

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 2652.

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2652. Mr M B Blose (EFF) to ask the Minister of Basic Education:

Whether her department has met its commitment to eliminate all pit toilets in public schools by the end of April 2025; if not, what (a) are the reasons for the delay and (b) revised timelines and accountability measures have been put in place to urgently address the basic infrastructure failure; if so, what are the relevant details?

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Response

The Department of Basic Education (DBE), together with Provincial Education Departments (PEDs) and the DBE's implementing agents, have made significant progress in improving sanitation facilities at public schools under the Sanitation Appropriate For Education (SAFE) initiative. Of the 3,372 schools identified under the SAFE initiative, 3,237 sanitation projects have been completed as of 30 April 2025, with 135 identified projects still outstanding.

The DBE has confirmed that these remaining identified projects are scheduled for completion by the third quarter of the 2025/26 financial year. These are primarily located in provinces with historical infrastructure delivery backlogs and systemic implementation constraints, such as delayed procurement processes, contractor underperformance, adverse weather conditions, and site-level disruptions. These projects are being implemented through DBE implementing agents and Provincial Education Departments (PEDs) with continued oversight from the DBE.

Delays in some projects, caused by underperforming service providers, are being addressed through contract terminations and the procurement of replacement service providers. In addition, projects that were allocated to our donor partners who, for one reason or another, are unable to fund them any longer, have been re-allocated to our implementing agents to complete in this financial year.

Once the identified sanitation projects have been completed under the SAFE initiative, the work of government in eradicating pit latrine toilets at public schools must continue. In this regard, the DBE will continue working collaboratively with PEDs to ensure that pit latrine toilets at public schools not identified for purposes of the SAFE initiative are appropriately and urgently replaced with suitable sanitation facilities. This must form part of the public school infrastructure development and maintenance plans of PEDs.

While notable progress has been made through the SAFE initiative, the persistent issue of pit latrine toilets underscores the complexity of addressing public school infrastructure backlogs in a sector with historical underinvestment, competing budgetary demands and implementation challenges at provincial levels.

It is important to remind Honourable Members that, while MECs for Education are responsible for the provisioning and maintenance of public school infrastructure in their respective provinces in terms of the South African Schools Act and the Government Immovable Asset Management Act, they do not report directly to the Minister, Deputy Minister or the Department of Basic Education. This reality necessitates heightened collaboration and oversight to ensure that national priorities are effectively implemented at the provincial level. PEDs should not be returning funds to the National

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Treasury while public school infrastructure backlogs persist. The DBE continues to provide national coordination, oversight and technical support in this regard.

To accelerate delivery and strengthen accountability, the DBE is working closely with provinces to implement the 10-Point Infrastructure Delivery Strategy, which includes:

- Finalisation of Infrastructure Asset Management Plans in line with the Regulations Relating to Minimum Uniform Norms and Standards for Public School Infrastructure;
- Strengthened project performance management and consequence measures for delays;
- Enhanced intergovernmental collaboration, particularly with implementing agents and local stakeholders; and
- Real-time monitoring tools, including the Safe Schools App, a digital platform developed in partnership with Vodacom South Africa. This app empowers learners, educators, and the public to report unsafe school sanitation conditions, track the status of sanitation upgrades, and provide photographic evidence where necessary.

The Safe Schools App is available at: <https://safeschools.gov.za>

The Minister and the Department of Basic Education remain resolutely committed to the full eradication of pit latrines in public schools. While more than 95% of identified schools have now been assisted, the final phase of implementation demands continued urgency, oversight, and responsiveness to community concerns.

For further information regarding the steps that the Minister of Basic Education and the DBE are taking to improve access to safe and dignified sanitation facilities at public schools, please see the speech delivered by the Minister of Basic Education in Limpopo on 4 April 2025 (available on the DBE website: <https://www.education.gov.za/Newsroom/Speeches.aspx>).

Protecting the safety, health and dignity of learners is a core constitutional obligation. The DBE will continue working with provinces to deliver on this priority, using every available tool, including digital platforms like the Safe Schools App, to ensure that no child in South Africa is forced to learn in conditions that violate their rights or compromise their futures.