragedy that's been happening for years.

In 2016, the Eastern Cape Department of Education promised to act, but failed, blaming a lack of funds. Yet, in the same year, R530 million in unused education funds were returned to Treasury, by the very same Department.

In 2021 and 2022, more funds went unused:

- R205 million and R100 million in the Eastern Cape respectively and
- R312 million in Mpumalanga.

It was, simply put, a mess.

But there is hope. Thanks to the GNU and the leadership of Minister Gwarube, we're turning tragedy into progress.

As of March 2025, 96% of the pit toilets identified in the 2018 SAFE Initiative have been eliminated.

Only 141 of 3,372 remain.

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This is real, measurable change—proof that with focus and commitment, we can restore dignity to every child. The **mess** has now become a **message** of hope.

Another crisis, less visible but equally destructive, and a silent pandemic in schools, is **bullying**. This is not mere teasing. It's a toxic force that erodes safety, destroys trust, and can, tragically, lead to suicide.

Children should not walk into school fearful -of humiliation, of violence, of isolation. The “cancel culture” is real and extremely cruel. Especially not those already facing hardship at home.

We must create schools where every child feels protected, valued, and that they belong.

Creating safe schools is the foundation. But what we build on that foundation matters even more. We live in an age of misinformation, emotional manipulation, and rapid technological change.

We must teach our children to:

- **Evaluate information critically**
- **Discern truth from fiction**
- **Engage responsibly as citizens in a democracy.**

The Fourth Industrial Revolution demands creators, not copycats or parrots in other words, critical thinkers, not passive receivers.

Education must ignite curiosity, cultivate problem-solvers, and prepare children to challenge the status quo.

While our education system should prepare learners for the Fourth Industrial Revolution – driven by technology, creativity, and critical thinking, the warning of recent research is also clear, over-reliance on AI, **can dull, especially, young minds’ ability to think independently-critically.**

We therefore must integrate digital literacy carefully:

- Equip teachers,
- Upgrade infrastructure,
- Teach skills like coding and problem-solving early **BUT, NOT AT THE COST OF THE BASICS-READING WITH UNDERSTANDING, WRITING, AND ARITHMETIC**

No matter how modern and glamorous the structure of a building, if the foundation is weak, it will collapse.

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Reading, writing, and arithmetic remain the essentials for a solid educational foundation. This child-centred budget prioritises solid foundations over ‘gimmicks’. The Department's efforts in this regard must be supported.

Our 1996 Constitution envisioned a nation of dignity, safety, and opportunity.

Our schools must live up to that promise: Schools Must be:

- Inclusive,
- Safe and
- empowering schools all learners

A truly evolving curriculum doesn't just transfer knowledge, it builds voice, confidence, and independence and critical understanding of learning material.

Because if children don't feel safe or respected, they won't think freely. And if they don't think freely, they won't be ready for the world beyond school walls. The Minister's close attention to this matter is appreciated.

In Closing: As Aristotle said: “It is the mark of an educated mind to entertain a thought without accepting it.”

And as Einstein reminded us, education **is about thinking, not just remembering.**

This budget vote isn't just about numbers. It's about the lives and futures of our children.

We owe them safety, dignity, and a system that equips them to shape a better world.

The DA supports this vote, because:

- we've seen the beginning of real change, and
- out of duty to every learner we serve to keep that progress alive.

Let's commit, with full hearts and unwavering focus, to leave no child behind.

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