**Media Statement**

If the performance challenges and uneven access to school infrastructure and other educational inputs are not addressed, the wide disparities in educational outcomes between rural and urban provinces, and between less affluent and more affluent schools, will persist.

This was the clear message from the Financial and Fiscal Commission (FFC) to the Portfolio Committee on Basic Education regarding the Department of Education’s spending patterns and equity in education. The FFC said attaining equity in education remains a challenge because education policies and the funding framework do not fully address barriers to education potential.

With respect to infrastructure conditional grants, the committee heard that more effective oversight over basic education conditional grants are required, more especially in the case of infrastructure projects. The FFC further said the delivery model of the Accelerated Schools Infrastructure Delivery Initiative (ASIDI) programme should be reviewed. This is because failure to meet implementation timeframes has a direct bearing on the division of revenue, as such outstanding targets should be quantified and further considered by the education sector together with national and provincial treasuries. The reform must incorporate demographic shifts as overriding factors to determine targeting of schools.

The committee heard that the slow pace of infrastructure grant implementation is slowly being overtaken by growing demographic shifts. The phenomenon of learner migration and subsequent school closures and merging leaves many of the refurbished ASIDI schools under-utilised. The DBE must revise the list of targeted ASIDI to ensure alignment to demographic shifts. In 2016, the FFC recommended that both the National Treasury and DBE must ensure that the Framework for Infrastructure Grants incorporates provincial spatial demographic patterns and forecasts when decisions to build, expand or maintain schools are made.

The FFC said the Maths, Science and Technology grant saw significant underspending in 2019/20. A total of 80% of schools do not have access to laboratory facilities. This grant thus plays an important role in providing support/resources to embed use of ICT across the curriculum and grow maths, science and technology. Therefore, reasons for underspending must be addressed.

Improvements in spending were noted with respect to the Learners with Profound Intellectual Disabilities Grant, which demonstrates teething problems over the past two years. It said the dampened spending recorded for 2020/21 should be seen in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on the sector.

Regarding non-conditional grants, the FFC recommended a revision of the allocation criteria for HIV/Aids life skills. It recommended that the DBE and National Treasury (NT) consider adjusting the allocation criteria for HIV/Aids life skills grant to available performance information, as per expected outputs, rather than relying on PES education component shares. It further said that the DBE and NT should consider incorporating this grant into the Provincial Equitable Share, and aligning planning and implementation with the community outreach component of the HIV/Aids, TB, malaria grant.

Committee Chairperson Ms Bongiwe Mbinqo-Gigaba and several committee members requested a revision of the school quintile system, as they feel the manner in which it is currently used to fund learners is outdated.

Rajaa Azzakani
16 November 2021