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Fake news and false media reports are misleading and causing harm to the debate on CSE section of Life Orientation curriculum

The Department of Basic Education has noted with concern the impact fake news has had on the debate around the issue of the Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE). False reporting by some media organisations and fake news have created unnecessary confusion and anxiety among parents in particular.

The Department therefore wishes to distance itself from a series of images that have been circulated on social media in recent weeks. These images are not part of the books produced by the Department.

Members of the public have been contacting the Department about videos with incorrect information that have also been distributed on social media. These social media posts have misled the public and created unnecessary anxiety and anger especially among parents. Social media has been an integral part of the fake news campaign against the Department regarding the issue of the Comprehensive Sexuality Education.

The DBE is aware of a lobby group against CSE that is creating misleading social media posts and feeding the public contaminated information.

One of the many images shows adults in bed with graphic details. Another piece of fake news says the Department will distribute condoms with stationery in 2020. There is also a video of an individual spreading wrong and potentially harmful information.

The DBE has cautioned that there is a difference between what is on the internet, social media and what is contained in the books of the Department. Parents are therefore urged to verify with the Department before making decisions based on information published by certain organisations and individuals.

The purpose of CSE is to address sexual abuse, HIV infections, learner pregnancy, and bullying and peer pressure and help learners stay in school until they complete Grade 12, at least.

Some media organisations have perpetuated the outrage with the continued reference to “sex education” and “sex curriculum”. The correct reference is Comprehensive Sexuality Education. It is part of a section of the Life Orientation subject, which focuses on “sexuality” as opposed to “sex”. Media reports have also incorrectly referred to a “new curriculum” or “planned curriculum” even when DBE made it clear the CSE aspect in LO is not a new curriculum.

It has also become necessary to correct the misrepresentation in the article carried in *The Mercury* of 12 November 2019, written by Mayibongwe Maqhina, with the title that said “*Parents can opt out of sex curriculum, says Minister*”. The headline of the article is patently false and its message misleading. The article is based on a misunderstanding of Minister Angie Motshekga’s reply to a parliamentary question.

In her response to the Parliamentary Question Minister Motshekga said “all learners in public schools receive set provisions as per the CAPS. Parents have a right to opt out of the current curriculum (CAPS), provided that they can produce an alternative curriculum that meets the required CAPS criteria for competence.” The meaning of this is contrary to the interpretation as perpetuated in the article.

What the response means is that the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) that is offered in public schools is a choice that parents have in terms of where they send their children. At any point a parent can opt out by seeking another curriculum offered at another institution (e.g. Cambridge or IEB [note that some private schools offer CAPS]).

The response is not to suggest that parents can opt out of specific sections of the curriculum like Life Orientation (which has CSE) but rather the whole curriculum altogether and replace it with an equivalent.

The learner's education is also not modular in that you can have parts of Cambridge (as an example) and then parts of CAPS and others something else. In other words the Minister said nothing new other than to remind of the general provisions available regarding the choice parents have when deciding on where to enrol their children.

If you choose CAPS, Life Orientation (with CSE) is already part of the curriculum, and has been since 2000. Parents are also free, and indeed, encouraged, to look into any aspect of what their children are taught in any subject at any time. It's all available to them in various ways.

The Department has now made available all the scripted lesson plans for people to read and review. The Department is therefore urging the nation to resist and ignore the latest misinformation campaign that seeks to spread more confusion and sow panic around the comprehensive sexuality education.

IMPORTANT FACTS:

- *There is no new CSE curriculum to be introduced;*
- *There is no implementation of a “new curriculum” in 2020;*
- *The department is conducting a pilot in 5 provinces, 1 500 schools;*
- *The Department is only testing the use of Scripted Lesson Plans, nothing more.*
- *Consultation has taken place in the areas where the pilot is taking place.*

Since the introduction of CSE in 2000, the Department has held continuous consultative engagements with stakeholders, both at national and provincial level. These engagements were specifically informed by, among others, the South African National HIV Prevalence, high rates of learner and teenage pregnancy.

The Department is open, and will continue, to engage concerned citizens who have an input to make regarding the scripted lesson plans on comprehensive sexuality education in particular and Life Orientation in general.

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