

Safe schools should be our priority!

By **Nomsa Marchesi MP** – DA Shadow Minister of Basic Education

Participation of South African teachers and School management on the TALIS survey has been a good benchmark for our education system against the best in the World, and like all research, it got South Africans talking!

The TALIS report illustrates what we already know about our Education. Actually, the large sum of those issues are understated. You see Chair, we have two types of education systems: one that find its roots in poverty and inequality, and another which thrives in financial stability, while 80% of our learners attend dysfunctional schools:

- Where a parent might never see their child again because he was killed by another learner;
- Where a learner might be assaulted by a teacher or might witness a peer assaulting a teacher;
- Where drugs and alcohol move freely into school premises due to local gang activity or because a tavern is located within 100 metres of a school;
- Where parents have no guarantee if their children will arrive at school and return home safe, because the bus they travel in is old and has not been serviced in years, or the taxis are overflowing with learners;
- Where a child has no chair to sit on because members of the community vandalised the school and took its furniture;
- Attend school with no sport facilities to keep learners occupied and unsusceptible to gangs and peer pressure;
- A learner will witness a teacher being shot at school by the teacher's partner because there is open access into the premises, and no security at school; or,

- Where a learner is missed by a stray bullet because they attend school in a gang infested area.

These are the daily realities of many learners in this country. When I took to inspecting the Department of Basic Education's budget, I discovered that Programme Five, which seeks to promote social cohesion, safety and the implementation of school sport, spends R7.1 million per annum with a budget increase of 6% for the next three years. This means the Department spends R788 000 per Province, and R500 per school per year, to monitor and support a school with this Programme. This is not commitment Minister, it is a sham!

Sporting facilities are non-existent in the majority of our schools. The Department of Sport has a miserable budget, yet it is expected to give support to schools. Adjustments must be made. Within that budget there is no clear-cut indication of how much is allocated for the prevention of violence through extra-mural recreational sport. We need clarity, Minister. Because within the system we have lost:

- 19-year-old Kulani Mathebula, stabbed to death by three boys from a nearby school,
- Daniel Bakwela, 16, stabbed to death by another learner;
- Felies Sithembile, 15, stabbed to death by a learner from another school;
- Odirile Mafora, 9, died in hospital after being beaten by a 17-year-old learner from the same school;
- David Metlape, 16, stabbed to death by a learner from the same school,

- Madan Motlhamme, 13, stabbed to death with a pair of scissors by his classmate; and,
- Unnamed learner, 16, Mpeko Primary School in the Eastern Cape, stabbed to death by a learner from the same school.

These learners will never finish their Matric, they will never go to University to obtain a job, get married or have children. They will not experience the fourth industrial revolution.

What is also disappointing is that the President paid no attention to the issue of school violence in both his SONA speeches this year! Which means the ANC government shows no interest in the safety of our learners, nor do they believe it is a crisis!

We need pre-emptive and preventive measures, we need to protect our learners and mitigate the effects of violence, responding to violence and recovering from violence.

As the Democratic Alliance (DA), we recommend five things to combat violence in our schools:

1. Every provincial department should establish Safe Schools Call Centres in all provinces, so that learners, staff and communities can immediately report and receive advice on violence, bullying, gangs and drug use. This has been very useful in the Western Cape and learners in other provinces need a similar resource;
2. Support after-school programmes to keep learners occupied, safe and socially engaged, like we are doing with the Western Cape's After School Game Changer;

3. We need serious collaboration across national government, including the Departments of Justice, Health, Social Development and Basic Education, as well as SAPS;
4. Ensure that every school is able to secure their property with fences and security guards;
5. Ensure the Department of Education properly trains educators on how to manage class discipline without resorting to corporal punishment.

The TALIS survey focused on many issues - amongst them were vandalism, violence and bullying, which happens frequently in South Africa and infrequently in OECD countries. The study fell short of analysing how many schools are burned in the participating countries! Because you see Chairperson, two days after the release of the TALIS report, a school was burned down in Heidelberg – this is our reality in South Africa.

One could say we are an outlier, because most countries have never experienced members of society burning schools, not even in the rest of Africa. Chairperson! Burning of schools is unheard of unless you live in a war-torn country. And despite appearances, given the impending deployment of the South African National Defense Force (SANDF) to the Cape Flats, we are not at war! Such actions undermine the guarantees of our constitution and deserves to be treated with contempt and disdain! It is an affront and it is criminal.

One would ask, who is to be blamed for such actions? We could blame communities, or dereliction of parental duties or society. However, these particular arsonists are not the learners of 1976 who protested against enforcement of Afrikaans, and may I add, they never burned any schools! Nor are they the 1988 learners who fought against apartheid. These are the born-frees who are 18 and older, who come from this very education system.

This means our current education system lacks emphasis on social cohesion, citizenry and how to treat each other with respect. A typical case is how the EFF intimidated Minister Pravin Gordhan, and threatened violence against him last week during his budget speech. They are young people, they are the born-frees whom I speak about and who display a tremendous lack of respect for the rules of Parliament, and human rights, equally undermining our democracy. This is unacceptable!

Furthermore, the report does not analyse how many teachers use corporal punishment, are assaulted by learners or how many learners are killed by their peers. Those are also outliers! It makes us an exception to the rule!

Minister, you need to relook at your school safety policy and how it is translated in Provinces, because right now, it is failing our learners!

The role of education is to shape our societies into creating better citizens which respect, contribute to and uphold the laws of our country. We need to behave better as citizens - yes it starts at home, but surely it is ingrained at school!