

Findings released into learners' death, racial segregation

By [More Matshediso](#)

15 May 2015

Gauteng Education MEC Panyaza Lesufi has released the findings of investigations into the death of three learners at Emma Primary School, as well as racial segregation at Curro Foundation School...

In September last year, media reported that three learners at Emma Primary School, in Winterveld, died allegedly after eating poisoned food provided by the school through its School Nutrition Programme (SNP).

The Gauteng Education Department then commissioned an external investigation into the matter.

Following the results of the investigation, MEC Lesufi said the autopsy report and toxicology laboratory results have confirmed that the cause of death of the three learners was poison ingestion.



© vladislav ivantsov – [123RF.com](#)

"On the day in question, one of the three learners brought bad food from home to the school and a bottle of juice. The food was shared by all three learners during the school break.

"Traces of the poison were not found in any of the food provided to learners by the school's feeding scheme. Therefore, the cause of death in respect of all three learners was not the food provided to learners by the school's feeding scheme," said MEC Lesufi at a media briefing on Thursday.

He said the traces of the poison ingested by the three children were found in the liver, bile and the stomach.

He said the poison was traced back to the bottle of juice given to one learner, who shared it with the other two.

The MEC said the matter has been reported to the police who are conducting further investigations.

MEC Lesufi said on Wednesday he sat in a meeting with the affected families and it was a painful experience.

"I gave each family the full report. I even led the families on the content of the report so that they can understand what happened. The children were poisoned, whether deliberately or otherwise is the matter that the police are investigating," he said.

He said the families have accepted the report, although they wanted the department to directly deal with the person responsible for the learners' death.

"We have handed everything to the police so that the police can conclude with the investigation," he said.

He said although he is relieved that it is not the SNP that was responsible for the death of these learners, he remained remorseful that they have lost three souls.

Curro Foundation School

In January this year, when schools re-opened for the first term, the MEC received a petition, which was signed by 32 parents, who handed it over to the school principal regarding the allocation of pupils to the Grade R classes according to

their race.

The Gauteng Education Department then tasked an investigation, which was conducted by Harris Nuped Molebatse Attorneys. The investigation included a process of interviewing all affected parties including parents, community members and the management of the school.

MEC Lesufi said findings of the investigation confirmed that there was indeed segregation of learners at the Curro Foundation School in Roodeplaat, Pretoria.

"I received the findings last month and handed them over to the management of the school to comment on them. They believe that the report is fair and they don't want to comment further," he said.

MEC Lesufi said Curro management confirmed the findings and admitted that this was a result of pressure from certain white parents, who did not want their children to share a class with children of other races.

"To me this is completely unacceptable, it is discriminatory and contrary to the provisions of Section 9 of the Constitution. It is also in contravention of Section 6 of the Equity Act.

"By segregating the learners based on their race, the school acted in a manner that was discriminatory and as a result violated section 7(c) of the Equity Act," said MEC Lesufi.

He said Curro School has admitted that its practice of segregation was wrong and that they have acted quickly to reallocate learners of minority racial groups throughout the three English classes in Grade R, after the submission of the petition.

"... They have also taken steps of apologising, both to parents and publicly in the media. The fact that the school has apologised for what took place and corrected the problem, appears to be an acceptance that what transpired was discriminatory and problematic," said the MEC.

He said the department acknowledges that diversity training has taken place at the school, and recommended that it should be conducted on an annual basis for all School Management and educators at the school.

He said he has decided to review the license that allows Curro School to operate.

"I will meet with Curro Management in the near future so that we can close this chapter. If I cannot be provided with information that will convince me that racialism will be promoted in the school, I reserve all my rights concerning their operating license.

"But I must indicate that in the majority of classes learners were not separated on the basis of colour," he said.