



**GAUTENG PROVINCE**

EDUCATION  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

## **Circular 11/2020**

**Date: 17 September 2020**

### **Topic**

**PREVENTION OF LEARNER DROPOUT AMIDST  
THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC**

### **Enclosures**

**ANNEXURE A:  
SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS FOLLOWING UP  
LEARNER ATTENDANCE AT SCHOOL DURING  
THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

### **Distribution**

- ✓ All Chief Directors and Directors at Head Office
- ✓ All Directors at District Offices
- ✓ All Officials at Head Office and District Offices
- ✓ Principals of all Public Ordinary Schools and LSEN Schools
- ✓ Members of School Governing Bodies and Governing Body Associations
- ✓ Staff members in Public Ordinary and LSEN Schools
- ✓ Teacher Organisations and Unions
- ✓ Relevant Non-Governmental Organisations

### **Enquiries**

**Directorate: Public Ordinary Schools**

On request, this circular will be made available in Afrikaans, isiZulu or Sepedi within 21 days  
Also available on the website at: [www.gauteng.gov.za](http://www.gauteng.gov.za)

Tel: (011) 355 0000  
17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001 | P.O. Box 7710, Johannesburg, 2000

[www.gautengonline.gov.za](http://www.gautengonline.gov.za) | Hotline: 08600 11 000

## **1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

As at the 31 August 2020, all schools have opened to accommodate learners in all grades. Despite the measures put in place by the Gauteng Department of Education to ensure that teaching and learning continues, there is a growing concern that learner dropout is increasing during the COVID-19 pandemic due to parent and learner fears and anxiety. These fears and anxiety stem from parents and learners not being aware of the measures that the Department and schools have put in place for COVID-19 containment to promote teaching and learning to ensure that learners do not lose out on the academic year.

## **2. PURPOSE OF THE CIRCULAR**

The purpose of this circular is to:

- 2.1 emphasize the learners' rights to education and the issue of compulsory attendance at school;
- 2.2 create an awareness of the measures that the Department has put in place to fulfil learners' right to education and promote compulsory attendance; and
- 2.3 explain the roles and responsibilities of schools to fulfil learners' right to education and promoting learner attendance.

## **3. LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK**

- 3.1 The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (Act No.108 of 1996), as amended;
- 3.2 South African Schools Act, 1996 (Act No.84 of 1996), as amended.
- 3.3 National Education Policy Act, 1996 (Act No. 27 of 1996), as amended.
- 3.4 Employment of Educators Act, 1998 (Act No. 76 of 1998), as amended.
- 3.5 Gauteng Schools Education Act, 1995 (Act No. 6 of 1995), as amended.
- 3.6 Directions regarding the re-opening of schools and measures to address, prevent and combat the spread of COVID-19 in the National Department of Basic Education, all Provincial Departments of Education, all Education District Offices and all Schools in the Republic

Of South Africa, 2020 "The Directions"(Published as General Notice No.343 in Government Gazette No.436465), as amended.

#### **4. THE LEARNERS' RIGHT TO EDUCATION AND COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE**

In terms of Section 29 (1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, everyone has the right to basic and further education. The education sector considers this right to be of such importance that it ascribes responsibilities to various stakeholders in Section 3 of the South African Schools Act, 1996, which requires:

- a) parents of learners that are of compulsory school going age to ensure that such a learner attends school and also makes it an offence with the possibility of a fine or imprisonment for a parent or any other person who prevents a learner from attending school; and
- b) the Head of Department, in cases where a learner is not enrolled at or fails to attend a school, to investigate the circumstances of the learner's absence and take appropriate measures to remedy the situation.

#### **5. MEASURES PUT IN PLACE BY THE DEPARTMENT TO REALISE THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION AND COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE**

##### **5.1 RECOGNISED SCHOOLING ALTERNATIVES TO ENSURE THE CONTINUATION OF TEACHING AND LEARNING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

In keeping with the directions issued by the Department of Basic Education, the Gauteng Department of Education offers three schooling alternatives to ensure the continuation of teaching and learning, namely, Normal Schooling provided by schools, Home Education and Lockdown Learning in the form of online classes and remote learning. Lockdown Learning targets learners with comorbidities and other reasons including fear and anxiety. Besides the aforementioned schooling alternatives, no other arrangement is recognised by the Department.

