

**STATEMENT BY THE MEC FOR EDUCATION, MS LINDI MASINA, AT
THE LAUNCH OF THE 2026 BACK TO SCHOOL PROGRAMME :
TUESDAY, 06 JANUARY 2026**

Programme Director.

Executive Mayor of Bushbuckridge Local Municipality, **Cllr Lydia Moroane-Zitha**

Provincial Chairperson of the House of Traditional Leaders, **Kghoshi Mokoena**

Acting Head; Education, **Ms. Gugu Mashiteng**

Chairperson of the School Governing Body of Mathupa Primary School, **Mr. B Sibiya**

Acting District Director of Bohlabela District, **Dr Samson Khomola**

Acting Area Commissioner of the Department of Correctional Services, **Mr NL Nkosi**

Regional Manager of Old Mutual, **Mr. Maxwel Dlamini**

Principal of Mathupa Primary School, Ms. NL Shabangu

Members of Senior Management

Circuit Manager. **AJ Sibuyi**

Representatives from the media

Good Morning,

As we begin this new year, I wish to extend warm and heartfelt greetings to every family across our beautiful Province.

We trust and hope that the festive season brought you moments of rest, peace, and renewal.

A new year is a gift , a clean page filled with promise and opportunity.

Our wish is that 2026 will be a year of growth, academic progress, safety, and success for every learner and every household in the Place of the Rising Sun.

Today and with less than eight days before the reopening of schools for the 2026 school year, we officially launch the **2026 Back to School Campaign**.

We do so by making a clarion call to all members of school governing bodies and the community of Mpumalanga in general to start with the preparations towards the successful school re-opening.

We are cognizant of the fact that since the closure of schools in December 2025, the Province has experienced persistent and above-average rainfall which may have affected school grounds, facilities and surroundings in many areas.

It is therefore essential that all schools governing bodies act with urgency to ensure that their schools are clean, orderly and ready to start with learning and teaching on the very first day.

They need to make sure that school grounds are well maintained, classrooms are thoroughly cleaned, furniture and learning resources are arranged properly, school gardens are restored, all hazards are reported, and stationery and textbooks are issued to learners before on time before the day of school re-opening.

School Governing Bodies are equally encouraged to lead these efforts with commitment and determination, mobilizing support and resources where needed and embodying the spirit of the **Rhandza Xikolo Xa Wena Campaign**.

Our collective view is that when communities work together, schools progress.

Therefore parents, traditional leaders, faith-based structures, business partners and civil society are cordially invited to play an active role in assisting and offering a helping hand for education to thrive in our Province.

PROGRESS ON LEARNER ADMISSIONS

The Department initiated learner admissions for the **2026** school year from **02 May to 31 August 2025**. The expectation is that the 2026 learner numbers are likely to be around 1.03 million.

So far all Districts have completed admissions except for few learners who are yet to be admitted in our fast-growing towns such as Mbombela, Emalaheni, Mashishing , Steve Tshwete and Secunda.

The current statistic at our disposal is that there are about----- learners that still need to be placed within these areas:

The Breakdown is as follows:

District	Number of Learners to be placed
Bohlabela	269
Ehlanzeni	2195
Gert Sibande	3917
Nkangala	3714
TOTAL	9826

The Department wishes to assure parents of the affected learners that everything humanly possible will be made to ensure the admission of their children in schools for the 2026 academic year.

We have observed continued migration from rural to urban areas, resulting in increased pressure on schools in certain towns.

We have also seen increases in applications outside feeder zones and occasional refusal of placement where space does exist.

These pressures have led to the identification of high-pressure or hotspot areas, where the demand for space exceeds the available capacity.

To manage this process effectively, the Department has strengthened its Provincial Admission Management System.

At provincial level, the **Provincial Admission Committee**, chaired by the Chief Director: District Coordination has been established to facilitate and process all admission inquiries.

Similar structures operate at District and Circuit level, working closely with principals, School Governing Bodies and parents.

