

Independent body to probe claims of school racism

An independent body will investigate claims of racism, the deployment of police and security forces at Pretoria High School for Girls.



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“The investigation should be concluded in 21 days and the department will take action following the recommendation of the investigation,” the Gauteng Education Department said on Tuesday, 30 August 2016.

This comes after Gauteng Education MEC Panyaza Lesufi’s visit to the school on Monday to address the concerns that were raised by learners.

The MEC had a variety of meetings with the School Management Team (SMT), learners as well as the School Governing Body (SGB) and parents.

Some of the concerns raised by learners were that the use of African languages on the school premises was not permitted, yet the other learners were allowed to express themselves in Afrikaans.

Learners also raised concerns over not being allowed to wear hairstyles such as Afros. Furthermore, the learners feel that educators use abusive and demeaning language when they address them regarding their hairstyles.

Learners also experienced racial abuse and victimisation by both white educators and white learners, in particular the use of hurtful terms such as monkeys, kaffir and being told they belong at Mamelodi High and not at Pretoria Girls.

“Management and senior officials in the school deal flippantly with or in ignore learners’ complaints about racial abuse and victimisation,” the department said.

The harassment and victimisation is not only limited to the schoolgrounds, but at school excursions as well.

Reviewing Code of Conduct

In the meantime, the department said the Code of Conduct of the school must be reviewed and the clause dealing with hairstyles should be suspended.

“The group that will review the Code of Conduct must include as wide a representation of the school community as is practicably possible. The emerging Code of Conduct must be workshopped with all stakeholders at the school, especially learners,” the department said.

The provincial department will provide psychological and related social services to counsel the learners for the trauma they appeared to have suffered.

“It must be stressed that none of the learners, who reported the prevalence of racial and emotional abuse at the school, will be intimidated. The SGB and the school management team must do their level best to directly address what appeared as a serious trust deficit between themselves and the learners,” the department said.

Additionally, the Group of Eminent Persons in the Premier’s Office, assisted by the Department of Basic Education Social Cohesion Branch, should assist in dealing with challenges related to social cohesion, race relations and diversity management.

This should include the conservative ethos and doctrinal make-up of the school in general.

Terms of reference submission date

The terms of reference for addressing challenges related to social cohesion, race relations and diversity management must be submitted to the MEC within 21 days.

“Learners must submit their written submissions to the Office of the MEC not later than Friday, 2 September 2016. The MEC will further apply his mind on these submissions and where necessary, seek clarification and/or rebuttal from the SMT and/or the SGB of the school. This interaction must be completed within 21 days,” the department said.

The matters that must be dealt with immediate effect, include the return of cell phones which were confiscated. This must be done within 24 hours.

The mocking of learners’ hairstyles must cease, pending the finalisation of the review and amendment of the Code of Conduct.

The mocking of African learners’ for usage of their mother tongue also needs to stop.

“The learners’ unqualified right to quality basic education must be ensured at all times. Teaching and learning must occur in a conducive and safe environment. To that end lessons must continue uninterrupted,” the department said.

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