

DBE distances itself from *Sunday Times* article

The Basic Education Department (DBE) has distanced itself from an article published in the *Sunday Times* on 12 May, titled: "Sex lessons for modern grade 4s".



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In a statement on Monday, the DBE said the article, which has caused a stir on social media platforms, is misleading and a complete misrepresentation of the work the department is doing.

"The journalist, Prega Govender of *Sunday Times*, has failed the readers of the newspaper and indeed the South African public by providing false information.

"In the article, he quotes the Director-General Mr Mathanzima Mveli. But what Mr Govender doesn't say is that the conversation he had with the DG was on a separate but related matter," said DBE spokesperson Elijah Mhlanga.

Dismissing the article, which he said has caused mass hysteria unnecessarily and confusion, Mhlanga outlined the facts as follows:

1. The new Life Orientation textbook for Grade 4 currently being written does not cover masturbation.

2. The textbook content for sexuality education in this grade is guided by Unesco's International technical guidance on sexuality education (an evidence-informed approach), as well as by input and guidance of research and evidence-based highly respected South African institutions.
3. The Grade 4s will learn, in an age appropriate and sensitive way, how babies are made and encourages learners to share what celebrations they know that are linked to welcoming children into the world.
4. The lesson set also covers being unique and special, healthy lifestyle choices with food and other substances, the importance of respecting each other and oneself, and understanding what a personal boundary is, as well as understanding the concept of privacy.
5. Grade 4 learners will practice skills such as identifying safe and unsafe behaviours within the context of personal lifestyle e.g. smoking, crossing the road in a safe way, as well as behaviours that are healthy or unhealthy for the environment.

"The DBE will be surprised if this particular lesson set causes outrage among learners, parents, teachers – or the media – around age inappropriateness," said Mhlanga.

The department urged the media to exercise caution and contact the department for accurate information.

"Our Grade 4 learners are precious to everyone and we therefore urge the media to contact us for accurate information regarding this vital textbook project," said the department.

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