5.1.1 Normal Schooling requires learners to physically attend school as per school timetable, this may vary from school to school depending on the implementation of social distancing in classrooms and the resources available in schools. Schools that have limited resources have implemented a rotation system which requires certain grades to attend on some days of the week while continuing with learning on days that they don't attend through online platforms or work issued on the days that learners do attend.

5.1.2 Home Education is applicable to learners from Grades 1 to 9 and would require the parent to apply to the Department to register the child as being home educated. The learner will be formally deregistered from the school. The Department has made allowance for in-year applications to accommodate parents and learners. It should be noted that:

- a) the parents must take full responsibility for the education of the learner; and
- b) the learner will be deregistered from the school and will not be guaranteed placement at the school on reapplication.

5.1.3 In cases where learners have comorbidities or are fearful about being infected with the coronavirus, parents can opt for Lockdown Learning. Where schools have the capabilities, they may opt to provide online classes and support materials.

Alternatively, schools must support these learners with curriculum material in the form of learner activity packs. This also requires parents to apply to the Department and receive approval from the Head of Department. It should be noted that these learners that remain enrolled at the school, will be supported by the school, and where fees are charged parents

will be liable for the fees. The application for lockdown learning will be valid for the academic year applied for.

An approved application for Lockdown Learning, means that the:

- a) parent takes responsibility for the education of the learner with the support of the Department and School;
- b) parent will pick up learning material from the school on a weekly/fortnightly basis and come to an arrangement with the school for the implementation of assessment; and
- c) the learner will not be deregistered from the School.

## **5.2 PROMOTION OF HEALTH AND SAFETY**

5.2.1 The Department of Basic Education has issued directives to all schools requiring them to promote health and safety and ensure the implementation of COVID-19 precautions. The following are some of the key directives provided.

All schools are required to:

- a) notify parents that they must not send learners to school if the learners have any of the observable symptoms associated with COVID-19, including fever, cough, sore throat, redness of eyes, shortness of breath or difficulty in breathing, body aches, loss of smell or loss of taste, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, fatigue or weakness.
- b) screen all persons entering the school premises, including learners and staff to enable them to identify people with possible COVID-19 symptoms.
- c) control access and only grant access to persons that:
  - (i) have passed symptom screening;
  - (ii) are wearing face mask; and
  - (iii) have the required permission from the Principal.
- d) ensure that:

- (i) all work surfaces and equipment are cleaned before school or work resumes, or after school or work;
  - (ii) classrooms, sleeping quarters and water and sanitation facilities are cleaned at least once a day by appointed cleaners; and
  - (iii) surfaces that are touched frequently by many people (railings, lunch tables, sports equipment, door and window handles, toys, teaching and learning aids, etc.) are cleaned more frequently.
- e) act in terms of the guidelines provided by the Department of Basic Education when there are suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19.
  - f) implement social distancing in areas in which crowding is likely to take place, including classrooms.

5.2.2 In schools where School Nutrition and Scholar Transport is provided, the Department has also provided Voluntary Food Handlers and Transport providers with guidelines to promote personal hygiene and ensure the implementation of COVID-19 protocols ie wearing a mask, sanitizing hands and practicing social distancing.

5.2.3 The Department has undertaken to disinfect schools where there were cases of COVID-19 and has also provided schools with guidance on disinfection.

### **5.3 PROVISION OF PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT**

To ensure that no learners and teachers are prevented from attending school and engaging in effective teaching and learning, the Gauteng Department of Education has procured and supplied schools with sufficient personal protective essentials, including masks and sanitizers and other COVID-19 tools for teachers, officials and learners.

Schools are required to ensure that:

- a) personal protective equipment are easily accessible, sufficient quantities of hand sanitizers based on the number of learners, educators or officials or other persons who access the school, hostel or office, at the entrance of, and in, the workplace or sleeping quarters, which the persons are required to use; and
- b) there are facilities for washing of hands with soap and clean water.

