

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 56.

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56. . Ms N R Mashabela (EFF) to ask the Minister of Basic Education: to ask the Minister of Basic Education:

- (a) How has the transition of early childhood development (ECD) functions from the Department of Social Development to her department been managed so far, (b) what challenges have been encountered in this regard and (c) what steps are being taken to address the needs of children with disabilities within the ECD framework?

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Response

(a) The Presidential and Provincial proclamations that were signed by the President and the respective Premiers in 2021 enacted the shift of the ECD function from the Minister and MECs of Social Development to the Minister and MECs of Basic Education on 1 April 2022. This has meant that all resources (human, financial and capital) that were connected to the function were transferred from the relinquishing department to the receiving department on 1 April 2022.

(b) There is currently a multitude of challenges in the early childhood development sector and they can be divided into three main categories: (1) systemic challenges; (2) challenges in having access to early learning opportunities for all children; (3) challenges in the quality of early learning opportunities provided. The main systemic challenges entail the overly burdensome regulatory framework, the lack of a management information system, historic underfunding of the sector, lack of infrastructure support to ECD centres, the lack of a quality assurance system and under-qualified practitioners. The challenge with access is that only 58% of 3-year-olds and 75% of 4-year-olds are currently accessing early learning opportunities. Ideally, we would like all 4-year-olds to be able to access early learning opportunities. Finally, the Thrive by Five Index highlighted the quality constraints in the ECD sector, with only 44.5% of 4-year-olds being developmentally on track in their early learning outcomes. To address these challenges, the DBE has developed the 2030 Strategy for ECD programmes as a roadmap to achieve the vision of universal access to quality ECD programmes by 2030. The 2024/25 financial year is the first year of the implementation of the Strategy where the DBE has prioritised the reduction of red tape through the implementation of a Mass Registration Drive and processing the 2023 Children's Amendment Bill. To improve the quality of ECD programme delivery, the DBE is strengthening the implementation of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF), through the development of guidelines and Learner Teacher Support Material (LTSM) for NCF implementation. The DBE is also working on the development of a quality assurance and support system to progressively support ECD programmes to meet the DBE's quality standards.

(c) The ECD and Inclusive Education directorates are collaborating with the University of Johannesburg (UJ) on the development of a screening tool to assist ECD practitioners with early identification and intervention of developmental delays. Plans are in place to train health officials and ECD practitioners on the use of these tools to identify children with special needs as early as possible, and to provide them with the needed support. All materials and training on the implementation of the National Curriculum Framework also include information to guide ECD practitioners on implementing inclusive practices in their classrooms.