

MEDIA STATEMENT

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EMBARGO: NONE

**TIME FOR EMPTY PROMISES MUST BE OVER –
BUDGET VOTE SPEECH**

The Minister of Basic Education, Siviwe Gwarube, has released the long awaited education budget for 2025/2026, wherein she refers to a statement that there is no longer a space for “vanity projects”, however, the allocation of budget does not always reflect this intention of the Minister.

Great emphasis has again been placed on foundational skills and improving numeracy and literacy. The majority of the focus on improvement of the foundational skills is, however, relying on the improvement of the ECD sector. This refers to improvement of ECD programmes, infrastructure and human resource development within this sector.

However, the expected focus on Grade R (to be implemented according to BELA guidelines) did not receive any attention.

A vast part of the budget (R57 million) is allocated to Mother Tongue-based bilingual Education. This in contradiction to the state of readiness of provinces to implement this initiative.

Although the Minister did mention that “quality teaching is the greatest enabler of quality education” little mention is made of concrete plans and Standard Operating Procedures which will reduce the size of overcrowded classrooms, filling of vacant posts, filling of promotion posts and providing suitable infrastructure.

The plight of the most vulnerable of learners – those with special education needs - is still put on the back burner. No mention is made of efforts to provide a national certificate for these learners, or to increase the 499 schools, so that more learners can be accommodated, but philosophical jargon is used to sugarcoat these issues: the reality is that there is a dire need for specialists at provincial and district level to support these learners and to enable placement in centres of learning providing for their needs.

R15.3 billion is allocated to Education Infrastructure Grant to eliminate the remaining 3% of pit toilets and construction in high-growth areas. There are again no clear and concise plans for the building of new schools to meet the need of growing learner numbers.

The Minister did indicate that provinces will be held accountable, specifically on fiscal constraints resulting in the non-filling of posts, non-payment of school allocations and interruptions in nutrition, transport and safety programmes. This, nevertheless, does not provide an actionable plan for addressing provincial officials who are not performing the functions which have been allocated or providing a plan of how officials will be held accountable.

In the budget, however, there is money allocated to establishing a new advisory body which will provide the insights which unions and governing body foundations have provided in the past.

Although the Minister refers to the accurate policy and legal steps which are being taken and for which regulations will be provided in the near future, key issues such as progression and promotion requirements are not discussed.

No mention is made about improving the working conditions of teachers, providing for their emotional and social wellbeing, or ensuring that the psychological wellness of teachers will be made a priority. The SAOU seriously regrets this key oversight.

The SAOU calls on the Minister of Basic Education to honour the promises which she made at the beginning of her term – to go back to basics: this includes ensuring that there are enough qualified and professional teachers in the system, to ensure that there is sufficient provision for learners with barriers to learning, to ensure that schools are safe learning spaces and that the focus falls on teaching and learning to ensure that learners master the foundational skills.

The time for talking and listening is now over and there is a dire need for action to be taken. The quality education of the learners in South Africa should receive a much higher priority.