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| MEDIA RELEASE | PSA demands urgent action following assault of learner at Rehlahleng Special School |
| DATE          | 5 June 2024   |
| EMBARGO       | None  |
| ENQUIRIES     | communication@psa.co.za   |

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) is outraged by recent indecent assault of a learner on the premises of Rehlahleng Special School in Limpopo and holds the Limpopo Department of Education accountable.

This Department's negligent behaviour started in August 2023 when employees reported the tyrannical behaviour of the Principal without any action by the Department. Subsequently, concerned employees brought this matter to the attention of the Union.

The PSA reported this situation to authorities, including the Principal, District Manager, acting Head of Department, and the MEC without success. It was clear that the situation at Rehlahleng School was a disaster waiting to happen. Learners with severe intellectual disabilities were left to fend for themselves and were exposed to danger on a daily basis. More than 100 learners were put under the care of only two employees, which contravenes legislation pertaining to care of learners with special needs.

As a result of the Department's careless attitude, the PSA filed a formal complaint at the Human Rights Commission. Several alleged contraventions of the Code of Ethics for Educators by the Principal were also reported to the South African Council for Educators (SACE). The Public Protector has also been approached to investigate numerous incidents where members of the School Governing Body (SGB) prevented employees from reporting for duty. Leaving learners with special needs unsupervised is criminal and cannot be left unpunished. Employees who cared about the safety of learners were barred from accessing the workplace.

The Department has also reportedly failed to provide the affected learner with support in reporting the incident, expecting the victim to be interviewed by a police official on her own. The learner has reportedly not been given counselling or psycho-social support. The acting Head of Department was still unaware of the incident two days later when the PSA again pleaded for the Department to intervene and address the safety of the school's learners. The Department's negligence allowed the Principal to abuse her power, supported by SGB members who intimidated employees and embarked on illegal activities, disrupting school operations, and jeopardising the rights of learners.

The PSA trust that the SACE, the SAHRC, and the Public Protector will ensure justice for the school's employees and learners as the Department has failed to address the problems at the school, despite being alerted.

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