**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**BASIC EDUCATION PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NOTES PROGRESS ON SAFETY AT SPECIAL SCHOOLS**

**Parliament, Tuesday, 18 February 2020 –**The Portfolio Committee on Basic Education has noted the progress made by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) regarding the safety of learners attending special schools.

“We want to commend the department for the work done so far in implementing the recommendations of the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), although we realise some challenges persist. We will monitor the implementation of the remaining matters,” said Ms Bongiwe Mbinqo-Gigaba, the committee chairperson.

Ms Mbinqo-Gigaba said the SAHRC reports arise from concerns about safety at special needs schools, especially in light of the death of one learner with hearing challenges and the injury of others in North-West after a fire broke out. In another incident, a learner with visual challenges died. The SAHRC investigated and made recommendations for the DBE to consider. In 2016, the National Treasury awarded the DBE a conditional grant of R477 million over the period 2017-2020.

Ms Mbinqo-Gigaba said the committee remains concerned about the minimal or lack of scholar transport provided to special schools. “It cannot be that the parents of these learners struggle to get them to school.” Concerns were also raised about the training of support staff at hostels and the number of staff available at these schools.

To address weaknesses and shortcomings, the DBE has issued a circular to guide provincial education departments as they undertake the following remedial actions: assessing the situation at the designated schools to establish the extent of resourcing, conversion and orientation required; and developing a business plan, containing a roadmap of what needs to be done by whom and by when to ensure the functionality of designated schools. This must include outreach services and linking the school with a special school as resource centre, where possible.

The committee heard that the DBE will be proactive, with programmes to cater for all learners, not only those with challenges. The committee also heard that the SAHRC’s recommendation was that the DBE must produce a document showing what has been done to demonstrate its commitment to an inclusive education system. This document must indicate the structural changes that will be made to comply with section 24 of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD) to ensure that people with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system based on disability.

Ms Mbinqo-Gigaba noted these matters and recognises that the DBE cannot address these challenges alone, as an integrated response and multidisciplinary strategy is required. “The committee will continue to monitor the progress and commitments made by the DBE.”

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON BASIC EDUCATION, MS BONGIWE MBINQO-GIGABA.**