

## MEDIA RELEASE

*For immediate release*

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### **PSC releases the Report on the availability of Learner and Teacher Support Material**

#### **A. BACKGROUND**

The Public Service Commission (PSC), as an oversight institution established by the Constitution, has always been concerned about the timely delivery of textbooks in some schools at the beginning of the school calendar year. Most importantly, the PSC noted the decision of the Supreme Court of Appeal (SCA) in the case of the Minister of Basic Education and others v Basic Education for All and Others, wherein it was held that **the right to basic education is not a progressive one, but one that must be realised immediately**. In this regard, the SCA stated that “... **the Department’s failure to provide textbooks to each learner infringes their right to basic education**”. Textbooks, including physical resources such as desks, are key requirements for the facilitation of effective and efficient teaching and learning at schools.

It is against this background that the PSC conducted service delivery inspections at selected schools on the availability of Learner and Teacher Support Material (LTSM) during January and February 2016. The timing of the inspection was critical as schools reopened during the second and third week of January 2016. The inspections sought to determine the availability of LTSM at schools and the readiness of schools to commence with learning.

The objectives of the inspections were as follows:

- To determine the procurement processes for the LTSM;
- To assess the role of District Offices in supporting the schools;
- To assess other challenges impacting on quality learning;
- To establish the availability of LTSM at the visited schools; and
- To establish schools’ adherence with the *Batho Pele* requirements

The scope of the inspections involved primary and secondary schools in the nine provinces and a sample of 99 schools, comprising both urban and rural schools, was targeted for inspections. Due to capacity constraints, the PSC sampled a total of 99 schools as outlined in the table below. The inspections followed both announced and unannounced methodology. Below is the province and number of inspected schools:

<b>Name of Province</b>	<b>Number of schools inspected</b>
• Eastern Cape	10
• Free State	10
• Gauteng	6

• KwaZulu-Natal	12
• Limpopo	13
• Mpumalanga	10
• North West	10
• Northern Cape	18
• Western Cape	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>99</b>

## **B. KEY FINDINGS**

### **1. PROCURMENT PROCESSES**

**Appointment of publishers** - The PSC found that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) has appointed publishers through a national tender for the procurement of textbooks. It has also developed National Catalogues of core textbooks and the Minimum School Bag (MSB) for stationery requirements in order to guide provinces with regard to the selection and procurement of textbooks and stationery for public schools. Furthermore, the DBE has developed a Basic Education Sector Plan (BESP) with specific timelines in terms of which procurement processes in the provinces have to be managed so as to ensure universal coverage of LTSM requirements. In terms of the BESP, provincial departments were expected to ensure that orders for all LTSM requirements, including stationery, were made by 31 July and that the material was distributed to the schools by 31 October of the preceding school year. The PSC also found that a transversal contract was secured with National Treasury for the procurement of stationery requirements. However, to date, only the Free State, Gauteng and Northern Cape have participated in the contract. Other provinces have their own procurement models.

**Budget allocations** - According to section 20 of the South African Schools Act, 1996 (SASA), schools are allocated the functions listed in that section. Schools classified as section 21 are allocated additional functions set out in that section and receive own budget allocations to procure own LTSM, including textbooks. All visited District Offices confirmed that the allocation of budget to public schools is centralised at the Provincial Head Offices. Ordinarily, provincial departments transfer funds directly into the accounts of section 21 schools. In most cases, these schools approach publishers directly to order their material. The other schools (not section 21) do not receive their funds directly, and were required to submit their needs through District Offices. The majority of District Offices were concerned that the budget allocation was insufficient, which resulted in perennial shortages in the schools.

**System of ordering books** – The Provincial departments of Education in all the nine provinces have different models of ordering textbooks for public schools. The provinces either procure textbooks directly from publishers or use an appointed management agent. In most cases, they even procure for section 21 schools. For instance, in the Eastern Cape, Limpopo, Northern Cape and Western Cape, the PSC found that the procurement process is

handled by the Provincial Head Offices of the respective Departments of Education for all schools. In the Free State, all section 20 schools receive their material from the Department, whereas section 21 schools procure their own material using their budget allocations. Similarly, the majority of section 21 schools in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal manage their own procurement by buying through booksellers. Of these schools in both provinces, 15% (300 out of 2000) to 25% (684 out of 2764) have opted to utilise the central procurement process. It was also found that in the Eastern Cape, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga all section 20 schools' textbook requirements are handled by an appointed management agent, whilst Mpumalanga's section 21 schools have also opted for this process. In the North West, the province has been divided into regions that have allocated schools to booksellers/distributors. All schools submit their orders through the regions for processing, after which they are forwarded to the Provincial Head Office for payment. The PSC found that both electronic and manual systems are used to order LTSM across the provinces.

