

**Press
Release
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South African Institute of Race Relations
The power of ideas

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Public Protector asked to investigate possible inefficient expenditure and maladministration in Gauteng education – IRR

The Institute of Race Relations (IRR) today approached the Public Protector to investigate possible inefficient expenditure and maladministration under MEC for Education in Gauteng Panyaza Lesufi, and to consider remedial action.

The IRR team, led by campaigns co-ordinator Hermann Pretorius, handed over its complaint to the Public Protector at the institution's offices in Johannesburg.

The complaint has three elements, each of which the IRR has asked the Public Protector to look into. The first relates to the launch of a website aimed at providing access to “new online curriculum lessons” – gdecontent.co.za. The quality of the website, which ostensibly took six years to develop, has been questioned. An analysis of the website by members of the public found several shortcomings, indicating substandard development and creating a strong suspicion of inefficient expenditure and maladministration of resources. Among these are the website's lack of HTTPS protocol in service of privacy and data integrity, layout elements indicating usage of an open-source and free learning management system, and antiquated

open-source platform web server software. These elements and their proper consideration in practice led to the conclusion that the website is badly designed. This raises serious questions about the resources expended on the website, especially given the time taken to develop it.

The second cause for concern regarding possible maladministration relates to the alleged R1.2 billion of irregular expenditure by the Gauteng Education Department. Details of this were published in news media in October 2019. MEC Lesufi sought to explain reports on this vast amount by posting photographs of what seem to be governmental expenditure reports, but these photographs are astoundingly insufficient in explaining away the complexities of this matter of irregular expenditure. The cavalier attitude with which Mr Lesufi engaged with members of the public asking legitimate questions of him regarding this matter speaks of a fundamental lack of respect by the MEC for the democratic right South African citizens have to hold government officials to account. Citizens deserve a thorough investigation into the allegations of irregular expenditure by the Gauteng Department of Education, even if Mr Lesufi is right in his laid-back defence that the more accurate figure of his department's irregular expenditure in 2018/2019 was in the hundreds of millions of rands and not over a billion.

The third instance of worrying signs of governmental maladministration by the Gauteng Department of Education, and perhaps the most pressing and urgent, pertains to the recent roll-out of the school placement system.

The system in question is reported to have come into effect in 2016 and have functioned inadequately since. In recent days, social and news media have been filled with stories and photographs portraying parents in distress over the failures of Mr Lesufi's department to ensure the effective and satisfactory placement of children at schools for the year 2020. This is nothing short of a disgrace.

The IRR is concerned that the continued maladministration of education in Gauteng – South Africa's richest province and the heart of the country's economy – will severely affect the life chances of the province's children. The people of Gauteng deserve better than the often flippant attitude shown by Mr Lesufi to those who question him or raise concerns about what is going on in the province's schools. It is vital that education in

Gauteng (and indeed South Africa) is well-run, and that the children of the province get the best start to life that can be offered to them. It is questionable that the way education is being administered in the province will deliver this outcome.

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