**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 265**

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**265. Dr W J Boshoff (FF Plus) to ask the Minister of Basic Education:**

1. Whether she will clarify the (a) policy of her department regarding the promotion of learners in the Foundation Phase and (b) educational basis for the specified policy;

(2) whether she will make a statement on the matter? NW1231E

**Response**

1. **a)** The Foundation Phase policy on promotion requirements is stipulated in the National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) and the National Protocol on Assessment (NPA), which state that a learner may only be retained once in the Foundation Phase in order to prevent the learner being retained in this phase for longer than four years.

* In the Basic Education Budget Vote Speech for the 2018/19 Financial Year, it was announced that the***progression and promotion policies*,** especially in the lower Grades needed to be reviewed, a policy proposal that is currently under consideration.

1. The international literature on this topic demonstrates very little evidence for repetition policies actually benefitting children. At best, these policies appear to have no effect on learner achievement and dropout, despite the immense financial stress they place on the schooling system. However, in many cases they have a negative effect on child outcomes.

### Two early meta-analyses (Holmes, 1989; Jimerson 2001) showed strong negative effects of retention policies on academic achievement and socio-emotional adjustment. A recent and more rigorous meta-analysis (Allen 2009), indicated that on average repetition either had a negative effect or a null effect on academic achievement.

### As such, support for automatic progression within the South African context is being considered as a possible policy position, given that repetition is regarded as being associated with learner dropout and poor academic performance (Branson, Hofmeyr and Lam, 2013; Hartley, 2006).

### Indeed, many scholars (Jimerson et al., 1997) hold the view that the negative effects of repetition far outweigh automatic promotion.

### Within this debate, we must also consider issues of efficiency and human rights aspects of over-sized classes, as well as the unaffordability of bringing the learner/educator ratio down substantially via hiring of additional teachers.

### Many school systems in both developed and developing countries have adopted automatic promotion policies which stipulate that all learners who complete a given school year be promoted to the next grade, regardless of their levels of achievement.

1. The Minister will not make a statement. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) is putting plans in place to make the necessary policy amendments which could give effect to automatic progression in the Foundation Phase:

* Every learner will be supported to achieve the expected levels of performance for the grade. There will be adequate support for learners at risk throughout the phase.
* For the breadth of foundational skills across the phase, there will be an *identified set of skills per grade to focus on*, thus making it possible to give *more opportunities to demonstrate competence in the next grade on the same skills if there is a need.*
* Learners who experience barriers to learning will be given the *opportunities to demonstrate their competence in ways that suit their needs*. This has the following implications:
* Some learners may need concrete apparatus for a longer time than their peers.
* Assessment activities, especially written activities, may have to be broken up into smaller sections for learners who cannot concentrate or work for a long time, or they may be given short breaks during the tasks.
* A variety of assessment instruments should be used, as a learner may find that a particular assessment instrument does not allow her to demonstrate her true competence.
* In the Foundation Phase the *inability to read should not prevent learners from demonstrating their mathematical competence,* because this produces misleading results that are of no use to the learner, the teacher who has to plan the learner’s learning sequence, and the education authorities who have to identify problems in the education system.
* The usage of *Mathematical terms should not be confined to the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT),* the knowledge of Mathematical concepts in *other languages should be accepted as correct.*
* Reporting will be comprehensive, giving the teacher in the next grade and the parents a clear indication of strengths and skills that need further development.