

OPEN LETTER TO LEARNERS, PARENTS, TEACHERS AND SCHOOL GOVERNING BODIES IN LIMPOPO FROM SECTION27

17 August 2012

Dear friends and comrades in Limpopo

The right to quality basic education is guaranteed by the Constitution. It is a right that must be fulfilled immediately and in full by the government, through the National Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the Limpopo Department of Education (the provincial Department).

Despite this we are aware of the exceedingly difficult conditions in which teaching and learning take place, and the challenges faced by teachers, learners, parents and school governing bodies in many schools in Limpopo.

These extend well beyond the failure to procure and deliver textbooks for 2012. While SECTION27's focus over the last four months had to be on textbooks, principals and teachers have raised the following issues as well:

- 1. The failure by the provincial Department to pay the funds due to schools in terms of the 'Norms and Standards for School Funding'. Principals have raised concerns at the Department's unilateral decision to reduce dramatically the funds payable to schools to cover operational day-to-day expenses such as chalk, electricity, cleaning materials and paper.
- 2. The lack of adequate and sufficient sanitation facilities at schools throughout Limpopo, meaning many learners and teachers have to use filthy and dangerous toilets.
- 3. The failure by the provincial Department to provide schools with sufficient classrooms. This leads to severe overcrowding in classes, as well as lessons being conducted outside.

SECTION27 and our allies remain committed to addressing all of these issues and securing an environment conducive to teaching and learning. While every effort will be made to engage the DBE and the provincial Department to find workable solutions to these problems, we will pursue litigation against the DBE and/or the provincial Department if this becomes necessary.

On the delivery of textbooks:

SECTION27 has noted with great concern the statements released by the DBE that textbook delivery is almost complete. On Tuesday 14 August the National Assembly's Portfolio Committee on Basic Education was told that 1 236 031 books have been delivered to schools. The DBE's spokesperson Panyaza Lesufi described the situation in Limpopo as "completely fine". We don't think this is true. We still receive reports from you that many learners are still waiting for their textbooks. We have spoken to many schools which have still received no textbooks at all. Yesterday we received the following email from an educator in Limpopo who asked to be kept anonymous:

As an educator in Limpopo, I was deeply saddened and confused about what I heard today, the 14th August 2012, when I head Panyasa Lesufi lying again on the Public broadcaster saying that textbooks were delivered to all schools in Limpopo. I can assure you that as far as I know, no single books were delivered to primary schools in Sekhukhune area up to now. You can come and verify for yourself at any primary school in Sekhukhune District. Books were only delivered to secondary schools. When we ask the provincial authorities, they tell us it is not in their hands but in the hands of the basic education department.

I don't know how can they now talk about catch-up plans when textbooks are not yet delivered. The Minister of Education came to our district and threatened us not to talk to the media about the book shortages if we value our careers. Even now I don't want my name to be known cause I will risk losing my job.

I therefore appeal to you people to help us. We don't know who to turn to.

The DBE is continuing to intimidate teachers and principals in order to conceal the real state of affairs in Limpopo.

Since the release of the Metcalfe report on 16 July the DBE has had no contact with SECTION27. They have twice failed to respond to our written requests for an update on delivery and the 'catch-up plan'. Despite being denied information by the DBE the reports we receive suggest that the DBE is in direct breach of two court orders, requiring delivery to be complete by 15 June 2012 and 27 June 2012 respectively.

We encourage you to continue to report the textbook shortages to the DBE's hotline on 0800 202 933 and to SECTION27. Do not be intimidated! Reporting breaches by the DBE and the provincial Department of the right to basic education is your right, and attempts to stop you from doing so are unlawful.

On the 'Catch-up plan':

The catch-up plan for Grade 10 learners was approved by the Portfolio Committee on Basic Education in Parliament on 14 August 2012. Despite this SECTION27 believes that it does not comply with the order handed down by the North Gauteng High Court. It lacks a sense of urgency — it has not even started yet and it is not clear when it will start. It provides no detail on extra classes for learners and training for teachers — despite the DBE agreeing with SECTION27 that extra lessons and training would be included.

We stand by the right of Grade 10 learners to a proper education in 2012. It is therefore our intention to approach the North Gauteng High Court again to ensure that delivery of textbooks is completed and a meaningful catch-up plan is put in place.

Monitor book orders for 2013:

We have been provided with a copy of a letter to publishers from the provincial Department. We are worried that this shows an intention not to procure textbooks for the foundations phases for 2013 in important learning areas, including numeracy, Tsonga, Venda, Sepedi, English and Afrikaans. This is in direct breach of the right to basic education and the DBE's own policies which prioritise the provision of one textbook per learner per learning area.

For these reasons as long as the DBE and the provincial Department continue to deny our learners a quality basic education, we will continue to take whatever steps are necessary to ensure the realisation of this right in full.

Quality Basic Education is a right!

Yours in solidarity!

SECTION27

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