

**SOUTH AFRICA**

# Back to school dates proposed with matric and grade 7 pupils first to return

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Pupils in grades 12 and seven will be the first to return to school after lockdown.

**Image:** SAMORN TARAPAN/123rf.com

Schools are set to partially reopen next week with teachers starting work in May and the pupils a few days later.

Basic education director-general Mathanzima Mveli told MPs on Wednesday that the department was planning to phase in the return of pupils to school with grades 7 and 12 pupils being the first to go back next Wednesday May 6. But these were preliminary dates with the deputy minister later saying children might only go back to school on May 18.

Other grades will return over weeks between May and July, as the lockdown restrictions are gradually eased, with the last batch (grade Rs) expected to go back on July 15.

Mweli said that as part of managing the risk, grades 12 and 7 (which are "exit" grades would return first. They are comparatively mature pupils who could help with the orientation of younger learners entering a particular school for the first time.

Mweli, who was addressing parliament's basic education oversight committee, said there would be no May/June exams this year, with the time being used for teaching.

According to the department's plan, grade 12 pupils will write their preparatory exams in September with the final exams rescheduled to November/December.

The matric results will most likely be released around the middle to end of January 2021, he said.

In a supporting document, the department protocols advise that schools must ensure:

- Hugging, handshaking and direct contact must be avoided;
- Cloth masks to be worn by pupils and teachers at all times;
- No mass public events;
- Sports matches, choral practices and festivals/Eistedfods are not permitted;
- Extra classes should be arranged in small groups that maintain social distancing.

Schools must sanitise classrooms before the start of every school day, ensure everyone sanitises hands when entering classrooms, and place limits on movement of pupils between classes.

But after the presentation by the director general, the deputy minister of basic education, Reginah Mhaule, said grade 12 and grade 7 pupils were in fact only expected to return to school on May 18 - and not May 6 as the report presented to the parliamentary committee suggests.

She said that principals and members of the school's senior management teams would report on May 4 to receive sanitisation packages and make schools ready for pupils.

Teachers will report on May 11 "to restructure the timetable and look at other things"

"Those teachers, who will not be teaching at the time, will be trained [to screen pupils]."

She said the plan was being presented on Thursday to the command council. - Additional reporting by Prega Govender

*\* This article has been amended to reflect that the deputy minister gave different back to school dates than the director general.*