

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 2858

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2858. Mr L W Mahlatsi (UAT) to ask the Minister of Basic Education:

[658] [Question submitted for oral reply now placed for written reply because it is more than quota (Rule 137(8))]

.With reference to the assertion she made during the meeting of the Portfolio Committee on Basic Education on 6 May 2025 that about 90% of schools are in fair to excellent condition, while in reality more than 8 000 and 13 000 schools still require proper classrooms and adequate toilet facilities and the deadline to eradicate pit toilets was also missed, (a) how does she reconcile the specified figures with her assertion and (b) what specific, measurable, and time-bound actions will her department now take to urgently address the dangerous infrastructure failures and broken promises?

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Response

With regard to the presentation made to the Portfolio Committee on Basic Education on 6 May 2025, it was explained that approximately 90% of public schools are in *fair to excellent condition*, according to the data drawn from the **Education Facilities Management System (EFMS)**, the Department of Basic Education's central database for tracking the physical state of public school infrastructure nationally.

It is important to understand that even among the 20,289 schools rated as being in fair to excellent condition, many still require additional infrastructure upgrades. These include:

- **Additional classrooms** in response to overcrowding caused by **population growth and migration patterns**, and
- **Additional ablution facilities**, especially where learner numbers have increased significantly.

The EFMS uses a national condition assessment scale to classify infrastructure condition, including key components such as roofs, flooring, ablution blocks and classroom structures. The EFMS also identifies schools with a condition rating of C1 (Very Poor) and C2 (Poor), which are prioritised for urgent intervention. This data informs planning, prioritisation and budgeting decisions by both the DBE and Provincial Education Departments (PEDs).

Currently, **PEDs are conducting updated infrastructure condition assessments** as part of the development of their **Infrastructure Asset Management Plans (IAMPs)**, due for submission by **30 June 2025**, as required by the revised Regulations Relating to Minimum Uniform Norms and Standards for Public School Infrastructure (Regulations 4(3), 4(4), 4(6), and 4(7)). These assessments are essential for:

- Quantifying infrastructure backlogs;
- Providing updated, evidence-based implementation plans; and
- Ensuring improved provincial accountability and progress tracking.

The Minister of Basic Education and the DBE remain committed to the progressive realisation of minimum infrastructure norms and standards, informed by accurate, up-to-date data. Once all provinces have submitted and verified their IAMPs, the DBE will consolidate and release national and district-level analyses of infrastructure conditions to guide targeted, measurable interventions.

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The DBE, together with PEDs and implementing agents, has made substantial progress in eradicating inappropriate sanitation facilities through the **Sanitation Appropriate for Education (SAFE)** initiative. Of the **3,372 schools** originally identified under SAFE, **3,237 projects had been completed by 30 April 2025**. The remaining **135 projects** are scheduled for completion by the **third quarter of the 2025/26 financial year**.

These remaining projects are concentrated in provinces such as the **Eastern Cape and Limpopo**, where systemic implementation constraints, adverse weather, procurement delays and contractor underperformance have caused delays. The DBE has taken action by:

- **Terminating underperforming service provider contracts** and reallocating them to new implementers; and
- Reassigning unfunded donor projects to DBE implementing agents for completion.

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

To address infrastructure challenges in a time-bound and measurable manner, the DBE is implementing the following:

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1. **Completion of Remaining SAFE Projects**
 - Target: Complete all 135 remaining projects by Q3 of 2025/26
 - Mechanism: Monthly monitoring with implementing agents and PEDs
2. **Human Resource Capacitation (DORA Strategy)**
 - 552 of 655 infrastructure posts filled across provinces
 - Ongoing recruitment to close remaining gaps in 2025/26
3. **Basic Education Sector 10-Point Infrastructure Delivery Strategy, including:**
 - Use of the EFMS as a real-time data platform
 - Standardised procurement templates and concept designs
 - Deployment of multiple implementing agents
 - Lifecycle project monitoring and performance enforcement
4. **Digital Public Oversight through the Safe Schools App**
 - Platform for educators, learners and the public to report unsafe conditions, including submission of photographic evidence
 - Functionality available to track sanitation upgrades in real-time
 - App is available at: <https://safeschools.gov.za>
5. **Updated School Maintenance Manual and Training Roll-out**
 - Aligned with latest national building norms
 - Cascaded training to PEDs, districts and School Governing Bodies
 - Annual refresher training and compliance monitoring
6. **Strengthened Norms and Standards Regulations**
 - Ongoing review to improve clarity, enforcement and accountability mechanisms
7. **Alternative Infrastructure Financing**

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- Collaboration with National Treasury and partners via the **Budget Facility for Infrastructure** to close funding gaps

Accountability mechanisms will need to be strengthened to prevent systemic negligence and to ensure the safety and dignity of all learners. In this regard, the Minister of Basic Education intends to review the Regulations relating to Minimum Uniform Norms and Standards for Public School Infrastructure to ensure that they are clear, provide for clear oversight mechanisms and can lead to improvements in infrastructure delivery at a school level.

The Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement has outlined the integration of multiple conditional grants, including the Education Infrastructure Grant (EIG) and the School Infrastructure Backlog Grant (SIBG). While this reform aims to streamline resource allocation, it reduces the ability of the DBE to directly influence infrastructure delivery at a provincial level. Consequently, provinces will play an even greater role in the implementation of public school infrastructure projects, including sanitation projects.

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>).