**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**BASIC EDUCATION COMMITTEE COMFORTABLE THAT DBE READY FOR 2022 ACADEMIC YEAR**

**Parliament, Tuesday, 30 November 2021 –**The Portfolio Committee on Basic Education expressed its ease with the Department of Basic Education's (DBEs') state of preparedness for the 2022 academic year. The committee today received a briefing from DBE on the matter.

Committee Chairperson Ms Bongiwe Mbinqo-Gigaba said in her concluding remarks that the committee is pleased with the fruitful and informative meeting. "The department has made us at ease with the plans it presented to us today. We realise that there are minor challenges and it will remain so for some time. We urge DBE and the provincial education departments to continue to work on these challenges in order to erase them."

One of the challenges is that thousands of learners remain unplaced for the new academic year. "We noted the numbers. It is concerning, but we also understand the reasons provided by the DBE for these learners not being placed."

According to the presentation Gauteng still has more than 276 000 unplaced learners, KwaZulu-Natal has 226 142, the Western Cape 29 550 and the Eastern Cape has 28 219. Mpumalanga has placed all learners for next year

The committee heard that unplaced learners at this stage are late applications. These continue to be a problem, despite the provinces' massive advocacy on application cut-off dates. This is caused by parents who ignore the published closing dates, as well as informal settlements that spring up around established communities, as it is difficult to predict expected numbers ahead of the new year. This is particularly challenging in largely urban areas and impacts on a whole range of provisioning issues, ranging from classroom space to teachers and textbooks.

Furthermore, English medium schools are perceived to provide better quality education and thus face an annual challenge of managing and accommodating all the applications they receive. Some of these challenges lead to insufficient schools in urbanised areas and the ever-present demand for spaces at schools of choice. This leads to tension between the rights of school governing bodies to determine admissions policies in terms of the South African Schools Act, and the rights of parents to access education at schools of their choice. In provinces where learners are admitted on a first-come, first-served basis, local learners who do not apply on time experience challenges with placement.

The committee heard that the DBE has over the years conducted school readiness monitoring (SRM) to identify any challenges that may impact on effective teaching and learning at the beginning of each year, and strives to address them promptly at the appropriate level of the system.

The sample of schools identified for 2022 SRM will be drawn from the five poverty quintiles in selected districts and circuits. This will include all types of schools i.e. primary, secondary, combined/intermediate schools, special schools, small schools and schools with boarding facilities. These visits will be conducted between 12 and 28 January 2022. Follow-up assessments will focus on issues picked up at the beginning of the 2022 academic year

The committee heard that inland schools are expected to open on 12 January 2022 and coastal schools on 19 January 2022. Basic Education Minister Ms Angie Motshekga emphasised that these dates are dependent on the Covid-19 pandemic.

The committee is expected to undertake a school readiness oversight visit early next year to assess the condition on the ground, said Ms Mbinqo-Gigaba.

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

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