**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 3517**

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**3517. Ms D van der Walt (DA) to ask the Minister of Basic Education:**

(1) Since her reply to question 1972 on 9 July 2015, has her department gathered any statistics with regard to female learners that are allegedly absent from school for up to 55 days in respect of each year due to lack of (a) sanitary towels and (b) proper sanitation facilities in schools, including bathrooms sanitary bins; if not, when will her department conduct an audit in this regard; if so, what are the relevant details;

(2) What measures is her department willing to put in place immediately in affected schools to ensure that (a) sanitary bins and (b) other resources are available at such schools to keep female learners in school? NW4180E

**RESPONSES:**

**(1) Since her reply to question 1972 on 9 July 2015, has her department gathered any statistics with regard to female learners that are allegedly absent from school for up to 55 days in respect of each year due to lack of (a) sanitary towels**

**RESPONSE**

1(a) The Department does not have information indicating that female learners do not attend school as a result of poor and/or no ablution facilities. The ***Third Youth Risk Behaviour Survey, 2011*** interviewed Grade 8-11 learners on, amongst others how easy or difficult it was for them to access sanitary towels when they needed them. Nationally, the majority of the female learners reported that it was easy to access sanitary towels when they needed them, with no significant variation by grade. Details are provided in the table below:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Grade** | **Number of respondents** | **% of high school learners who have access to sanitary towels (pads) when they need them** |
| Grade 8 | 1 387 | 70.1% |
| Grade 9 | 1 427 | 75.1% |
| Grade 10 | 1 498 | 73.5% |
| Grade 11 | 1 344 | 73.1% |

There is very limited research in this area. A significant research study in this regard was conducted in **Nepal**.These couldalso not provide substantial evidence in this regard. The ***Nepal*** research was undertaken in a two-pronged approach (control group and focus group) with the other group provided with sanitary ware. After some time, both groups were interviewed to assess improvement in attendance of learners who were provided with sanitary ware. The findings indicated that learners who were provided with sanitary ware reported no improvement in school attendance, despite the access to sanitary ware. This suggests that menstruation (lack of and unaffordability of sanitary ware) has no impact on school attendance.

Furthermore, the Department, through the analysis of 2014 General Household Survey (GHS) data from Statistics South Africa has found that there is no difference between boys and girls absenteeism rate at school **(Table 1).** On the reasons for being absent at school, the data did not include lack sanitary wares as a reason for absenteeism amongst female learners. But almost 15 per cent of female learners indicated that they were absent from school due to illness or injury compared to 11 per cent of male learners. The detailed reasons for learner absenteeism are provided in the table below disaggregated by gender **(Table 2);**

*Table 1: Percentage of learners by number of days absent*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **No. of days** | **2014** | |
| **Male** | **Female** |
| 1 day | 2.8 | 2.6 |
| 2 days | 1.3 | 1.2 |
| 3 days | 0.6 | 0.5 |
| 4 days | 0.3 | 0.3 |
| 5 days | 1.6 | 1.5 |
| Not Absent | 93.4 | 94.0 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 |

***Source****: General Household Survey, 2014, DBE own calculations*

Table 2: Reasons given for learners who were absent for 5 days

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Main reasons for being absent at school** | **2014** | |
| **Male** | **Female** |
| Illness/injury | 11.0 | 14.5 |
| Did not want to go to school | 8.7 | 8.5 |
| Need to take care of someone else at home | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Employed/working outside home | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Doing household chores | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| The weather was bad | 4.0 | 6.5 |
| No money for transport | 3.4 | 0.6 |
| Lack of transport/problems with transport | 0.0 | 1.5 |
| Writing exams | 73.0 | 68.4 |
| Does not feel safe at school | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| **Total** | **100.0** | **100.0** |

***Source****: General Household Survey, 2014, DBE own calculations*

1(b) **Proper sanitation facilities in schools, including bathrooms sanitary bins; if not, when will her department conduct an audit in this regard; if so, what are the relevant details**;

**Response**:

**1(b)** The Department does not have information indicating that female learners do not attend school as a result of poor and/or no ablution facilities. Instead of carrying out a survey whose outcomes would assess the impact of the absence of these facilities on absenteeism, the Department rather conducted condition assessments on the schools to asses those that do not have sanitation facilities and has put in place plans to provide these facilities as part of the ASIDI Programme and where these are available but insufficient or require upgrading, the Provincial Departments of Education have provided for those under the Education Infrastructure Grant and their Equitable Share.

2. **What measures is her department willing to put in place immediately in affected schools to ensure that (a) sanitary bins and (b) other resources are available at such schools to keep female learners in school**?

**Response:**

**2(a)** Schools are encouraged to ensure that sanitary towels bins and / or burners are made available in all female toilets and districts/circuits and health units in provinces are responsible for monitoring that.

**2(b)** As mandated by the Regulations Relating to Minimum Uniform Norms and Standards for Public School Infrastructure (Gazette 37081 of 2013) the Provincial Education Departments have submitted implementation plans to provide adequate infrastructure, this includes the provision of basic services (sanitation, water and electricity) and other educational spaces, part of the purpose of providing sanitation facilities at schools is to create a conducive learning and teaching environment that would reduce learner absenteeism at schools. In cases where these facilities do not exist at all, they are provided for under the ASIDI Programme.