

About the Institution

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) is a national department responsible for overseeing and strengthening South Africa’s basic education system for Grades R to 12.

The DBE reports to the Minister of Basic Education, with administrative leadership provided by the Director-General (DG), who serves as the accounting officer. The DBE’s 2024/25 expenditure totalled R4.39bn, with R28bn transferred to provinces and municipalities for basic education spending.¹

Flag Status

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
								
Improper appointments	Co-opting key functions	Climate of fear or favour	Corrupt awards	Financial malpractice	Obstructing accountability	Manipulating perceptions	Private gain	Shadow network

ISS Analysis

- ACTis has raised one flag for the DBE and placed two under monitoring.
 - While there are some risks associated with improper appointments within the Department, the main risk concerns corrupt awards and financial malpractice. Repeated irregular procurement awards, failures in project execution, and large accumulated irregular expenditure reflect systemic weaknesses in internal controls that may enable procurement abuse. There have been improvements in annual irregular
- expenditure, and corrective action and formal accountability mechanisms are in place. However, the persistence and scale of these issues point to recurrent attempts to make corrupt awards, with no indication of whether they are related in terms of how they are perpetrated or who benefits from them.

 - The combination of leadership risks and procurement-related irregularities at the DBE warrants continued monitoring.

Findings

Flag #1

Improper Appointments



The flag is being monitored for a pattern of alleged irregular appointments.

- The Basic Education Portfolio Committee received allegations that the Minister of Basic Education, Siviwe Gwarube, improperly influenced the appointment of a Deputy DG by recommending a candidate who was not the top-ranked contender for Cabinet approval. The post for Curriculum Policy, Support and Monitoring was advertised in November 2024, and interviews were conducted in May 2025 (the date of recommendation is unknown). The allegations further suggested that Minister Gwarube's support for the candidate was 'linked to cadre deployment'.²
- The Committee also received allegations that a former Chief of Staff in the Minister's office bypassed standard recruitment procedures for the position of Chief Director: Communications in early 2025. The Chief of Staff, who has since resigned, submitted two CVs directly to Human Resources on behalf of candidates who had not applied through the official channel.³

Flag #3

Climate of Fear or Favour



The flag is being monitored due to high vacancy rates in critical positions.

- The DBE reported vacancy rates of 24% for Chief Education Specialists (CES) and 17% for Deputy CES in 2024/25. CES are designated as 'critical occupations' by the DBE. They are typically senior professionals responsible for curriculum oversight, system-wide quality assurance, policy development and interpretation, and strategic leadership across specialised education functions. The reasons for the Department's difficulty in attracting professionals to these posts were not discussed in the Annual Report.⁴

Flag #4

Corrupt Awards



The flag is being monitored for a possible pattern of irregularly awarded contracts within the DBE.

- In April 2026, Minister Gwarube requested that the National Treasury investigate any irregularities in the awarding of a contract for textbooks and teaching support materials



Flag raised



Flag lowered



Under monitoring

for Grade 1 to 3 learners in early 2026. The investigation was prompted by queries about Lighthouse Publishers, a relatively new organisation in this publishing space, which received the award to publish 1 707 titles, representing 26% of the total contract.⁵ Lighthouse Publishers could earn an estimated R285m of the R1.6bn tender in the first year.⁶ The Federation of Governing Bodies of South African Schools stated that it did not know Lighthouse Publishers; other companies that bid for the contract were well-known, well-established suppliers.⁷ The National Treasury investigation was deemed 'inconclusive' in May 2026, and the DBE has now launched an independent investigation, which it anticipates will be concluded by July 2026.⁸

- In its 2024/25 report, the Auditor-General of South Africa (AGSA) found that the DBE delegated management of Sanitation Appropriate for Education (SAFE) projects to the Development Bank of Southern Africa. This allowed contractors to appoint their own service providers, leading to collusion and incomplete work despite payments being made to those providers. The fruitless and wasteful expenditure that resulted from this was valued at R52.5m.⁹
- Also in 2024/25, the AGSA reported that the Department had awarded contracts based on evaluation or adjudication criteria that were either not stipulated or that differed from those set out in the original bid documents. Contracts had also been awarded to bidders who did not score the highest points, a finding the AGSA had made the previous year. The names of the suppliers involved were not disclosed.¹⁰

Flag #5

Financial Malpractice



The flag is raised due to high levels of accumulated irregular expenditure and internal control deficiencies.

