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Table of Contents

Visic	on	3
Background to the Policy		4
Objectives of the Policy		5
Proposals of the Policy		5
	Enabling Learners to Become Literate and Numerate at International Benchmarked Levels	5
	Providing Access to Quality Education for All	6
	Contributing Towards Creating a Safe and Secure Education Environment	8
	Enhancing the Benefits of Technology in the Provision of Basic Education	10
	Developing Good Governance, Leadership, Management and Accountability in all Levels of the Education System	11
End	End Notes	

Vision

A schooling system that prepares young people for life and the world of work, enabling them to live lives they value as contributing citizens.



Background to the Policy

[Disclaimer: This summary must be read and understood in conjunction with the Basic Education Policy, as the policy unpacks the rationale behind the proposed recommendations in more detail].

For learners to leave the schooling system and meaningfully contribute to the economy, they must have access to quality education. This means that those who cannot afford to attend private schools should still have access to the same quality of education within the public education system. The schooling system, whether private or public, must empower learners to reach their full potential, enabling them to live the lives they value and seize opportunities presented to them.

However, various challenges stand in the way of learners' access to quality education. Factors external to the education sector, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, service delivery protests, and gang violence, have resulted in critical learning losses due to school closures and/or learner absenteeism. Thus, the time required to effectively deliver the curriculum has been lost. This, amongst other factors, has resulted in deteriorating reading and numeracy outcomes, which is demonstrated by our poor performance in international benchmarking tests such as PIRLS and TIMMS.

Factors within the education sector, such as poor-quality teaching, inconsistent curriculum implementation, inadequate learner transport, and the increasing costs of schooling, combined with decreasing support funding, have led to disparities in educational opportunities. The No-Fee School Policy and school quintile rankings, specifically designed to address affordability challenges, have proven to be ineffective in increasing access to quality education for those who cannot afford to pay. Furthermore, the state of infrastructure at many public schools is dire, resulting in an unconducive school environment for teaching and learning.

Poor management and a lack of accountability hinder the national Department of Basic Education's ability to effectively manage these external and internal challenges. The Department is plagued by corruption, maladministration, abuses of power, unethical hiring practices, and misappropriation of resources, leading to a decline in service delivery and a failure to adequately support schools and educators. These issues contribute to the widening gap in educational quality, ultimately disadvantaging the learners who rely on the public education system.

The DA's Draft Basic Education Policy proposes various solutions to address the identified challenges. However, the sector has experienced significant budget cuts, necessitating Policy prioritisation. This leads us to propose that the initial focus must be primarily on improvements in the system that can make meaningful educational impacts without incurring significant costs.

We propose that we begin by placing a greater emphasis on literacy and numeracy in the foundation phase (first three years of school). To support this, we will focus on enhancing education outcomes by improving the foundational skills of reading and numeracy and testing children for these skills at the end of Grade 3.

Objectives of the Policy

In pursuit of the DA's vision to prepare young people for life and the world of work and to enable them to live lives they value as contributing citizens, the basic education policy has the following 5 objectives:

- 1. Literacy and numeracy: To enable learners to become literate and numerate at international benchmarked levels.
- 2. Access: To provide access to quality education for all.
- **3. Safety and security in schools:** To contribute towards creating a safe and secure education environment.
- **4. Benefits of technology:** To enhance the benefits of technology in the provision of basic education.
- **5. Governance:** To develop good governance, leadership, management and accountability at all levels of the education system.

Proposals of the Policy

To realise the mentioned objectives, the following key proposals are included:

Enabling Learners to Become Literate and Numerate at International Benchmarked Levels

The DA will improve reading by:

- Devoting a minimum of 10 hours per week in the Foundation Phase (grade R to grade 3) to developing reading and writing skills.
- Devoting a minimum of 7 hours per week and working towards allocating 8 hours per week in the Foundation Phase to numeracy skills.
 - Introducing a national literacy and numeracy test at the end of the Foundation Phase, under independent invigilation, to assess whether learners have acquired these foundational skills.
- Reviewing budget allocations and allowing funds to be directed towards reading resources and interventions.¹
- Moving away from large-scale reading interventions towards small-scale, better-resourced, adequately evaluated, and targeted reading interventions. For this to be successful, the Western Cape systemic testing needs to be expanded nationwide. This will monitor learning challenges and guide targeted interventions. Additionally, a targeted approach would be more cost-effective.²

