

MEDIA RELEASE PSA: Western Cape not ready to reopen schools

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The Public Servants Association (PSA), is concerned that not all schools are ready to and able to provide reasonable care to protect learners, educators, and staff against possible COVID-19 infections at school. The risk of the virus spreading in schools has been proven today with two schools, namely Parkvale Primary School in Valhalla Park and the Hague Primary School in Delft, reporting "positive" cases with only the staff attending the schools.

Far too many schools have as yet not received all the required material to ensure that everybody entering the schools grounds, is screened and that proper hygiene and sanitising protocols can be applied. The identification and management of educators and staff, over the age of 60 and those with co-morbidities has not been finalised, leaving all involved confused and uncertain as to what to do. This unfortunate state of affairs is amplified by the conduct of Principals and School Management, who are threatening staff and requiring them to continue working despite the obvious lack in the compliance with required safety measures.

The PSA crisscrossed the whole province to ascertain what was happening and was further updated by members throughout the region. It was established that most of the schools are yet to receive some or all Personal Protective Equipment (PPE's), no deep cleaning has been done, as WCED believes that since the school buildings had been closed during lockdown, there is no risk of the virus being on any surface areas of the buildings itself. Where PPE has been received, it has been found that it is inadequate as the material issued does not correspond with the size of the school or the number of learners and educators returning to the school. The additional cleaning materials for cleaning to be done by cleaning staff, has not arrived at some schools to date and cleaners are expected to use what is available at the schools. Thermometers at some schools are inaccurate as they all read at a digital reading of 32 degrees. No screening of employees and training of screeners has been done at most schools - especially special schools.

Another school in Kuilsriver, Bethal School reported a positive case today. The PSA was surprised to learn that only the educators were sent home, whereas cleaners were expected to stay behind to clean the school. The PSA has informed the department that this is not the proper protocol and have instructed its members to return home as well. There are clear guidelines and regulations in place for the handling of positive cases and those who come into contact with these cases, but individual Principals do not follow the prescribed regulations, which is of grave concern. The PSA feels that WCED is only partly compliant to the *Disaster Management Act* Regulations and appreciates the efforts of those schools who have managed to comply but feel that partial compliance is simply not enough to state that the Western Cape is ready to re-open schools. Ours schools will attract hundreds of children next week.

The PSA supports the aim to allow all our children access to education, especially those who could not participate in on-line educational activities, but the standard of readiness of our schools to safely accommodate the learners and school staff should be more than just reasonably ready. The PSA calls upon the MEC to be honest with their limitations and accept that the department is not ready and furthermore calls upon all role-players to engage in the interest of the safety and health of the workers and learners at schools.

The PSA will keep monitoring the compliance of health and safety standards and will have a follow up meeting with the employer in due course.