The Department has also undertaken to ensure that all necessary COVID-19 essentials such as sanitizers and detergents are replenished on a monthly basis or as required.

## **5.4 CURRICULUM CONSIDERATIONS**

- 5.4.1 The Department of Basic Education (DBE) working in collaboration with Provincial Education Departments (PEDs) and other key stakeholders including teacher unions has put together a Covid-19 School Recovery Plan, pertaining to the re-opening of schools for Grades 1 to 11.
- 5.4.2 The proposed school recovery plan entails in the main recovery of lost time, reorganisation and trimming of the curriculum and the creation of the required enabling conditions to ensure a safe and secure return of learners and teachers to school.
- 5.4.3 The trimming of the curriculum means that subject content has been trimmed and reorganised to fit into the remaining school days. This means that in 2020, schools will be consolidating learning after a long break, and building clear foundations for learning in 2021 and 2022 to ensure that learners are not disadvantaged in any way. (See DBE Circular S3 of 2020- Distribution of the Teacher Guidelines for the Implementation of Annual Teaching Plans (ATPS) and the Minimum Core Content and Skills Per Subject and Per Grade for more details).

## **5.5 ASSESSMENT, PROGRESSION AND PROMOTION CONSIDERATIONS**

- 5.5.1 Changes in the ATPs and the need to limit physical contact amongst learners have also necessitated changes in the programme of formal assessment in most subjects. The best approach, seemingly, centres on maximising school-based efforts to utilise available resources, time and space to develop a plan for critical content, skills, values and attitudes for the 2020 academic year with a view to using part of the 2021 academic year to revise and remediate 2020 work.
- 5.5.2 The June Examination was cancelled in all grades to allow for more teaching time. Schools will administer a formal assessment in Grade 4 to Grade 9 subjects at the end of terms 3 and 4 to identify the learning gaps for remediation in the current or subsequent grade. In the remainder of the 2020 academic year, School Based Assessments (SBA) must focus on formative assessment which is intricately linked to the process of teaching and learning. The collection of evidence generated through both formative and formal summative tasks in the current grade informs the overall progression of a learner into the next grade.
- 5.5.3 The SBA for Foundation Phase (Grades R–3) remains unchanged at 100%. For the Foundation Phase, the calculation of the final progression mark will be obtained from terms 1, 3 and 4 as no marks are calculated for term 2.
- 5.5.4
- a) The revised weighting for SBA in Grades 4–9 counts 80% of the final progression mark. The 80% weighting will comprise all assessment tasks conducted in term 1 and term 3.
  - b) The increased weighting of 80% for SBA will ensure that the teachers' ongoing assessment in the classroom plays a more important role than the final end-of-year school-based test in



determining whether the learner should be promoted to the next grade.

- c) The school-based test will carry a weighting of 20% in Grades 4 to 9.

5.5.5 The weightings for SBAs and examinations for Grades 10 and 11 will comprise of 60% for SBAs and 40% for examinations.

## **6. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SCHOOL TO FULFIL THE LEARNERS RIGHT TO EDUCATION AND PROMOTING LEARNER ATTENDANCE**

The Department, SGBs and SMTs are obligated under the Constitution to ensure that compulsory education is enforced and that parents use the alternatives created by the Department to ensure continued learning. It is also the objective of government to prevent dropouts across all grades of school, especially in the FET Band.

6.1 Schools clearly have a major role and responsibility in assisting the Department to fulfil its responsibility towards ensuring that learners' rights to education are met and that parents comply with compulsory learner attendance requirements.

6.2 a) The Principal, School Management Team (SMT), Staff and School Governing Body (SGB) must encourage learners that are not exempted from attending school, that is, those approved for Home Schooling or Lockdown Learning to attend school regularly and punctually as per the National Learner Attendance Policy.

