

Joint statement issued by the Department of Basic Education and SECTION27 on the release of the Limpopo textbook delivery verification report

16th July 2012

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) and SECTION27 today publish the report compiled by Professor Mary Metcalfe and her team following their investigation to verify the state of the delivery of textbooks to schools serving Grade 1-3 and Grade 10 learners in Limpopo Province.

We have accepted the findings and recommendations of Professor Metcalfe, which we set out below.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. Provinces ordinarily order textbooks before the end of a school year so that these books can be available when teaching and learning start at the beginning of the next school. The Limpopo provincial government was unable to order books in 2011 for 2012 because the province had overspent its budget.
2. The Cabinet in December placed the Department of Education in Limpopo under administration in December 2011.
3. For a variety of reasons to be investigated by the Presidential Team (appointed by the President to investigate the reasons for the delay in the delivery of textbooks), orders began to be placed with publishers for textbooks for Grade 1-3 and Grade 10 learners only in the first week of June 2012.
4. The first court deadline for delivery of these books was 15th June, and this was later extended to 27th June. Schools closed on 22nd June.
5. The first books only started arriving in the central warehouse from the 7th June 2012. More than a million books arrived over 2-week period, more have arrived since, and more are expected.
6. It would ordinarily take an estimated 6 weeks to process these books into school-based delivery lots, generate the necessary paperwork to track delivery, transport them from the central warehouse to the district warehouses, and then deliver them to schools.
7. If the intention was to deliver the material in a 2-week time frame then a much more comprehensive plan was required with greater resources, capacity and infrastructure than was made available.
8. When SECTION27 and the DBE met on 28th June to review compliance against the court order, the DBE presented figures that tracked movement of the books (that had at that stage been received) from the central warehouse to the regional warehouses. In fact, the records of the service providers show that very few of the textbooks had reached schools at that stage.
9. The settlement between DBE and SECTION27 required delivery to and receipt of books by schools by June 27. This clearly did not take place. SECTION27 believed the reports it was receiving should have been about receipt by schools. The DBE maintains that the reports were only of dispatch to and from warehouses, and they did not infer delivery to schools.
10. Whatever interpretation is accepted, both parties agree textbooks were not in schools by the 27th June as agreed in the settlement agreement.

11. By the time deliveries started to schools, they were closed for the school holidays further compounding delivery difficulties.
12. Because there was no money in the Limpopo budget for textbooks, the orders had been rationalized and reduced. When books started arriving many schools could not understand why they had not received what they had ordered.
13. Limpopo schools have the poorest communication infrastructure in the country. Communication with schools had been poor. The circular that explains this was only dispatched on 29th June when schools were closed.
14. The pressure to squeeze this complex process into a 2-week process caused weak systems to buckle, and a full audit of delivery could not be completed because large numbers of proof of delivery notes had not been returned.
15. We are unable to make an accurate assessment of how many books have reached schools as yet, and we are concerned about the number of schools that report that they do not have the correct books – in quantity, in language, or with categories missing.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

16. It is urgent that rapid and efficient mechanisms be put into place:
 - 16.1. To communicate to schools both directly and through stakeholder organisations what they should have received
 - 16.2. To facilitate the recovery and delivery of books has been delayed by system breakdown of the non-availability of school personnel
17. The resources that are required to top-up textbooks for all grades in Limpopo at the start of the 2013 school year, and to provide new textbooks for all learners with the roll-out of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement to grades 4 and 11 in 2013 must be quantified and committed to now so that schools can be properly informed of what to expect, and so that the necessary planning processes for efficient delivery can be put in to place.
18. We have confirmed that warehouses belonging to the Limpopo Department of Education have volumes of textbooks from previous years that have not been delivered. These must be audited and distributed, and an investigation must be conducted into the circumstances of
19. Further auditing of the delivery process will need to be undertaken. I have provided the DBE with the formal report of the two audit companies that formed part of my team.
20. Government reporting against orders made by the court must be double-checked for accuracy and completeness against the order so that that information provided to the Executive Authority for subsequent communication or compliance reporting purposes is accurately and fully informed.

Although litigation on this issue has necessarily brought the Department of Basic Education and SECTION27 into conflict and although there will continue to be challenges and disputes, including possible court action if it is not avoidable, the DBE and SECTION27 state their full commitment to the rights of learners to basic education. We call for all stakeholders and parties to work together to achieve this end.

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