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**Suspension of Matsha College not a panacea to the problem in schools and the entire MOE**

Botswana Federation of Secondary School Teachers (BOFESETE) is losing confidence in the way Ministry of Education is handling problems facing that Ministry both at school level and at its headquarter – TSM.

It is quite clear that the Ministry of Education is not proactive in dealing with its own problems rather it has the perpetual tendency of waiting until it's late and that is when they take action. Matsha issue is an old story which could have been addressed even before the catastrophe which claimed innocent lives. There are clear indications that not all is well in the schools. These ranges from, demoralized teachers, directionless and powerless administrators.

Suspending Matsha school head in itself is not a means to an end. What else could the school head have done if he did not have a strong support base. School heads do not have powers to close a school even when they see that the behaviour of the students is deteriorating. The power to suspend or expel a student can only be reversed by the Ministry of Education.

This brings into question the role of Chief Education Officers. Probably this is one of the unnecessary layers in the Ministry of Education. Though placed in the regions, this group is failing to give proper feed back on what is happening in their respective regions. This group is not visible in schools, they only show up when there is a problem in one school or another. Unless their role is reviewed and redefined, they will only function as fire fighters than a vital link between MOE and the schools. BOFESETE wants to remind the Chief Education Officers that they are not only representing the employer but they represent the employees too and in all cases should be seen as such. On many occasions when Education Officers are sent to schools to administer investigations on what ever cases could have occurred they always side with the school administration. We need to change this approach

because teachers now see them more as foes than friends. The MOE officials should endeavour to bring BOFESETE on board when investigations on issues of concern are undertaken in schools. We are a responsible organization capable of assisting to correct any wrongs that could occur in our schools. We wonder whether by suspending Matsha School head, the MOE will also do the same to other similar cases.

BOFESETE feels it is indeed proper to take strident action against officers who mishandled the implementation of parallel progression. The policy should have been implemented in 1994 and some government officers refused to implement it. The government is presently struggling to pay back teachers their dues, it is expected that millions of pulas will be used to undertake this project. This anomaly has no doubt left teachers inconvenienced.

Since the introduction of leave encashment, not a single teacher has been paid while other government employees have benefited from this. Apparently a committee to work on the modalities of leave encashment for teachers was set up and it was eventually communicated to teachers on how they can encash their leave. It is however embarrassing to note that not a single teacher has been paid up to now. What has been done to the officers who failed to implement this? This has only helped in teachers further losing trust in government initiatives.

The scarce skills policy also divided the teachers because of some inefficient government officials at the MOE. The teachers demonstrated and sent a petition to the Office of the President on this. Someone at the MOE bungled this policy and no action was ever taken. We are still waiting to hear who is to be suspended for this.

The overtime allowance is still a topical issue amongst the teachers and it appears the MOE officials are misinforming and ill advising the government on this. The teachers made a proposal to government regarding payment of overtime. The government accepted that teachers deserve an overtime allowance. Some MOE officials then deliberately misled cabinet to the effect that teachers wanted a certain fixed percentage for the allowance. It is unfortunate that the cabinet also took this hook, sinker and line. The cabinet should have informed teachers the percentage government could afford and not just to say the teachers allowance is unaffordable. The teachers are already bracing themselves for action regarding the allowance because this issue has been deliberately delayed and downplayed. The MOE officials are doing this deliberately to test teachers patience. This will however cost government in many ways if teachers are not listened to.

The MOE also has a tendency of advertising posts whenever they feel like it. Many senior teachers posts are vacant in both primary and secondary schools. The officials say they are in no hurry to advertise these posts. This, however becomes a time bomb not for the MOE but for the government in general.

We still expect to hear some suspensions and expulsions at the MOE for the numerous bungling of cases that have led to strikes, demonstrations and petitions.

Yours in service

**BOFESETE National Executive**