**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**BASIC EDUCATION COMMITTEE NOTES PROGRESS IN PLACING ALL LEARNERS FOR ACADEMIC YEAR**

**Parliament, Tuesday, 11 May 2021 –**The Portfolio Committee on Basic Education today received a briefing from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) on the 2021 learner admissions report.

The Western Cape Education Department (WCED) was also part of the briefing as it still had unplaced learners until about six weeks ago. According to the latest information available, the province had 109 unplaced learners earlier this month, but only due to the fact that parents not having confirmed taking up the spaces at schools that have been made available to them.

Committee Chairperson, Ms Bongiwe Mbinqo-Gigaba, commended the WCED for having made progress in placing all learners but raised concerns that it took several months for this to happen and questioned the fact that all learners could not be placed at the beginning of the academic year. MEC Debbie Schäfer from the Western Cape informed the meeting this was due to a lack of funding for additional learners and said it was only after more funds were made available by the provincial treasury following the intervention by the Premier, that all learners could be placed.

The WCED had over 5 000 learners to be placed in March 2021. The number was reduced to 3 786 by 13 April 2021. The remaining unplaced learners was 1 228 as of 24 April 2021. Updated information received on 10 May 2021 indicates that the figure of unplaced learners was at 109.  All 109 have been accommodated but parents have not confirmed with the schools where space had been allocated. The WCED released more than 400 additional posts in March and an additional 179 posts were added in April to relieve pressure and place learners. A further 43 classrooms were opened after the appointment of additional teachers and 129 mobile classrooms were procured and delivery has commenced.

The DBE informed the committee that additional numbers in public schools, especially in the Western Cape and Gauteng, could be due to migration from different areas but also Covid-19 saw many parents not being able to afford independent school fees, thus moving their children to public schools.

The DBE told the committee that it is the responsibility of every parent and guardian to ensure that their children are registered for the following year, well before the end of the current school year. Early admission assists provincial education departments in the determination of, among other things, post provision, learner teacher support materials, learner furniture, additional classrooms and ensuring that teaching and learning commence on the first day of the schooling calendar.

The committee heard that the Covid-19 pandemic also had an effect on admissions. The pandemic has led to the late opening of the registration and admission process, the extension of the closing dates, different provincial admission periods as Covid-19 affected provinces differently, limited advocacy campaigns conducted due to restricted travel and gatherings and delayed finalisation of placement.

In relation to undocumented learners, the committee heard that the DBE, in collaboration with the Department of Home Affairs, has released Circular 1 of 2020, which is aimed at simplifying the registration and admission of undocumented learners following the 2019 Court Judgement that prohibits such learners from being left out of the system.

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