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NNF 3 of 2026

14 January 2026

Welcome to Term 1, 2026!

NAPTOSA extends a warm welcome to all teachers, Education Support Personnel (ESP), TVET and CET staff, learners, and all stakeholders in the education sector as we commence the first term of the new year.

As we begin this academic year, we do so with renewed hope, determination, and a shared commitment to quality public education. While we trust that the year ahead will be better than the one behind us, we remain acutely aware of the serious challenges confronting the sector and reaffirm our resolve to confront them head-on.

One of our foremost concerns remains the Government Employees Medical Scheme (GEMS), particularly the persistently high and unaffordable contribution increases that continue to place an undue burden on public servants. NAPTOSA is continuing the fight on behalf of our members and is actively engaging on this matter. Should GEMS refuse to meaningfully “come to the party,” we will have to explore credible alternatives to ensure that our members have access to affordable, quality healthcare.

We also note, with deep concern, the ongoing staffing uncertainty arising from the incentivised Early Retirement Programme, and we are closely monitoring provinces experiencing financial challenges to ensure that staff appointments are effected timeously. While acknowledging the need for fiscal responsibility, NAPTOSA is firm that the loss of experienced educators and support staff without adequate replacement planning threatens stability, workload balance, and the overall quality of education delivery. Staffing norms must prioritise continuity, capacity, and the well-being of those who remain in the system.

School safety remains non-negotiable. Teachers, support staff, and learners have the right to work and learn in safe, secure environments. Incidents of violence, crime, and intimidation in and around schools continue to undermine teaching and learning. NAPTOSA reiterates its call for the urgent prioritisation of safety measures and stronger interdepartmental cooperation, under our **#SafeSchoolsEqualSafeNation** campaign, because safe schools are fundamental to a safe society.

Persistent delays in infrastructure development and maintenance are concerning. Inadequate classrooms, unsafe buildings, poor sanitation, and lack of basic services continue to compromise dignity, learning outcomes as well as mental health. Accelerated, transparent, and accountable infrastructure upgrades must be a central focus of the year ahead.

The ongoing challenges with learner enrolment and placement also demand urgent attention. The reality that many learners remain unplaced at the start of the academic year points to inadequate planning and ineffective systems. Every learner has a constitutional right to education, and systems must be strengthened to ensure timely and equitable access for all.

NAPTOSA also underscores the importance of Grade R, now compulsory, and calls for adequate, ring-fenced funding to support its effective and equitable implementation across all provinces. Quality early childhood education is foundational to long-term learning success and must be properly resourced, supported, and regulated. In this regard, NAPTOSA further calls on all un/underqualified Grade R practitioners to actively

pursue the improvement of their professional qualifications, with the necessary support from the state, to ensure quality teaching, professionalism, and the best possible start for our learners.

Despite these challenges, we choose optimism. We celebrate the resilience, professionalism, and dedication of educators and education workers across the sector. We acknowledge the progress that has been made where collaboration and commitment have prevailed, and we remain confident that, through collective action and principled advocacy, positive change is possible.

NAPTOSA stands firm with its members and the broader education community. Together, we will continue to advocate, to protect, and to build an education system that is equitable, safe, and fit for the future.

We wish all education workers and learners a productive, safe, and successful first term.

Mr BL Manuel

Executive Director