- b) While directive 6B of the directives issued by the Department of Basic Education emphasises that schools must maintain accurate daily attendance registers of learners and requires the school to maintain records of learners who are unable to attend school due to COVID-19 related issues, it does not detract from the implementation of the National Learner Attendance Policy which requires amongst others parents to inform the school of a

learner's absence and for the Principal to monitor learner attendance and follow up learner absence from school for more than three consecutive days. See Annexure A for a sample follow up letter.

- c) Further to Paragraph 6.2 (b) above, GDE collects statistics from schools on a regular basis, maintaining accurate records of learners in the different categories while assisting the Department to produce reliable and valid reports to inform decision-making.
- d) The Class Register is an official document and may be required for legal and any other purpose. The Class Register must clearly identify:
  - (i) a learner who is on lockdown learning;
  - (ii) a learner that is absent;
  - (iii) a learner who has been withdrawn.

The school must keep withdrawal records from parents.

- 6.3 The Principal, Staff, SMT and SGB must advise parents of the three schooling modes (as per paragraph 5.1 of this Circular), cancel any informal arrangements between the school and the parents and ensure the implementation of paragraph 5.1.
- 6.4 The Principal, Staff, SMT and SGB must promote a safe, healthy and clean school environment (as per paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of this circular) ensuring compliance to the COVID-19 protocols of wearing masks, sanitizing hands and social distancing.
- 6.5 The Principal and SGB must:
  - a) keep parents informed of the measures that the Department has put in place to fulfil learners' rights, emphasise the curriculum and assessment adjustments that have been made to accommodate the time lost and encourage parents to send learners regularly to school when they are not ill;
  - b) encourage parents to also contribute towards fulfilling the learners' rights to basic education and compulsory school attendance;

- c) encourage parents to utilise one of the schooling options provided in paragraph 5.1 above;
- d) ensure that parents are made aware that the schooling options, curriculum and assessment considerations that have been put in place are all in the best interest of the learner and that there is no justifiable reason for a learner to lose out on the academic year.

## 7. New In Year Applications for Admissions

- a) Schools that receive in year applications for admission must process the application in terms of the Regulations relating to the admission of learners to public schools (published in Government Notice No. 4138 of 13 July 2001 in Provincial Gazette No. 129).
- b) Schools are required to admit new learners as per normal, taking into account the merits of each case and the best interest on the learner. The COVID -19 pandemic should not be used as a reason not to admit.
- c) Parents will be responsible for ensuring that the school receives the learner profile to ensure continuity of the child's learning in an appropriate manner.

## 8. CONCLUSION

The Principal is urged to bring the content of this circular to the attention of all stakeholders and to ensure its implementation.

## 7. SIGNATURE OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT



**MR. EDWARD MOSUWE**

**HEAD OF DEPARTMENT**

**DATE:** 16/9/2020

**ANNEXURE A: SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENT FOLLOWING UP  
LEARNER ATTENDANCE TO SCHOOL DURING THE COVID-19  
PANDEMIC**

|                          |
|--------------------------|
| <b>SCHOOL LETTERHEAD</b> |
|--------------------------|

**Dear Parent/Guardian**

**LEARNER ABSENCE FROM SCHOOL**

Your child/ward \_\_\_\_ (Name of child) \_\_\_\_\_  
in Grade \_\_\_\_ has not been to school from Date (\_\_\_\_\_) to  
Date (\_\_\_\_\_). This constitutes (No. of days \_\_\_\_\_).

Please be informed that the school has reopened and all learners are expected to attend school, regularly and punctually as per school timetable, to offer “normal schooling.” The school is complying with health and safety requirements, ensuring that classrooms, ablution facilities, sanitation facilities and frequently touched surfaces are cleaned regularly and strictly observing COVID-19 protocols of wearing masks, regularly washing/sanitising of hands and practicing social distancing in the classroom and high traffic areas.

To ensure that no learners and teachers are prevented from attending school and engaging in effective teaching and learning the Gauteng Department of Education has procured and supplied schools with sufficient personal protective equipment, including masks and sanitizers and other COVID-19 essentials for teachers, officials and learners. The school has made these easily accessible to all in school and ensures the sufficiency for

all, as well as, ensured that there are facilities for washing of hands with soap and clean water. The Department has also undertaken to ensure that all necessary COVID-19 essential such as sanitizers and detergents are replenished on a monthly basis or as required.