The DA will address learning losses by:

- Allocating additional time towards core subjects such as mathematics, science, and language, where feasible.
- Considering the reduction of the instructional workload in subjects other than mathematics and language. Specifically, the focus will be on trimming the content within non-core subjects.
- Assessing learning losses by expanding systemic testing nationally.
- Implementing targeted instruction.³ The principle of targeted instruction seeks to assess student learning levels and group them by skill proficiency when delivering the curriculum.

The DA will ensure that **teaching and learning continue** despite disruptions to schooling that may occur. We will do this by introducing blended learning in all schools, to integrate both conventional and on-line teaching practices. This will enable learners to access resources from any linked location and strengthen the capacity to shift to remote learning on short notice.⁴ This will be done by increasing access to the internet, thereby helping to bridge the digital divide, which will bridge the digital divide. Access to all aspects of educational technology must be a priority. This will assist in providing tailored instruction to meet a learner's needs.

The DA will improve the curriculum by:

- Reviewing and reducing the volume of content in all subjects, where possible.⁵ Content duplication in similar subject areas should be eliminated.⁶
- Piloting the introduction of teaching assistants as a strategy for teachers to get in-class support for administrative tasks to reduce the administrative burden on teachers.
- Requesting that the National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (which will be replaced by the Schools Evaluation Authority) makes recommendations on how current internal evaluations (exams and continuous assessments) can be enhanced to improve quality and learning outcomes in the system while reducing administrative burdens on teachers.
- Monitoring poor performing schools, including absentee rates and' time management, to
 ensure that the syllabus is properly completed in the time allocated. Interventions will be
 required to ensure time lost on non-instructional activities is limited.
 - Placing a focus on training school management and teachers (after school hours) on effective time management practices.⁷
- Ensuring that each child gets 210 full teaching days per year. This will require a culture of being "present, punctual and prepared" for every task at every level of the education system.

The DA will **improve quality teaching** by:

- Ensuring that teachers in each phase undergo a competency assessment every five years to remain in the profession.
- Encouraging school-based and teacher-led professional development programmes.
- Enabling career advancement pathways for teachers within the classroom.
- Expanding the Western Cape Schools Evaluation Authority (SEA) nationally would improve school accountability by measuring the quality of education delivered. The SEA would measure learning, access, infrastructure targets, and school governance processes.8
- Implementing targeted curriculum implementation training for teachers.

Providing Access to Quality Education for All

The DA will address the challenges within the Quintile System by:

- Amending the quintile classification indicators to consider not only the community's economic status but also the individual economic status of learners, in the process of ranking schools.^{9,10}
- Exploring the potential of implementing a sliding scale to classify schools in each quintile.
- Ensuring the regular (re)classification of schools to ensure schools are correctly classified¹¹.
- Addressing poor quality education in lower quintile schools.¹²
- Implementing incentives for teachers who teach in difficult socio-economic environments.¹³

The DA will address the challenges with the No-Fee School Policy by:

• Piloting the removal of the umbrella approach to the no-fee school to instead only consider a learner's individual economic status.

The DA will address the challenges of implementing the **school feeding scheme** by:

- Addressing the delays in procurement by shifting from a centralised to a decentralised procurement model at a provincial level, where feasible.¹⁴
- Developing training videos and additional hard-copy content on the standards of quality food preparation for various meals to be disbursed to food handlers.
- Distributing a digital meal planner, which will assist schools and food handlers in creating menus and ensuring the most efficient and nutritious meal options are delivered based on food cost and availability.

The DA will increase **classroom capacity** in the public education system by:

- Strengthening relationships with private partners in the delivery of school infrastructure.
- Supporting schools to expand their capacity to take on more learners where this is mutually agreed upon between the school and department.