Help desks have been established to assist with placement queries and appeals and numbers are

Our message is clear every child of school-going - age must be admitted and no learner must be left outside the classroom.

LEARNING AND TEACHING SUPPORT MATERIALS

Learning and Teaching Support Materials remain one of our most critical priorities because quality learning cannot take place without the necessary resources.

We are pleased to report that the Department delivered stationery to all schools last year.

To this end, we urge all schools management teams and school governing bodies to ensure that these are distributed according to policy prescripts that governs such.

Further LTSM for Early Childhood Development, reading initiatives, Maths, Science and Technology, and Special Schools continues to be rolled out.

The Department achieved **95% textbook coverage in 2024**, with additional top-up books delivered for Grades 4 to 11 in April 2025, and full Grade 12 textbook provision completed in July 2024.

Grade 10 and 11 support materials are also aligned to our digital learning initiatives, including learner tablets planned for the 2026 academic year.

Schools are reminded that textbooks must be issued before teaching begins and must be cared for because they remain Government property.

The intention is that learners must arrive in schools on the 14 January ready **to learn** and not wait for materials. Our commitment is that no learner should be deprived of learning support due to administrative delays.

TEACHERS POST PROVISIONING FOR 2026

The Department has consulted with the Education Sector Unions through the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC), has finalized and approved the allocation of educator posts for the 2026 academic year.

This process is guided by our commitment to ensure that every classroom has a qualified teacher and that every subject is appropriately staffed.

For the 2026 academic year, a total post establishment of **32 103** educator posts has been approved.

Importantly, where there is a continued need, the posts of educators previously appointed in a temporary capacity have been extended to ensure continuity and stability in our schools.

This also includes the extension of substitute posts in instances where the substantive post holder is unable to return to duty for legitimate and approved reasons.

The Department has issued a comprehensive business process with clear timelines to guide the filling of educator posts across all categories.

Promotional posts are managed in line with the approved management plan, ensuring transparency, fairness, and full compliance with applicable legislation and collective agreements.

We remain committed to ensuring that vacancies are filled timeously so that the delivery of quality education is consistently supported across the province.

LEARNER FURNITURE

The Department conducted an assessment of learner furniture shortages across the province in 2025. As a result, new learner furniture was procured and delivered to 342 schools, benefitting 20,310 learners.

Schools are further encouraged to seek support from the Department of Correctional Services to repair broken furniture as and when required.

NATIONAL SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMME

The National School Nutrition Programme remains one of our most important poverty-alleviation and learner-support interventions.

We know very well that a hungry child cannot concentrate therefore cannot learn attentively.

Through this programme schools will continue to provide nutritious meals every school day from the very first day of reopening.

All learners in quintile 1 to 3 will be beneficiaries of this programme.

The Department is ensuring that deliveries are completed timeously, that storage facilities meet safety standards, and that food handlers receive ongoing support and training.

Many of those who prepare meals are caring mothers and community members whose service we deeply appreciate.

For many children, this daily meal restores dignity, energy and concentration and we remain fully committed to sustaining and strengthening this programme.

It is based on this context that schools are encouraged to established vegetable gardens to supplement the school nutrition programme.

SCHOLAR TRANSPORT

Another key support measure to ensure that learners who live far from school are not disadvantaged by distance or unsafe routes.

Working in partnership with the Department of Public Works, Roads and Transport, the Department has finalized needs assessments through consultations with schools and verification of learner numbers.

Approved routes have been advertised and assigned, and learners are being allocated transport in line with approved criteria.

Our database links individual learners to their schools and transport routes, ensuring accountability and proper management.

67 221 Learners are going to benefit from scholar transport provisioning this year.

Safety standards, including vehicle capacity limits, are being strictly monitored by our sister Department.

During the first ten days of the school year, learner information will continue to be verified to ensure accuracy and compliance.

We note that the persisting rainfall might have damaged some road infrastructure.

In this regard, school governing bodies are urged to proactively communicate with the Department to ensure that learners are not put on risk and to avoid any eventualities.

The fact that it must be very one's responsibility to ensure that learners are ferried safe to schools and back home, cannot be over emphasized.

