



# PRETORIA HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

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## SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

18 November 2024

## COURT PROCEEDINGS LAUNCHED AGAINST THE GAUTENG DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

### Pretoria High School for Girls School Governing Body Media Statement

1. The School Governing Body (SGB) of Pretoria High School for Girls (PHSG) announces that it has today launched court proceedings against the Gauteng Department of Education (the GDE), the MEC for Education (the MEC), and others.
2. The court proceedings are aimed at the following:
  - 2.1 To compel production by the MEC of the report of Madlamlamba Attorneys relating to the school (the Report) that was publicised with so much damaging fanfare by the MEC at the school on 4 November 2024, but which the MEC has for some reason refused to release to the school;
  - 2.2 To interdict the GDE from taking any steps pursuant to the Report, pending its review and setting-aside; and
  - 2.3 To review and set aside, as irregular and irrational, both the MEC's decision to commission the Report, and the Report itself.
3. PHSG is a jewel of a school. It has existed for over a century. It is fully integrated. It serves its community. It consistently provides the highest standard of education to the young ladies who are fortunate enough to be at the school, and it consistently produces a matriculation pass rate

of between 99% and 100%, with an impressively high percentage of university entrance qualifiants (that is more than double the National average).

4. The SGB is an elected body from within the school, the majority of whom are elected parents. They serve without remuneration, giving of their time for the sake of their daughters, and generally for the sake of South African public education.
5. Racism is abhorrent. It is abhorrent to all right-thinking South Africans, and it is abhorrent to the school. Even allegations of racism leave an indelible stain. And that is why we all should be very careful before we even suggest that someone is guilty of something so abhorrent. *All the more is that so in the education environment.*

Yet unsubstantiated and ungrounded allegations of racism are what PHSG, and learners at PHSG, have been subjected to at the instance of the very body from which PHSG and its learners should have been entitled to expect protection and not its opposite – the GDE.

6. The court papers which PHSG have launched will show that *officials of the GDE insisted* on PHSG learners being charged with the abhorrence of racism in their matric year, close to their matric exams, on the basis of their involvement in a private WhatsApp group and messages within that group which the Thabo Mbeki Foundation quite rightly described in a letter to the MEC dated 10 October 2024 in these terms:

*“We ourselves have also closely studied the comments made by the chat group, independently, to determine whether these constituted manifestations of racism and hate speech. Our own firm conclusion is that there is no such manifestation in the said comments.”*

7. The GDE officials in question should have appreciated what the Thabo Mbeki Foundation was able to appreciate, and what the SGB disciplinary tribunal that was convened to decide the case against the learners (and which unanimously acquitted them) was able to appreciate, which is that there was no racism involved.
8. Then, when the learners were acquitted, the GDE professed to respect the outcome, but didn't. It embarked on an entirely unjustified and groundless witch-hunt for further examples of racism. It appointed Mdladlamba Attorneys to, “conduct an investigation into the allegations of racism at Pretoria Girls High”.

9. And then, when Madladlamba Attorneys were (as the school knew would be the case) unable to find instances of racism (except for the allegation that – we quote from the GDE’s Media Statement of 4.11.2024, not having been provided with a copy of the Report itself – “white educators do not greet their black colleagues”, a generalisation which is so vague, unproven and unprovable that it doesn’t belong in any self-respecting report. But there it apparently is, leaving its unproven and unprovable stain. The investigators apparently claim that the school’s principal confirmed the allegation. But that is entirely out of context), despite the fact that their mandate was to investigate racism only (the GDE’s HOD wrote to the school as recently as 3 September 2024 proclaiming that “the intention of this investigation is to determine whether there is a cause for concern at the school. *Should there be no racism at the school, same will mean the end of this investigation*”), they went on to seek other issues with which the school could be charged and the MEC, without apparent concern for the fact that these other issues had nothing to do with racism, publicised those findings on 4 November 2024 to the obvious detriment of the school.
10. The court papers will show that the investigators had no mandate to go beyond racism, and that once they found no evidence of racism the investigation should, as promised by the HOD on 3 September 2024, have ended. *But the court papers will go on to show that even those other, unmandated, findings against the school by the investigator are themselves entirely without substance and would, with the simplest of further enquiry, have shown themselves to be without substance.* The SGB wants to emphasise this. *PHSG has been subjected to an MEC whose task should be to uplift, and to assist with education, fanfaring unmandated and unsubstantiated – and plain incorrect – findings of wrongdoing on the part of the school, without the school ever having been given the opportunity to see those findings, and to answer them before the MEC-initiated glare of publicity.*
11. Just one instance in this regard. South Africans will know that the charges of racism against the learners (charges which, the SGB repeats, were levelled at the learners only because officials of the GDE insisted thereon – this can be proven) were widely publicised, and that the school had to endure political demonstrations outside its gates. It was obvious to the school – if not to the GDE – that the hearing had the potential of being highly controversial. For that reason, the school briefed an independent, experienced, practising advocate to chair the disciplinary tribunal. The SGB is convinced that no right-thinking South African could find fault

with that. And yet, because the advocate had, in order to comply with GDE regulations (which require such disciplinary tribunals to be chaired by an SGB member), to be co-opted onto the SGB for the sole purpose of enabling him to chair the tribunal, *one of the findings against the school, publicised with so much fanfare, is that the school should not have paid the advocate.* The school will defend itself against this, but the mere fact that the MEC should allow this speaks to how the school has been mistreated.

12. None of this should have happened. The school, and its SGB, shouldn't be in this adversarial relationship with the Department. The Department should have *helped*, and *protected*. The Thabo Mbeki Foundation in its aforementioned letter called on the MEC and the GDE to do the right and not the wrong thing, and it emphasised the importance of teaching, of schools and of proper order in schools. It spoke to the GDE's apparent unconcern about political demonstrations at schools, and the way in which the GDE has treated PHSG's Principal (we quote from the letter: "This situation was made worse by obliging the Principal to appear at a School Assembly to make an unwarranted apology to the learners .... What did the GDE seek to achieve by treating the very Head of the School in this shameful and humiliating manner?").
13. Yet, it has happened. PHSG has been treated shamefully, and South Africa and education have suffered. The Principal and staff of PHSG are prohibited by the GDE from speaking up. Only the school's SGB may speak for it. So it has. It is to right these wrongs that PHSG's SGB has felt compelled to launch the application.

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