**Warehousing and delivery of LTSM** – In four provinces (Eastern Cape, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga) the entire process, including the warehousing and delivery of the material to the public schools, is handled by the appointed management agent. However, in Limpopo and Mpumalanga the respective departments have provided central warehouses where publishers deliver the ordered textbooks whilst the Department of Education in the Free State has provided warehouses in all districts. In the North West, the Department of Education utilises the services of booksellers or distributors for the warehousing and delivery of textbooks. In the Western Cape, the procured material is delivered directly to schools by publishers.

**Challenges emanating from own procurement** – The PSC found that allowing some of the schools to procure on their own material as provided in section 21(1)(c) of the SASA has led to unintended consequences. Key challenges include the impact on efficiency and effectiveness arising from the different methods of procurement and delivery of LTSM in different provinces. Provincial departments also found it difficult to accurately monitor and report on the state of universal coverage due to lack of cooperation by some of the section 21 schools. Furthermore, the provision led to some of these schools purchasing commercially produced textbooks at unaffordable and unsustainable cost to the State and raising questions of financial mismanagement.

**Shortages of textbooks** - The majority of District Offices raised concerns that though textbooks were delivered, in many instances, the number of books was less than the registered learners. District Offices across all provinces mainly attributed the shortage to an increase in the number of learners, which exceeded initial projections. In KwaZulu-Natal, there were concerns that some of the schools delay in submitting their requisitions, which resulted in late deliveries. Similar concerns were raised by officials at the District Offices in the Eastern Cape, which resulted in officials having to use their own transport to collect LTSM from the warehouse to deliver to schools. Suppliers were also criticised for sometimes delivering incorrect material or delivering at awkward times without prior arrangement.

## 2. SUPPORT BY DISTRICT OFFICES

A total of 30 District Offices were visited with the view to establish their role in supporting schools in order to ensure timely delivery and sufficiency of LTSM. The District Offices indicated that they provided training and guidance to schools to address identified challenges such as accessing catalogues and templates provided in CD format as was observed in schools in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo. In addition, Circuit Managers were trained on the catalogue requisition system to enhance the selection and ordering of LTSM. Similarly, District Offices in the Western Cape indicated that they provided training to principals on how to use the online procurement system, whilst the Northern Cape stated that its training focused on the ordering processes and procedures.

## 3. OTHER CHALLENGES IMPACTING ON QUALITY LEARNING

**Human resource constraints** – Most District Offices raised concerns of shortage of educators. In KwaZulu-Natal for example, the PSC found that there is a shortage of educators in critical subjects such as Mathematics and Science. In Limpopo and Free State, the main concern was around the requirement for District Offices to first search for suitable educators from the list of excess educators before advertising, which delayed filling of posts and impacted on the quality of learning. This also resulted in some of the classrooms having more learners than the required learner to educator norm of 30:1. In some cases, the situation was exacerbated by insufficient classrooms or unavailability of teachers for certain subjects in some of the schools. For example, the learner to teacher ratio in some schools in the Northern Cape and Free State was as high as 45:1. In the Western Cape, the ratio was 38:1 and 35:1 in primary and secondary schools respectively. KwaZulu-Natal had the highest ratios with the majority (7 out of 12) of the inspected schools recording in excess of 40:1. Nkowane High School was worst affected with the ratio of 75:1. The high learner to teacher ratio implies that learners with learning difficulties were deprived of personalised attention by their teachers.