The DA will provide short-term relief to learner transport challenges by:

- Considering the rationalisation of functions by making one department the sole implementor of the scholar transport programme across all provinces.
- Considering a Scholar Transport Conditional Grant.
- Reviewing the National Scholar Transport Policy to make the eligibility criteria more inclusive.
- Expediting the implementation of learner Transport Safety Norms and Standards, as outlined in the 2015 National Scholar Transport Policy¹⁵, to ensure compliance with operational standards and guidelines.
- Ensuring that scholar transport vehicles are accessible to disabled learners.

The DA will improve the ECD sector by:

- Removing red tape for ECD registrations¹⁶ through the following interventions:
 - Looking into the viability of a one-stop-shop, through a single ECD registration system, for registration applications.
 - Ensuring municipal authorities issue relevant documentation promptly to avoid delays.
 - Recommending the amendment of local by-laws to facilitate the above recommendations.¹⁷
- Upskilling and training government and NPO staff on management skills to ensure effective policy implementation.

The DA will **professionalise the ECD sector**. This will be done by:

- Improving the quality of ECD programmes through strengthening monitoring and implementation mechanisms within the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the NPO sector¹⁸.
- Expanding the modes of training programmes available for ECD practitioners to include training delivered at TVETs or colleges.
- Including ECD in the DA-amended quintile ranking system to ensure equitable access and funding.

The DA will ensure access and improvements in the quality of education provided to **disabled learners** by:

- Expediting the development of minimum norms and standards for learners with disabilities in all schools.
- Implementing a universal design policy in the curriculum, school infrastructure projects and pedagogy.
- Conducting research into the feasibility of expanding a Universal Design for Learning as a method for curriculum adaption¹⁹ as a new model for designing and implementing the curriculum to support the diverse learning needs of learners.
- Monitoring enrolment for learners with disabilities in both special and ordinary schools.²⁰ See the section on 'learner drop-outs'.
- Ensuring that no learner with disabilities is denied entry to an ordinary school based on disability, where the school meets the minimum norms and standards to accommodate learners with disabilities.
- Investigating the feasibility of partnering with private teacher development companies and NGOs whose work can be incorporated into developing "full-service schools".
- Ensuring each school has at least one educator with specialised training to identify and support learners with special educational needs.
- Piloting the implementation of inclusive education in parallel to 'Special Schools' through gradually expanding ordinary schools to full-service schools depending on the outcome of the aforementioned recommendation.²¹
- Including special and full-service schools in the DA-amended quintile rankings to ensure they receive funds accordingly.
- Considering a special grant for full-service schools.

Contributing Towards Creating a Safe and Secure Education Environment

The DA will address the problem of unsafe schools by:

- Ensuring school safety is instilled as a cultural norm.
- Ensuring that teachers and other staff members complete the relevant training as part of their onboarding procedures.
- Ensuring that all schools have transparent processes for reporting abuse.
- Providing guidelines on the use of media concerning students. A 'content' policy that specifies the circumstances in which a photograph, video or recording can be taken, stored, and distributed (with parental approval) should be developed by the DBE and implemented across the country.²²
- Implementing a whole-of-society approach in dealing with gang-related violence and infrastructure vandalism in schools. The DA will support the whole-of-society approach by:
 - Encouraging open communication between nearby schools regarding gang-related threats and incidents. This intervention could raise awareness and ensure preventative measures are put in place.²³
 - Creating more opportunities for learners to participate in sports, arts, and cultural activities.
 - Making use of early detection mechanisms to detect early signs of gang-related activity.
 - Investigating the implementation of preventative treatment programmes related to gang activity in hotspot areas.

The DA will address corporal punishment by:

- Conducting in-service workshops to promote professionalism and alternative corrective behaviour mechanisms.²⁴
- Expanding the Strategy for Alternatives to Corporal Punishment (ATCP) to incorporate strategies to instil a culture of self-discipline and non-violence in schools.²⁵

The DA will address substance abuse in schools through demand-side interventions by:

- Educating teachers on drug abuse prevention strategies²⁶ to ensure they are skilled in identifying signs of substance abuse.²⁷ These can be done through workshops, seminars, and lessons on basic counselling.²⁸
- Ensuring vital referral pathways to struggling learners to assist with stress management and coping skills.
- Encouraging schools to develop teacher-parent forums, which can serve as a support structure for parents.
- Ensuring schools refer learners who have drug problems to the social development district department so that an expert can assess them.

