**BUDGET VOTE 16: BASIC EDUCATION**

**Hon. Z Majozi**

Honourable Speaker,

The Department of Basic Education is a government department that is in charge of shaping the future of this country. Its success in achieving its output determines the overall development goals of government, by educating our young people to achieve success.

What is concerning with the way this department is run is that we still have perpetual overcrowding of learners in our public school system. In fact, the average class sits at about 31 learners to 1 teacher including educators who have fewer students in their specialist teaching subjects. This leaves this figure to be much higher in real terms.

It is no wonder that independent studies have revealed that about 80% of learners leaving grade 4 are unable to read for comprehension. The regression of literacy in South Africa is at a crisis stage which requires immediate government intervention in order to effect a change, yet there are little to no plans by the government to address this. Despite the clear problems facing this department, in its budget, there is no specific National Reading Plan, no proper budget, no accurate reporting, and no progress on implementing vital interventions.

It does not take an expert to tell us that part of the problem in schools is that the learning environment for many is unconducive. Learners' classrooms are overcrowded, insufficiently equipped with proper learning materials and what little infrastructure exists is not maintained or very old. The government has, in its own admission, recognised these challenges and committed to fixing them especially regarding the dangerous pit latrines but as expected, has FAILED to deliver on its promises to our people.

Although the department has made available an online system of issuing lost or damaged matric certificates, it has not come up with an a timeous and cost-effective way of handling the matter of those accused of being implicated in irregularities such as cheating\copying during matric results, what this often means is that pupils spend resources, time and money going in and out of court on seemingly never-ending court battles, there are instances of such which date back to almost a decade ago.

In some instances the department fails to provide tangible evidence and this unfortunately translates to these groups of students not having a chance at bettering their lives by pursuing higher education which ultimately means they cannot get employed. We must bring to an end the perpetual poverty life cycle in which the non-issue of matric certificates will bring about.

The process of replacing matric certificates is lengthy as it can take up to half a year!

Honourable Speaker procurement spend in South Africa stands at approximately R926 billion annually for the procurement of goods and services it is vulnerable, fragile and susceptible to corruption which warrants greater control by legislation at the cost of turn around times.

Unfortunately good financial control, is not always the case for the building of schools as well as infrastructure in schools as there have been probes and investigations made into irregularities in tenders awarded by the Department of Education throughout the country over the past decades. For example two district municipalities in the Eastern Cape irregularly awarded a R1.5 billion toilet tender whilst in the same province, the Hawks arrested 10 people in connection with a R600 million tender fraud in the province.

Members, as we are all aware that the High Court recently ruled that schools, clinics, hospitals and police stations are all to be exempted from loadshedding but the government intends to appeal this decision. Now I would like to bring to highlight some of the challenges that schools are faced with during loadshedding such as not having access to water and teaching and learning disruptions. I would like to ask what extreme stages of loadshedding mean for our children considering that there have been allegations that loadshedding will go up to stage 10 this winter.

We cannot continue to accept being led by a government that has substandard programmes - those that do not address the meaningful development needs of our children. Let us not forget that the basic education level for learners is the most critical time of their educational development. By the time of tertiary education, it is too late to reform foundational skills that learners can use to further develop their academic knowledge.

Minister in the interest of instilling confidence in the basic education sector, why dont you brief parliament as well as the committee on the methods that will be used to protect against examination leaks that has become prevalent at the end of every year.

The IFP supports the Budget.

I thank you.