**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**BASIC EDUCATION COMMITTEE COMMENDS DBE FOR PROGRESS MADE ON TARGETS**

**Parliament, Tuesday, 24 August 2021 –**The Portfolio Committee on Basic Education today commended the progress made by the Department of Basic Education on its targets for the fourth quarter of the financial year, during the difficult period of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The committee received presentations on the DBE’s fourth quarter performance and an update on the implementation of online learning. The DBE indicated it fully achieved 90% of its targets, as set out in the annual performance plan for 2020-21, and partially achieved the remaining 10%. This compares with 61% of targets fully achieved and 28% of targets not achieved at all in the previous financial year.

Committee Chairperson Ms Bongiwe Mbinqo-Gigaba said: “The committee is pleased with the report we received. The progress made is clearly outlined. You have used your finances effectively, with little underspending, keeping in mind the challenges brought on by the pandemic.

“We however noted and want to express concern regarding the underspending of certain targets. It cannot be that DBE underspends on its programme for learners with special educational needs and severe challenges. These learners are special and should be treated as such. They require much-needed equipment and it should be provided.”

Regarding online learning, the committee heard that as the Covid-19 pandemic has adversely affected the basic education sector through temporary school closures aimed at reducing the spread of the virus, the DBE, the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT), provincial education departments and partners have implemented various remote learning interventions to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on learning.

The DBE, in collaboration with NECT, is implementing Remote Learning Programmes. Two work streams were set up: Woza Matric Work Stream (Grade 12) and Tswelopele Work Stream (Grade R – 11). These aim to support learning, exam preparation and catch-up, targeting 1.2 million learners, 50 000 teachers and parents. Programmes deliver lessons remotely via broadcasting (TV and radio) and online platforms.

The committee heard virtual classroom lesson and teaching platforms should be broadcast live on various digital platforms, such as TV, smart devices, laptops and mobile phones. Commencement of phase 1 – testing and piloting – has been delayed due to Covid-19 protocols.

The DBE informed the committee that some of the benefits of the programme are an interactive online education platform for educators and learners; users are able to create self-grading and interactive learning content that will lead to effective and efficient teaching and learning; it is accessible to teachers and learners anywhere and anytime using different web-enabled devices; it equips learners with 21st-century skills for the workplace; and supports the emergence of a new type of school.

The Independent Communications Authority of South Africa assigned temporary radio frequency spectrum in the various bands to five mobile network operators. The obligation will be implemented for a period of 17 months from the date of the installation of the complete solution. The DBE and partners identified 17 schools in the eight districts to implement phase 1 of the virtual classroom solution.

During the meeting, the issues around South Africa’s high teen pregnancy rate that have been in the media recently were also mentioned. Several committee members indicated that this requires a more detailed discussion and agreed that the DBE cannot be expected to deal with the issue on its own. The responsibility for this cuts across government departments and is a societal matter.

Ms Mbinqo-Gigaba said the committee will continue to provide an oversight role by monitoring the progress of all programmes and projects to ensure a better education for all learners.

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