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Child Protection Week 2026: Protect a Child, Protect Our Future

29 May – 5 June 2026

As Child Protection Week draws to a close, it is incumbent upon all of us to reflect not only on the progress made in advancing children's rights, but also on the stark realities that continue to threaten the safety, dignity, and wellbeing of South Africa's children. This annual observance should serve as more than a symbolic event on the calendar; it must be a call to action and accountability.

The Constitution is unequivocal. Section 29 guarantees every child the right to a basic education, while Section 28(2) affirms that the best interests of the child are of paramount importance in every matter concerning them. These are not aspirational ideals; they are binding constitutional obligations that must guide every policy, decision, and action affecting children.

Measured against this standard, the latest South African Police Service (SAPS) crime statistics for the fourth quarter of the 2025/26 financial year (January–March 2026) paint a deeply troubling picture. Violence in and around schools remains a persistent and unacceptable reality.

During this reporting period, SAPS recorded:

- 51 rapes at primary, secondary, and high schools;
- 8 murders on educational premises; and
- 361 cases of assault with intent to cause grievous bodily harm (GBH) at educational institutions.

Source: SAPS Crime Statistics – Republic of South Africa, Q4 2025/26 (January–March 2026).

These figures represent more than statistics. They represent children whose rights, dignity, safety, and futures have been violated in spaces that should be places of learning, growth, and protection. The crisis extends beyond children as victims. Increasingly, children are also drawn into cycles of violence as perpetrators, often shaped by poverty, trauma, social instability, and inadequate psychosocial support. Within schools, School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV) continues to undermine safety, learning, and development. Learner-on-learner violence, bullying, sexual harassment, and abuse require urgent intervention.

This reality underscores the need for dedicated gender champions and child protection structures in every school. Early identification of abuse, effective reporting mechanisms, comprehensive support services, and the promotion of a culture that rejects all forms of violence are no longer optional – they are essential.

Children's safety is further compromised by inadequate school infrastructure. Across the country, learners continue to attend schools that are overcrowded, poorly ventilated, and ill-equipped to withstand increasingly severe weather conditions. The absence of a coordinated national strategy to address climate-related risks in schools reflects a failure to place children's welfare at the centre of educational planning.

NAPTOSA is also concerned about practices such as matric overnight camps conducted immediately before examinations. While intended to improve academic performance, these camps often place unnecessary strain on learners, disrupt family life, and raise concerns regarding child safety and wellbeing. Any intervention aimed at improving educational outcomes must prioritise the rights, protection, and holistic development of learners.

The continued prevalence of violence and unsafe learning environments represents a profound failure of our collective responsibility to South Africa's children. While legislative and policy frameworks exist, implementation remains inadequate, and too often constitutional promises fail to translate into lived realities.

Through our campaign, **Safe Schools Equal Safe Nation**, NAPTOSA calls on the Department of Basic Education, school governing bodies, educators, parents, communities, and all social partners to act with urgency and purpose. Child protection cannot be confined to a commemorative week; it must become a daily commitment reflected in our schools, homes, and communities.

Every child deserves to learn in an environment free from fear, violence, abuse, neglect, and discrimination. The safety of our children is inseparable from the future of our nation. A country that cannot protect its children cannot claim to be securing its future.

As Child Protection Week concludes, let it not mark the end of the conversation, but the beginning of renewed action. We must move beyond awareness to accountability, beyond promises to implementation, and beyond concern to collective responsibility. The measure of our nation will be found in how well we protect its most vulnerable citizens.

Protecting children is not merely a legal obligation, it is a national imperative. Protect a Child, Protect Our Future. #SafeSchoolsEqualSafeNation

Mr BL Manuel
Executive Director