

Provincial Launch of the School Safety Protocol

MEC Martha Bartlett

Friday, 26 October 2018

Gaegake Primary School, JTG District

Programme Director,

Kgosi Toto;

MEC Lebogang Mothlaping;

Executive Mayors, Local Mayors and Councillors present;

Representatives from all political parties and alliances;

SAPS Provincial Commissioner, Lt Gen Shivuri

Head of Departments, Government and SAPS officials;

Representatives from our School Governing Bodies, Teacher Unions and QLTC Structures;

Representatives from our Community Police Forums;

Principals and Educators;

Learners and Parents;

Members of the media;

Distinguished guests;

Ladies and gentleman;

We are gathered here, united in action to ensure that every child should feel safe from violence on their school premises. Today, it is not unusual for learners to violently attack fellow learners, educators and school personnel, showing a complete disrespect for authority and the institution.

The Department of Basic Education takes school safety very seriously and as an apex priority of Government, the department has put in place various policies and measures to ensure the safety of all learners, educators and relevant stakeholders in schools.

We must reiterate that there is no place for violence, drug-use/abuse, sexual harassment and other criminal acts in schools, as it poses a serious barrier to learning. There is great focus on the inculcation of values and ethics and of a just and caring society within schools and our communities. The Department views these societal ills in a serious light because they carry a potential to deprive our learners of their inherent constitutional rights to life, education, equality and dignity.

Our interventions have focused on addressing elements of physical infrastructure relating to proper fencing, burglar proofing, support programmes for learners and the strengthening of partnerships with all relevant stakeholders.

The Department has a solid partnership with the South African Police Services (SAPS) aimed at linking schools with local police-stations and the establishment of functional School Safety Committees. The School Safety Protocol will strengthen the existing partnership between the Department of Education and the SAPS, together with all our partners and stakeholders, to promote safer schools and to prevent the involvement of learners in crime.

Schools are critical to instil discipline and ensuring safety, in terms of the Codes of Conduct for Learners at all public schools. Schools are therefore directly responsible for providing an environment conducive to the delivery of quality teaching and learning by, among other things, promoting the rights and safety of all learners, educators and parents.

A National School Safety Framework has been developed to serve as a management tool for Provincial and District Officials responsible for school safety, Principals, Senior Management Team Members, SGB members, teachers and learners to identify and manage risk and threats of violence in and around schools. The Framework is critical in empowering all responsible officials in understanding their responsibilities with regards to school safety.

The Department has also developed a National Strategy for the Prevention and Management of Alcohol and Drug use amongst learners in schools.

As schools mirror our communities, curbing drug use in schools will in turn prevent drug use within the communities and render them safe for all citizens. Schools have been provided with a Guide to Drug Testing in South African Schools.

In terms of the Regulations for Safety Measures at all Public Schools the Minister has declared all public schools as drug free and dangerous weapon free zones.

Sexual harassment and violence affect learning environments negatively, creates an atmosphere of fear and aggression. These are certainly not conditions under which our learners should be subjected to as part of their learning experience. Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Sexual Violence and Harassment have been developed and distributed to schools, to support schools and school communities in responding to cases of sexual harassment and violence against learners. The guidelines set out clearly how public schools should treat victims of sexual harassment and violence, as well as the steps that must be taken to deal with those who have or are alleged to have committed such acts.

It is important for parents and communities to actively participate in addressing and promoting school safety. Parents and communities are well positioned to see to it that children are safe wherever they are. We must guard and protect our institutions of learning against any form of vandalism or theft and report it to the authorities.

The Department will continue to protect the rights of all learners in schools. The success of our efforts rely largely on the collective support and cooperation of parents and communities, to work together with schools to ensure that all children are safe and realise their full potential in school.

In conclusion, keeping schools safe allow learners to look forward to being in an enabling environment that promotes social and creative learning. When their basic safety needs are not met, they feel uncomfortable at school and leads to absenteeism. Promoting school safety creates an open space for learners to explore, learn and grow.

Education is a societal matter, and I am looking forward to work with all of you to create a safe and conducive environment for quality learning and teaching. School safety is a non-negotiable, as we view all our schools as centres of excellence.

I thank you!