**Physical infrastructure** – In Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal, the visited District Offices were concerned about the condition of the majority of schools being old and in some instances dilapidated. In the Northern Cape, officials decried the high vacancy rate in the Infrastructure Development Unit of the Department as contributing to the lack of attention to maintenance of identified schools. The Eastern Cape was worst affected as approximately 42 schools in the Engcobo District Municipality were still mud structures, despite government's commitment to eradicate these. Furthermore, the condition of the majority of the schools was generally derelict.

The PSC found that there is shortage of classrooms in the majority of provinces. In Limpopo, there was a dire shortage of classrooms and staff rooms at the majority of schools. In some instances, lack of space has led to classrooms being used as offices by educators. In KwaZulu-Natal, some of the classrooms are dilapidated and required refurbishing.

#### 4. AVAILABILITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING SUPPORT MATERIAL AT THE SCHOOLS

The inspection sought to establish whether the ordered LTSM, in particular textbooks, were delivered at the visited schools by the beginning of the 2016 academic year and whether these were sufficient. The table below reflects the rate of textbook delivery at the **inspected** schools in the nine provinces.

**Table 1: Number of inspected schools and rate of availability of textbooks per province**

Province	No. of schools that were inspected that received textbook orders in time for the 2016 school year	%	No. of inspected schools that found their textbooks to be sufficient in time for the 2016 school year	%
Eastern Cape	0	0%	0	0%
Free State	10	100%	4	40%
Gauteng	3	50%	3	50%
KwaZulu-Natal	12	100%	6	50%
Limpopo	12	92%	6	46%
Mpumalanga	10	100%	4	40%
North West	10	100%	9	90%
Northern Cape	10	56%	7	39%
Western Cape	10	100%	6	60%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>46%</b>

Generally, the majority (77 out of 99) of the sampled schools in the provinces received their requisitions for textbooks in time for the commencement of the new school year. For example, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, North West and the Western Cape recorded the highest delivery to all schools (100%). They were immediately followed by Limpopo (92%), whereas Gauteng and Northern Cape experienced a low delivery rate with only 50% and 56% of schools respectively stating that they received their orders timeously. None of the schools in the Eastern Cape received their textbook orders on time. The findings also indicate that on average, 78% of schools across the provinces had received their textbooks requisitions in time. It should, however, be mentioned that it is **possible** that the schools that were not visited may have received their textbooks on time.

It is also worth noting that, the DBE has since in a letter dated 19 May 2016 confirmed that ***“all textbooks that were ordered in 2015 for the 2016 academic year were delivered to schools which equates 100% delivery of ordered material”***. While this shows commendable progress, the findings of the PSC identified systemic challenges that warrant attention.

#### 5. ADHERENCE TO BATHO PELE REQUIREMENTS

The PSC noted with concern that *Batho Pele* is not taken seriously in the majority of schools as they were found lacking in compliance despite the policy being in its 19<sup>th</sup> year of

implementation. It was disheartening to observe, amongst others, that only a measly 33% of the inspected schools provided ramps to enable easy access to people with disabilities.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The PSC recommends that:

- the DBE should centralise the ordering of the LTSM, especially textbooks, in order to enhance universal coverage in schools.
- the DBE should expedite the “single core textbook” across all grades so as to enhance complete coverage for all learners.
- special attention should also be given to the development and provision of suitable learning material in the case of schools catering for learners with special needs.
- provincial Departments of Education should include regular monitoring of the retrieval of textbooks in schools in the performance agreements of District Managers and school principals to ensure effective implementation of retrieval systems.
- the accounting officers of the provincial Departments of Education in the Free State and KwaZulu-Natal should engage the Director-General of the DPW in soliciting its efficient support to address infrastructure challenges of schools.
- departments should ensure that control systems are developed and implemented for monitoring all invoices received from service providers and that these are paid within 30 days in line with the Treasury Regulation 8.2.3.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The systematic challenges in the provisioning of LTSM remain a cause for concern, with the majority of schools still experiencing a shortage of textbooks, and thus depriving many learners of their constitutional right to quality basic education as per the decision of the SCA. *Batho Pele* is also not taken seriously in the majority of schools as they were found lacking in compliance despite the policy being in its 19<sup>th</sup> year of implementation.

The PSC trusts that the recommendations contained in the Report will assist the DBE and provincial Departments of Education in improving service delivery.

## ISSUED BY THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

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