The school timetable has been revised to incorporate rotation on a weekly or daily basis for different grades to facilitate social distancing and keep learner numbers manageable to avoid any overcrowding. The Department has trimmed the curriculum (reduced subjects and/or reduced content) for all grades, besides Grade 12 and provided educators with revised Annual Teaching Plans to fact in the loss of time due to the lockdown and phased in return to schools. For this year the teaching and learning emphasis will be on consolidating learning and over the next tow years teaching and learning will build on these foundations to ensure that learners do not experience any content gaps. Together with the revised curriculum the assessment and promotion or progression requirements have been revised in the interest of the learner, as follows :

- a) The School Based Assessment(SBAA) for Foundation Phase (Grades R–3) remains unchanged at 100%. For the Foundation Phase, the calculation of the final progression mark will be obtained from terms 1, 3 and 4 as no marks are calculated for term 2.
- b) The revised weighting for SBA in Grades 4–9 counts 80% of the final progression mark. The 80% weighting will comprise all assessment tasks conducted in term 1 and term 3. The increased weighting of 80% for SBA will ensure that the teachers' ongoing assessment in the classroom plays a more important role than the final end-of-year school-based test in determining whether the learner should be promoted to the next grade. The school-based test will carry a weighting of 20% in Grades 4 to 9.
- c) The weightings for SBAs and examinations for Grades 10 and 11 will comprise of 60% for SBAs and 40% for examinations.

Should you still not be at ease to send your child/ward to school, then it is recommended that your child/ward be registered for Home Education or Lockdown Learning, to ensure that the learner continues to learn and not los out on this academic year through no fault of theirs. If you are interested in

any of these alternative schooling options you are welcome to contact the school or the Department for further information and advice on how to register. A brief explanation of each type of alternative schooling options is provided below:

- a) Home Education is applicable to learners from Grade 1 to 9 and would require the parent to apply to the Department to register the child as being home educated. Once approved by the Head of Department, the learner will be formally deregistered from the school and not be guaranteed placement at this school on reapplication. An application for home education means that you will take full responsibility for your child's learning with no help or support from the school or Department. Note that the Department is allowing registration to take place in year due to the pandemic.
- b) Lockdown Learning is the other option provided by the Gauteng of Education to ensure that learners continue to learn. This alternative is especially provide for learners that have comorbidities or are fearful about being infected with the coronavirus. Where schools have the capabilities, they may opt to provide online classes and support materials. Alternatively, schools must support these learners with curriculum material in the form of learner activity packs. This also requires parents to apply to the Department and receive approval from the Head of Department. It should be noted that these learners remain enrolled at the school, will be supported by the school and where fees are charged parents will be liable for the fees. The application for lockdown learning will be valid for the academic year applied for. An approved application for Lockdown Learning, means that the:
  - i) parent takes responsibility for the education of the learner with the support of the Department and School;
  - ii) parent will pick up learning material from the school on a weekly/fortnightly basis and come to an arrangement with the school for the implementation of assessment; and
  - iii) the learner will not be deregistered from the School.

In the light of the above, I humbly appeal to you to either ensure that your child/ward returns to school for normal schooling or register for Home Education or

Lockdown Learning, to ensure that your child/ward does not lose out this academic year.

You are requested to contact the school immediately to inform the school of your plans for your child/ward. Parents/Guardians are further reminded that should you not exercise any of the schooling options put forward above and your child/ward is of compulsory school going age, you will be contravening Section 3 of the South African Schools Act, 1996 (Act No. 84 of 1996) and I will have no alternative but to escalate the matter to the District, for further action. This may lead to the Department instituting criminal charges which may result in a fine or imprisonment for a period of six months.

I trust that you, the parent/guardian will make the wise choice of ensuring that your child/ward continues with learning by exercising one of the schooling options provided above.

Yours faithfully

---

**Mr/Ms/Mrs**  
**Principal**