

Speech notes by Edmund van Vuuren (MPL), Education Budget Vote for 2016/2017 – 01 June 2016.

Note to Editors and journalists: Please note that this speech will be delivered by Bobby Stevenson, DA Chief Whip.

Education still no better than before

- Department has not appointed and paid the 1665 post level 1 educators.
- Jobs for cash scandal.
- Impaired literacy capabilities

Honourable Speaker, all protocol observed.

Honourable Speaker, R31 billion has been allocated to the Department of Education for the 2016/17 year, and this amounts to 45% of the total budget of the province. Unfortunately, this budget has been spent disproportionately in that the compensation of employee's budget compromises the availability of funds towards service delivery within the key areas of the department. The commitment to increasing the number of functional schools by appointing capable principals has been hampered twofold in that the Eastern Cape is alleged to be involved in the cash for jobs scandal and that the 381 principal posts advertised in Education Bulletin volume 1 had its closing date extended due to incorrect post requirements. Honourable Speaker, if the creation of better access to quality education is to remain an apex priority deducing from how business is done within this Department, the delivery of quality education will remain an apex priority dream – allow me to substantiate.

The Department of Education has availed 1665 post level 1 posts to be distributed amongst the 23 districts in the province. These posts were supposed to be finalized by the end of the last school quarter. 1482 appointment letters out of the 1665 posts were issued, with 912 cases at treasury for authorization and 544 outstanding treasury submissions. Hon Speaker, not only has the Department of Education been slack in the appointment of these educators, but

these teachers have also not been paid, making a mockery of education being an apex priority. Furthermore, this Department has also undertaken that the timeous appointment of qualified educators will be a key priority in ensuring that there is always a teacher in front of a learner. Once again the Department has failed our learners dismally by not having fully implemented its recruitment plan as seen by the various school protests across the province.

Honourable Speaker, there is an agreement that was signed between the Department of Education and its social partners that if the 1665 teachers are appointed, the union will assist in having excess teachers reassigned to where they are needed. Unfortunately, the union has reneged on this agreement and on the contrary has instructed all school principals and schools affiliated to Sadtu in a circular, not to participate in the identification of excess teachers at their schools. This is grossly unfair in that more than 5478 teachers in excess at their current schools will not be assigned to the more than 3146 vacancies within the province. What then, has become of the undertaking by both the Hon Premier and the Hon MEC for Education that a premium will be placed on teacher placement turnaround times and professional development?

Honourable Speaker, the so-called “jobs for cash” report of a ministerial task team has exposed a racket in this province in which union officials and departmental officials are alleged to have corrupted processes governing the hiring and promotion of teachers and principals. If it can indeed be proved that certain officials from both the Sadtu Union and the Department of Education are involved in these corrupt practices then the Democratic Alliance wants those officials to be criminally pursued, fired and prevented from working in any government department. We would also like to see that the appointments of the principals and teachers that benefitted through these corrupt practices be reversed with immediate effect and subjected to due disciplinary processes. What then becomes of undertaking that the number of underperforming schools be decreased when people who are clearly unfit for the jobs are getting these jobs? It is thus no surprise when we see the thousands of youth leaving our shores because of nepotism and unfair appointments – we are chasing those with skills away, and it is unfortunate that our learners must pay the penalty for mediocrity.

Honourable Speaker the price for a post ranged from around R6000 to more than R30 000. As suspected, the unions are up in arms, blaming everyone besides themselves and accusing others of “union bashing”. The result of the jobs for cash scandal is not only that the best available teachers are not placed in our schools, but that the learners once again get less than they deserve. Teachers appointed on merit are also negatively affected by such corrupt practices. Lack of oversight and monitoring as well as weaknesses within HR policies are the drawing cards for unscrupulous officials to embark on corrupt practices.

The Democratic Alliance is of the opinion that powers to recommend the appointment of principals should be withdrawn from certain schools that have dysfunctional school governing bodies as well as in underperforming schools, but should allow those schools the authority where the system works perfectly and where there are no undue influences as per their record to continue with their recommendations for appointments.

Hon Speaker, the rights of our children to decent education have sadly been compromised in that the majority of South African children cannot read for meaning by the end of Grade 4, even in their home language, and the results in English are no better. It is incomprehensible that today we still have children with impaired literacy capabilities who are not able to read and in some instances not able to read and write. These are basic skills that every child has the right to and should be allowed to develop – however given the current issues within our provincial education system, the lack of literacy levels where 27% of grades 1 to 3 are learning in classes with more than 55 pupils, is just one of the many effects of a failing system.

When is government going to realize that their inability to govern appropriately and provide decent education to children will leave us with a disempowered generation who lack the capabilities that they should have developed as children? The Eastern Cape is well renowned for its shortcomings in terms of providing quality education and suitable learning environments to those who

need it. Whether it's a lack of teachers or a lack of classrooms or overcrowded classrooms, all of these have contributed to impairment of our children's capabilities – these issues appear to be part of an endless cycle that government continues to perpetuate through bad governance. Further to this, there are teachers who lack the pedagogical skills and subject content to address the needs of the learners, thus placing them at a greater disadvantage. It is all too easy to attribute these issues to maladministration and corruption, which need to be addressed, but what we tend to overlook and what need to be address is that through all this it is the children who suffer and who are affected, and our first priority must be them above all else.

Honourable Speaker, I have written to the Department in my capacity as a member of the legislature and a member of the Portfolio committee of Education to enquire about certain educational matters that affect learners and parents. These letters were written on the 19th of April 2016 and up until today I have not received any responses. This is how the Department of Education treats stakeholders in education it is shocking, unprofessional and unacceptable. If they treat members of the legislature in such an ignorant manner, imagine how the public is treated? I wanted to enquire from the Department as to their position regarding Khumbulani High School in Port Elizabeth that burnt down in 2010 and how they are going to deal with the decrepit building that has become a breeding ground for inconceivable crimes – no response. I also wanted to enquire from the Department as to why the 1735 textbooks to the 735 learners of the new Jeffrey's Bay Comprehensive High school have not being delivered this academic year as this is a travesty of justice, and inconceivable to imagine how learners had to swim the tide without any resources – no response.

I'm not surprised, but will most certainly tell all and sundry who is responsible for the state of affairs within our more than 5550 schools.

The DA supports the report.

Thank you.