The Department wishes to urge parents to register their children in schools within their residential areas to avoid instances where learners are driven past nearby schools because this poses some risks in the long run. **This is our appeal.**

SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENT

The Department, working closely with its implementing agencies, continues to prioritise the provision of safe, dignified and fully functional school facilities across the province.

Our goal is to create a learning condition in which every learner and educator can thrive and perform at their best.

During the 2025 calendar year, a total of **221** schools were planned to receive maintenance and renovations work.

Of these, **77** schools have already been completed and handed over for use. Mathupa Primary School also benefited from the renovation project mentioned above.

This represents meaningful progress, as more classrooms are now available to support effective learning and teaching.

Construction of new schools across the province is also progressing well. However, the persistent rainfall has slowed work at some sites, including Long Tom Secondary School, Ilanga Secondary School, Silulu Secondary School and the new Sidlamafa Secondary School, among others.

In schools where large section of construction has already been completed, the Department together with implementing agents and contractors will consider allowing teaching to take place in finished sections while remaining works continue.

This will only be done where it is safe and compliant with all construction and occupational health and safety requirements.

To further ease overcrowding and respond to storm-damaged infrastructure, the Department has procured **130** mobile classrooms .

These units will be deployed to affected schools as an interim measure to ensure continuity of learning.

Sadly, just last week, **28 schools** in our province suffered severe storm damage.

Our officials are already on the ground, conducting assessments and coordinating repairs so that learners are not disadvantaged.

Efforts to improve school sanitation infrastructure are yielding the expected results. So far there is no school in the province that solely rely on Pit Latrines as the only source of sanitation infrastructure.

We also call upon School Governing Bodies to fully utilise the **13%** allocation of their budgets for routine maintenance. Regular upkeep of school facilities plays an essential role in preserving infrastructure and ensuring a safe learning environment.

Through these coordinated efforts, the Department remains firmly committed to improving school infrastructure and creating environments that enable quality teaching and learning in every corner of the province.

SCHOOL READINESS AND LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITY

Principals carry a sacred responsibility in leading functional, disciplined and accountable schools.

We expect all school management teams to ensure that timetables are finalized, staff are present and prepared, learner materials are issued, and communication with parents remains open and transparent.

Risks and emergencies must be reported immediately so that necessary support is provided timeously.

Our collective goal is that learning begins without disruption across the Province.

Education is about developing the whole child academically, socially and emotionally.

We therefore call upon parents and communities to support learner discipline and well-being.

Bullying, substance abuse, vandalism and violence have no place in our schools.

We must create nurturing environments where every learner feels safe, respected and supported.

Mental health awareness, kindness, tolerance and responsible behaviour must be encouraged at all times.

We request that we walk this journey with your children side by side.

Let every parent show interest in their child schoolwork, communicate with teachers, and encourage responsibility and respect

Our teachers remain the heartbeat of our education delivery and their dedication shapes lives and builds the future of our nation. It is based on this

understanding that every effort needs to be made to support teachers at all times.

Learners must be taught to arrive on time, listen to teachers, work hard, and believe in themselves.

OUR PROMISE

As a Provincial Government, we confirm our commitment to supporting schools, strengthening learning outcomes, addressing infrastructure challenges, improving accessibility, and ensuring accountability and service excellence.

Our message remains constant that no child must be left behind, no school must be neglected, and no dream must be denied.

CONCLUSION

We wish to extend our appreciation to the leadership of Mathupa Primary School for hosting us today and for leading from the front our Back to School Campaign.

Equally, I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to the Provincial Chairperson of the House of Traditional and Khoi San Leaders, **Kgoshi Mokoena**, the Executive Mayor of Bushbuckridge Local Municipality, Cllr Lydia Moroane-Zitha, the Leadership of Old Mutual for donating the shoes and gardening equipment.

Together, we will make 2026 a year of renewal, progress, excellence and hope.

Let us walk forward together, teaching, learning, growing and rising together.

Ngiyabonga.