

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 246.**

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**246. Mr P P Xaba-Ntshaba (ANC) to ask the Minister of Basic Education: to ask the Minister of Basic Education:**

- (1) What progress has been made towards attaining the March 2025 target in completing the remaining projects identified under the Sanitation Appropriate for Education initiative;
- (2) whether there are any challenges in this regard; if not, what is the position in this regard; if so, how are the specified challenges being addressed in a timely manner to improve sanitation facilities in schools?

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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.

The 2006 School Register of Needs recorded 9,600 schools reliant on basic pit toilets. By 2018, 3,898 schools were initially identified under the SAFE initiative. This number was later refined to 3,372 schools by excluding schools which closed as they were non-viable; schools that had appropriate sanitation but required refurbishment; schools that were on private land but had no agreement with the property owner in terms of Section 14 of South African Schools Act; and schools that had appropriate sanitation and needed no intervention.

Of the 3,372 schools identified under the SAFE initiative, 3,200 sanitation projects have been completed to date, with 172 identified projects still outstanding as of the 17 February 2025. The DBE has confirmed that these remaining identified projects are scheduled for completion by 31 March 2025.

Delays in some projects, caused by underperforming service providers, are being addressed through contract terminations and the procurement of replacement service providers. The DBE has advised that existing Framework Agreements (Contractor Databases) are being used to procure the replacement contractors in a shorter period. Defaulting contractors are also being blacklisted from these databases, and steps are underway to list those contractors on the List of Restricted Suppliers by National Treasury.

Our donor partners, who have been very instrumental in assisting the DBE in the initiative of replacing pit toilets in schools, still have 45 projects where planning and design activities are underway and are awaiting the appointment of contractors. There is a firm commitment from these partners that funding is available and the projects will be taken through to the construction stages.

In addition to the above, the DBE has advised that 1,088 public schools with no toilets were identified and have been provided with sanitation facilities as part of the Accelerated School Infrastructure Delivery Initiative (ASIDI). This completes sanitation projects under ASIDI.

The above SAFE and ASIDI projects are in addition to sanitation improvement projects that PEDs undertake.

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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.

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.

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 EIG and the 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.

It is important to remind Honourable Members that, while MECs for Education are responsible for the provisioning of public school infrastructure in their respective provinces, 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.

To assist the basic education sector to eradicate pit latrine toilets in schools, we have launched a Safe Schools app – a digital platform developed and donated by Vodacom South Africa to empower users to report unsafe toilets in schools, monitor progress on their removal and provide real-time feedback on infrastructure improvements. By enabling the public to crowd-source information about unsafe toilets not identified for the purposes of the SAFE initiative, PEDs, together with the DBE, will have access to current data necessary to inform budgeting, planning and implementation of school sanitation projects. The Safe Schools app can be accessed via <https://safeschools.gov.za/>.

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