The DA will improve the state of **school infrastructure** by:

- Phasing out all schools built with inappropriate and/or dangerous materials.
- Ensuring adequate water and sanitation facilities at schools where funding is available.
 - Diversifying sources of funding available²⁹ for school infrastructure. This can be done by identifying ways in which strong private sector participation and funding can be included within the school infrastructure maintenance network.³⁰
- Enhancing the protection of school infrastructure by implementing the following interventions:
 - Increasing local-level engagement with communities.
 - Establishing a National School Protection Response Team, in line with the SAHRC's National Investigative Hearing, into the impact of protest-related action on the right to basic education in South Africa. This response team would include relevant departments such as SAPS, DBE, and other relevant stakeholders.
 - Replicating the national task team at provincial and local levels.
 - Improving safety and security measures in schools by increasing the number of CCTV cameras and alarm systems installations in hotspot areas.
 - Encouraging community ownership of schools through increasing local community involvement in addressing school vandalism.

The DA will address **overcrowding** in schools by:

- Considering co-teaching to reduce teacher-to-learner ratios within the same classroom contexts immediately.
- Conducting a feasibility study for the potential nationwide expansion of online schooling as a component of blended learning
- Expanding the availability of mobile classrooms in under-resourced schools.
- Acknowledging the role played by good independent schools in relieving the burden on the public schooling system.

The DA will address the problem of learner dropouts by:

- Strengthening learner tracking and tracing mechanisms and diverting learners who drop out of all forms of education, back into the school system. There are various mechanisms by which this can be done. These include:
 - Closing the gaps within the Learner Unit Tracking Information System (LURITS) system, which is responsible for tracking a learner's school and inter-provincial movement, and ensuring all schools have electronic administrative systems for accurate learner data capturing.
- Using available technology to identify early warning signs for dropouts and offer support
 interventions. These technologies can assist learners who have disengaged in learning and
 who require additional support to get back on track. For example, mobile apps could serve
 as one-stop-shops to include counsellors, social workers and psychologists. This will allow
 learners and parents to easily access online information and professionals offering psychosocial
 support.
- Expanding teacher professional development programmes offered by SACE to include a psychosocial component.
- Opening additional positions at the district level for in-house counsellors or educational psychologists in the public education system.

The DA will address the challenges of both progression and repetition policies by:

- Establishing flexibility within the curriculum that can enhance the role of technical, vocational and industry training providers in the education sector to ensure skills that cater to local economic contexts.³¹
- Strengthening the pathways from schools to TVETs by equipping schools to become information hubs for TVETs.
- Expediting the implementation of the three-stream model that can be introduced early on for learners who struggle academically and would thrive taking more practical subjects.³²
- Considering amending the progression policy via a phased-in approach. Learners who foresee that they will not meet the academic requirements can either repeat their grades or be diverted to vocational streams (as stated in the three-stream model in this paper).

Enhancing the Benefits of Technology in the Provision of Basic Education

The DA will improve digital learning and address the digital divide by:

- Ensuring that teachers and learners have access to open, informal learning and professional development resources.
- Expanding courses offered by SACE to include a Learning to Teach Online³³ component.
- Expanding free access to the internet, where practically possible, especially in less connected areas.
- Implementing a blended approach to online learning where required to prevent a sense of isolation and address the challenges of delivering the curriculum for practical subjects. A blended approach to learning is a mixture of an online and in-person component to teaching and learning.
- Including a section in the South African Schools Act regulating online schools.

The DA will enhance the provision of **homeschooling** by:

- Conducting a national survey on home education. This survey will compare traditional public schools to home education in terms of academic achievement, social development, and relative success of home-schoolers in adulthood and tertiary education.
- Encouraging the sharing of facilities between nearby traditional schools and children schooled at home.

