

Media Release: WCED warning to learners regarding discipline in schools

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Statement by Brian Schreuder: Head of Department – Western Cape Education Department

Learner discipline in schools remains a huge concern for the Western Cape Education Department. Physical or verbal abuse will simply not be tolerated and I have taken a strong stance on this. We need to protect those learners and educators who want to contribute towards quality teaching and learning. Violent and abusive behaviour has no place in our schools. Learners and their individual rights must be central to what happens in every school.

Gangsterism is also a major concern. It is a threat that is not always visible or known to educators or fellow learners, however, it is a threat that can flare up suddenly and can often lead to dangerous and violent circumstances.

This was the case at a high school in the Western Cape last year. A violent fight erupted allegedly as a result of gang rivalry within the community. What transpired was truly shocking.

Learners were chasing each other with weapons ranging from pangas, knives and scissors. Two learners were stabbed and others were physically wounded. What is concerning is that this fight seems to have been orchestrated as learners had hidden weapons on the school premises. Thankfully none of the bystanders were hurt, but the fight involved 14 learners from various grades. The learners were suspended and faced a disciplinary hearing. The governing body recommended the expulsion of the 14 learners. When I received the file I was saddened by what I read.

Schools are public spaces and in terms of the *Regulations for Safety Measures at Public Schools, 2001*, as amended, the National Minister of Basic Education declared all public schools as **drug free** and **dangerous weapon free zones**. These 14 learners had not only violated these regulations, but also their school's code of conduct and had put themselves, other learners and educators at risk.

We simply cannot and will not accept this kind of behaviour in our schools. Based on the evidence at hand, I have therefore made the decision to uphold the recommendation to

expel all 14 learners. Last year I upheld the recommendations to expel 132 learners in the province, 41 cases related to violent behaviour or assault.

Our schools are places where learners should “Enter to Learn and Leave to Serve”. Gang affiliations, violence, verbal threats and substance abuse have no place in our schools. I would also like to warn all learners that tougher action will be taken in future against repetitive bullying in our schools. Schools must please ensure that their codes of conduct also apply to online learner activity when it comes to social media bullying.

Schools must implement disciplinary action should learners transgress their codes of conduct. I will not hesitate to make a decision that is in the best interests of the other learners and educators of the school when it comes to an individual being found guilty of dangerous, violent and offensive behaviour. Our schools must be places of learning and nothing else.

As the WCED, we will continue to implement programmes that assist in addressing conflict. We will also continue to provide workshops and programmes in anti-gangsterism and substance abuse, cyber-wellness and values-driven initiatives through our Transform to Perform Strategy. Our Transform to Perform Strategy aims to promote positive behaviour in schools with a growth mindset and values-driven approach to our peers and educators.

But today, this serves as a warning to all the learners of this province to respect their schools, fellow learners and educators. I appeal to all communities, parents, educators and schools to take hands to keep our schools safe and protect them as places of learning.

Let us keep violence, conflict, drug use and abuse off our school premises.