

To: **Minister of Basic Education**
Ms Angie Motshekga
National Department of Basic Education

Personal Assistant to the Minister of Basic Education
Mr Steve Mabua
Per email: **Mabua.S@dbe.gov.za**

And to: **Mr Hubert Mveli**
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And to: **Mr Jabulani Ngcobo**
Director: Inclusive Education
Department of Basic Education
Per email: **Ngcobo.J@dbe.gov.za**

8th April 2020

Dear Minister Motshekga

RE: SUPPORT TO LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES DURING COVID-19 LOCKDOWN AND BEYOND

1. We refer to your media statement dated 26 March 2020 on plans to support learners during the COVID 19 lockdown.
2. We would like to acknowledge the efforts made by the Department of Basic Education to respond to the extraordinary situation we find ourselves in during this COVID-19 global crisis.
3. In the aforesaid media statement of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) on 26 March 2020, Minister Motshekga states: "We urge those who raise learners with special education needs to get in touch with the department should the need arise." While this is a welcomed effort by DBE to ensure an inclusive response to the COVID-19 crisis, this statement as well as subsequent statements, lack the crucial information of the relevant contact persons, and what information or support to expect.

4. It has come to our attention that many of the parents of learners with disabilities with whom our organisations engage are facing particular difficulties at this time. For many families, especially those in rural areas, learners attend and spend most of their time at special schools, special care centres and hostels.
5. At these schools and hostels learners receive, albeit with varying availability of specialised resources, therapeutic interventions, assistive devices for learning and communication, accommodation and care. Unfortunately, in many cases the families and communities that children have returned to, lack the financial resources and knowledge on how to communicate with, understand and support learners for an extended period of time such as this current school closure period.
6. The World Health Organisation (WHO) in its briefing on disability considerations during Covid-19 urges “Appropriate action by schools and other educational facilities to ensure continued education for students with disability who may be required to study from home for longer periods”.¹
7. It is critical for the continued health and well-being of these children that parents have access to a variety of support services over this period. In so far as these relate to the DBE, these include access to:
 - 7.1 Accessible information relating to COVID-19 and the lockdown
 - 7.2 Accessible learning materials. As far as we are aware all content provided by the DBE to date has not been made accessible. For example, TV content has no sign language interpretation
 - 7.3 Adapted curriculum learning material, in particular, material to support the adapted curriculum for learners with intellectual disability
 - 7.4 Copies of the daily programme from the schools that learners were attending to ensure structure and continuity over this period
 - 7.5 Assistive devices to support with communication and learning, for example, braille writers, low vision aids
 - 7.6 Self-care and other health care items for example, diapers
 - 7.7 Nutritional food
8. We would like to understand, with reference to the media statement above, whether these support materials and services are available to parents when they contact the DBE. In addition, information regarding whom the relevant contact person(s) are would be most useful. A dedicated hotline number for parents of learners with disabilities is a recommendation we strongly encourage.

¹ <https://www.who.int/who-documents-detail/disability-considerations-during-the-covid-19-outbreak> (page 6)

9. Reference was also made in the media statement to the development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) which were being developed. We would appreciate the opportunity to view these to understand whether additional detail outlining the services to parents with disabilities have been included in the SOP.
10. If any of these services are not available to parents, we would appreciate understanding the difficulties with meeting these needs with a view to assisting with solutions.
11. In an effort to support their constituents, many Organisations for Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) have developed useful materials specific to the type of disability expertise of their organisation. These have been shared with the Inclusive Education Directorate for wide circulation. We request the DBE to urgently upload these and other accessible and appropriate learning materials on the DBE Cloud, the DBE website and other platforms.
12. We would welcome continued engagement with the Inclusive Education Directorate to share insights and expertise to tackle not only the immediate needs of families of children with disabilities but also plans for the continued lockdown in the likely event that it is extended or schools remain closed.

We thank you for your consideration of our letter and look forward to your response.

We trust you will stay safe and well over this period.

Yours sincerely



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