- Accumulated irregular expenditure in 2024/25 totalled R6.1bn, equivalent to 132% of total expenditure. The DBE has reduced its annual irregular expenditure from R955m in 2022/23 to R68.2m in 2024/25 (from 21% of the Department's expenditure to 1.4%). The AGSA reported that most irregular expenditure incurred in 2024/25 was due to non-compliance with preferential procurement regulations.¹¹
- The AGSA found internal control deficiencies in 2024/25. These included deficiencies in the preparation of the annual financial statements (which were subsequently corrected, allowing an unqualified audit opinion to be issued) and a failure to take steps to ensure certain procurements complied with legislation.¹²



Flag raised



Flag lowered



Under monitoring

Flag #6

Obstructing Accountability

Findings indicating resilience have been observed under the flag.

- The DBE received an unqualified audit in 2024/25, indicating that its financial statements accurately presented the Department's financial position.¹³

Flag #8

Private Gain

A finding indicating resilience has been observed under the flag.

- In June 2026, the DBE reportedly entered into an agreement with the Special Investigating Unit (SIU) that allows SIU investigators to conduct lifestyle audits on senior officials within the Department. Minister Gwarube's spokesperson said that the initiative aimed to identify potential instances of corruption, maladministration or irregular financial gains that may have adversely affected the Department's operations and governance.¹⁴



Flag raised



Flag lowered



Under monitoring

Recommended Actions

	DUTY BEARER	ACTION(S)	ASSOCIATED FLAGS
1.	Portfolio Committee on Basic Education	Monitor the implementation of the AGSA's recommendations relating to irregular expenditure and internal control weaknesses and require periodic reporting from the DBE on corrective action.	Flag #5: Financial Malpractice
2.	Department of Basic Education	- Conduct a review of the causes of high vacancy levels in critical specialist posts and implement measures to improve recruitment and retention in these occupations. - Review procurement controls and bid adjudication processes. - Implement consequence management against officials found to be involved in procurement irregularities. - Develop and implement a plan to reduce the accumulated irregular expenditure and address internal control weaknesses identified by the AGSA, with regular progress reporting.	Flag #3: Climate of Fear or Favour Flag #4: Corrupt Awards Flag #5: Financial Malpractice
3.	Special Investigating Unit	Apply for a mandate to investigate the SAFE project contract awards, and other irregular awards flagged by the AGSA.	Flag #4: Corrupt Awards
4.	Public Service Commission	Review whether the process for appointing the DDG for Curriculum Policy, Support and Monitoring was consistent with applicable public service recruitment and appointment requirements.	Flag #1: Improper Appointments



Flag raised



Flag lowered



Under monitoring

The 9 Flags

Flag #1

Improper Appointments

Improper appointments, dismissals or failure to remove individuals in senior positions may be used to drive a corrupt agenda.

Flag #2

Co-opting Key Functions

Informal control may be established over critical functions within the institution to abuse them.

Flag #3

Climate of Fear or Favour

The working culture favours loyalty over duty; alignment with a corrupt agenda is rewarded, and resistance is punished.

Flag #4

Corrupt Awards

Contracts, licences, partnerships, loans and/or investments may be awarded irregularly and repeatedly benefit the same actors.

Flag #5

Financial Malpractice

The institution's financial management practices may be abused to advance a corrupt agenda.

Flag #6

Obstructing Accountability

The institution's internal operations might be deliberately obscured to hide potential misconduct.

Flag #7

Manipulating Perceptions

A public narrative that frames misconduct as innocence may be promoted.

Flag #8

Private Gain

Illicit gains may be distributed to benefit the same actors.

Flag #9

Shadow Network

The same public and private actors may collude to gain control over an institution's assets and functions, benefiting repeatedly.

About ACTis

What is ACTis?

The Anti-Corruption Tracker Information System is an initiative of the Anti-Corruption and Accountability Project at the Institute for Security Studies. It provides analysis on corruption and state capture in South Africa, to inform early intervention and enforcement. It utilises a system of indicators and an AI-driven data-collection and analysis tool, validated by human experts. It identifies risks within individual government institutions and produces actionable recommendations to address them, with a view to disrupting patterns of state capture and corruption.

Findings are shared directly with government and other duty-bearers, civil society organisations, the media and the public, empowering authorities to intervene, strengthening accountability, and enabling citizens activism.

Links to ACTis Information:

Further project information may be found at the following links:

[Terms and Definitions](#)

[Project Methodology and Analytical Framework](#)

[About the Anti-Corruption and Accountability project](#)

[About the Institute for Security Studies](#)

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Flag raised



Flag lowered



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Flag raised



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