

Reference: COVID-19/20210124/01  
Enquiries: BK Schreuder

**To: Principals and Teachers of Public Schools**

(For information: School Governing Bodies)

(For information: Independent Schools)

Dear Colleagues

**LATEST AMENDED DIRECTIONS FOR THE REOPENING OF SCHOOL**

Welcome back to all Principals, SMTs and non-teaching staff for the start of the 2021 school year. As indicated previously, it will again be a year with unique challenges that will demand exceptional leadership from all leaders in education. Our Theme for 2021: ***The Year of Values-driven Leadership, Enhancing Functional Schools***, is therefore very apt. Further guidance and ideas on the focus on our 2021 Theme will follow shortly.

On Friday, 22 January 2021, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) issued an *Amendment of Directions* in terms of Regulation 4(3) of the Regulations made under the Disaster Management Act, 2002 (Act 57 of 2002), published in *Government Gazette* No. 44096 of 22 January 2021.

The purpose of the Directions is to provide guidelines to the education sector with regards to the opening of schools for the 2021 academic year.

The following dates must be noted:

**School dates and required staff for the reopening of schools.**

<b>Return to school date</b>	<b>Required staff/learners</b>
25 January 2021	The principal, the school management team, non-teaching staff, including Education and General Assistants employed in the Basic Education Employment Initiative, must return to work.
1 February 2021	All educators to return to work
15 February 2021	All learners to return to school

## **Clarifications pertaining to the amended Directions**

The amended Directions indicate that all Directions previously issued by the National Minister continue to apply. Therefore, the following must still be adhered to:

- Schools must still maintain physical distancing of 1m. Learners are to wear masks and screening measures still apply. All other health and safety protocols are to be implemented.
- Schools are to continue to rotate learners/grades as per their Temporary Revised Education Plans, as implemented at the end of last year.
- School feeding must resume on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January 2021 for learners that qualify under the National School Nutrition Programme. Schools must please ensure that the necessary preparations are in place, including health and safety requirements as previously communicated to schools and ensure that food has been ordered or is available.
- The WCED provided schools with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) last year. Many schools indicated that it was more than required and it was planned to last well into 2021. As indicated in Circular 0031/2020 and 0030/2020, schools are to use 15% of their Norms and Standards allocations for expenditure on local purchases, which now includes augmenting any personal protective equipment, if required.
- Grade 12 learners are to attend school every school day. Temporary Revised Education Plans must accommodate this.
- If alternate-day timetables are necessary to ensure physical distancing, schools must ensure that all learners (other than Gr 12) attend alternate days so that every learner attends a minimum of 5 days in a 10-school day cycle (5 days over a two-week period minimum).
- Aftercare facilities may be open.

We are expecting further communication from DBE in the coming days which will further clarify these and other issues that are outstanding.

## **Learners, teachers and non-teaching staff with comorbidities:**

To clear up any misunderstanding regarding exemptions from public schooling or teaching as a result of comorbidities the WCED has drafted letters to explain this in more detail. These will reach schools soon. In summary:

- Parents who have applied for learners to be exempted from public schooling in 2020 do not have to apply again. However, the agreement between schools and parents still apply with regards to the collection and return of assessments and required work.

Should there be any new applications for exemption from public schooling, parents are to complete the forms that are on the WCED website under Guideline 1(a) - WCED Guideline Exemption from public school attendance. (<https://wcedonline.westerncape.gov.za/back-school/>) This also applies to parents of learners without comorbidities who wish to keep their children at home for the duration of the National State of Disaster.

- With regards to non-teaching staff and teachers at schools who have comorbidities, the WCED will be issuing letters to schools to explain the process going ahead.

It will explain that non-teaching staff and teachers who received approval for a concession based on medical evidence submitted during 2020 do not have to apply again. Any newly appointed official or official whose chronic medical profile has changed subsequently, must apply on the prescribed form which will be distributed to schools.

Officials who received or will receive a concession to work from home due to a comorbidity, must enter into a Remote Working Contractual Agreement with their line managers in order to guarantee accountability, performance and liabilities. Clear deliverables must be set as per performance agreements and modes of delivery during the remote work period, which can be tracked and accounted for. In the case of school-based staff, these contracts must be entered into with principals.

A request for Substitute teachers will be considered for teachers that have sadly passed away or who are on extended leave. The teacher assistants employed through the Presidential Employment initiative will be tasked to assist with duties in the interim period where teachers are working from home due to comorbidities.

SMT members with comorbidities should report to school until they have completed planning and agreed with principals as to how their management and leadership role, as well as their teaching functions, will be managed while working from home. By the time all teachers return on 1 February, all teachers with comorbidities that have been approved by the WCED, and have entered into the Remote Working Contractual Agreement, will be permitted to continue working from home, until further notice.

Further communication about this will be issued shortly.

### **The next few weeks: Preparations and ensuring health and safety**

Many teachers have asked what they must do at school so long before learners return. I know that all WCED schools planned and prepared well at the end of last year for the start of schooling this year. However, I have asked District Directors and Circuit Managers to engage meaningfully about this. In the following days Circuit Managers/Districts will engage with all schools to share advice, good practice and sensible ideas about the many actions that need to/can be taken, now that the time is available. I call on all schools not to waste this time, but to use it constructively in preparing schools (cleaning and planning), preparing lessons in the event of further disruptions going forward, preparing and sharing ideas amongst schools about ways of online learning (also for learners in disadvantaged communities), preparing digital lessons and preparing for more digital teaching and learning.

I would like to wish all of you the best for a successful start to the 2021 school year. Ensuring your safety and the safety of others is paramount. I am confident that the measures, if correctly put in place, to protect staff and learners will reduce the risk of exposure. While the rate of infections is dropping in the Western Cape, we must still be cautious at all times. Please ensure that any new teachers, staff, or learners are orientated in the health and safety measures at your school, and that they are strictly adhered to.

We have lost a number of our colleagues over this past holiday period. I know that many of you and your staff will be mourning the loss of your peers again when you return to school. Please, during these trying times, make use of the Employee Wellness Programme to receive the necessary psycho-socio support by making contact with the independent employee wellness service provider at **0800 111 011**.

I also know that many staff are fearful in this second wave. While we can never predict the future of this virus, I can confirm that it is very clear that infections do not increase as a result of schools being open, as all trends indicate that the infection rate reported by staff and learners that attend schools increases and decreases at the same rates as Provincial numbers. We must continue to make responsible choices about how we go about our daily lives within our communities to limit the risk at our schools. Infections are still largely brought into schools by adults. For this reason it is critical that staff wear masks (properly) at all times, maintain physical distancing and restrict physical meetings to only those that are essential – and then meet in a well-ventilated area and keep meetings short.

I know that these are again difficult times and we must, as leaders, motivate and encourage our staff to continue to be positive about the year ahead. Our role as educators is to educate our children who so desperately need stimulation and support at this time. The loss of teaching and learning time will already have an impact on these learners in years to come. Let us please try to mitigate any further negative impact on their lives by encouraging and supporting them in the best way that we can.

We have shown strength through adversity in 2020. May we continue to lead our schools in obtaining our vision for quality education for every learner, in every classroom, in every school in the Province.

We are here to serve.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "BK Schreuder", with a horizontal line underneath it.

**BK SCHREUDER**  
**HEAD: EDUCATION**  
**DATE: 24 JANUARY 2021**