Developing Good Governance, Leadership, Management and Accountability in all Levels of the Education System

The DA aims to enhance **good governance** in the education sector by:

- Replacing the National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU) with the school evaluation authorities (SEA), which will operate at a provincial level.
- Encouraging collaboration between Provincial Education Departments to share their administrative successes and managerial resources for improved administration.
- Ensure a national audit of tender regulation compliance covering all education departments.
- Increasing transparency in hiring and firing processes of educator and principal posts.
- Implement a victim reporting structure for gender-based violence-related issues in every department.

The DA will enhance the **functions of SGBs** by:

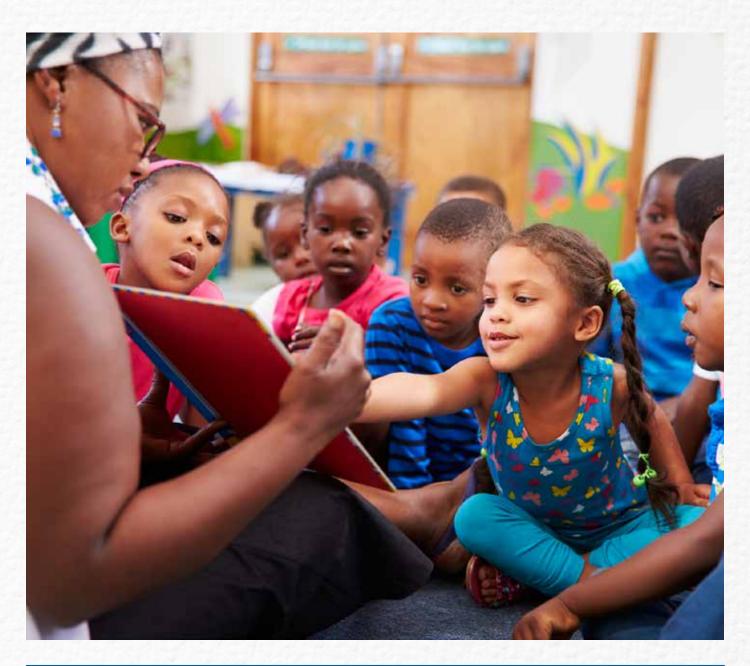
- Implementing minimum membership qualification guidelines for specialist posts in the SGB.
- Ensuring SGB members undergo ongoing development training. 35,36,37.
- Ensuring SGBs have and implement compulsory induction programmes for all incoming members.³⁸
- Conducting annual performance assessments of SGB members.³⁹
- Investigating the potential for incentivising SGB members for their work.

The DA will expand and improve the collaboration school model by:

- Ensuring that service-level agreements are established between the provincial education department and the operating partner.
- Implementing effective monitoring and quality control mechanisms before the national expansion of collaboration schools.
- Strengthening internal capacity, systems, processes, and controls when choosing school partners and donors to ensure responsible expansion and sustainability of collaboration schools.⁴⁰
- Developing norms and standards related to collaboration schools, which detail the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders for better accountability.
- Detailing formal processes that must be followed when partners choose to withdraw their resources from the school.

The DA will mitigate against the negative impact of **teacher unions** on the education system by:

- Ensuring the implementation of the recommendations highlighted in the 'Report of the Ministerial Task Team to Investigate the Allegations into the Selling of Posts of Educators by Members of Teachers Unions and Departmental Officials in Provincial Education Departments'.⁴¹ These include:
 - Principals should be selected by qualified, well-resourced panels that can adequately evaluate a candidate's competence, qualification, and suitability for the relevant vacancy.
 - Experienced and highly ranked educators should sit on the panels.
 - Regulations should ensure that educators at post-level 1 positions cannot be promoted to directly as principals. An individual must first become a manager to acquire the relevant skills and competencies in lower-level managerial positions before becoming a principal.
 - Review union privileges regarding the observations of the hiring process at schools.
- Supporting further research into the impacts of teacher trade unions on educational outcomes.
- Legally prohibit cadre deployment⁴².
- Ending trade union control of teacher appointments and introducing strict meritocracy in the interests of learners.
- Implementing systems that prevent the "selling of posts" by members of trade unions and/or governing bodies.



End Notes

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