



Reference: Reopening of Schools
Enquiries: BK Schreuder

To: Principals and Teachers of Public Schools

(For information: School Governing Bodies)
(For information: Independent Schools)

Dear Colleagues

NEW DATES FOR THE REOPENING OF SCHOOLS

I am sorry to have to interrupt your well-deserved holiday with this letter, but it is important that I keep you as up to date as possible with changes and developments. New developments in the education sector have necessitated this correspondence, even though there are still many aspects that will need further clarification. I will share information on those issues as soon as decisions have been taken.

As you are aware the revised 2021 school calendar issued last year indicated that schools would reopen on 25 January 2021 (for teachers) and 27 January 2021 (for learners). I had also indicated that schools should be prepared for uncertainty and possible disruptions in 2021, due to Covid-19 and other factors.

Today the Deputy Minister for Basic Education, Reginah Mhaule, announced that the national government has taken the decision to delay the reopening of both public and independent schools throughout the country.

The changes, as announced, are as follows:

- **School Management Teams** are to report to schools on **Monday, 25 January 2021**.
- **Teachers** are to return to school on **Monday, 01 February 2021**.
- **Learners** are to return to school on **Monday, 15 February 2021**.

While these dates are clear, there are a number of outstanding matters that need clarity.

- As it was not specified when **school support staff** must return to school, I suggest that Principals and SMTs take a decision in this regard, in the interests of adequately preparing

the school for the return of all teachers followed by learners. My own view is that this should also be on the 25th of January 2021.

- Principals and SMTs should also consider when the various Assistants, appointed last year under the Presidential Employment Programme (PEP), should return. Possibly this should also be when school support staff return.

Currently it appears as if all learners will return on Monday, 15 February 2021. What is not yet clear is whether schools will need to follow alternate days/rotation for learners, as at the end of last year. This is very probable, but we will give direction as soon as further consultations have taken place.

There are no details on whether the National School Nutrition Programme will need to be implemented from 27 January 2021 or if teachers with comorbidities will be granted a special concession to work from home. While the Collective Agreement reached in the ELRC in this regard last year has lapsed, it is probable that such teachers would need to be supported.

I know that these and many other questions still need to be answered. The Department of Basic Education will be consulting on some of these details next week and we hope that directions will then be issued in this regard later next week. We will then communicate the impact of these directions as soon as they have been published. This will guide us on how we will manage our schools going forward.

Colleagues, I know that this is not the ideal way to start a new school year. But I know that we will be up to the challenge and overcome them. Last year, we led our schools in a time of uncertainty and change. We had to change the way our schools operated and how we delivered the curriculum. I am proud to say that our WCED schools – you – managed with great distinction against many odds.

Changed processes and procedures have been put in place. This year we must further improve on these systems, school functionality and alternative, hybrid and blended methods of teaching, the enhanced use of technology, that can accommodate the challenges brought on by the pandemic. We now have the knowledge and the willpower to do so. We are also not alone. The whole world has been affected by this. Some countries have lost over 280 teaching days already. When I read this and think of how we all surpassed many expectations in ensuring the delivery of the curriculum in our schools last year, at the height of the pandemic, I am confident that we can surpass many more, even with this short delay to the start of the school year for learners.

The **theme** for 2021 is the "**Year of Values-Driven Leadership – Enhancing Functional Schools**".

This is our opportunity to show and grow our leadership capacity to meet these unprecedented and challenging demands.

I will be having a series of information and consultation meetings with school governing body associations, teacher unions and principal organisations to discuss, as a collective, our concerns and suggestions on the way forward.

I sincerely hope that you have all had a relaxing and safe holiday thus far. May you continue to enjoy your remaining days as we prepare to lead our schools with confidence.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "BK Schreuder". A horizontal line is drawn underneath the signature.

BK SCHREUDER
HEAD: EDUCATION
DATE: 15 JANUARY 2021