

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 270.

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

What (a) measures has her department implemented to address infrastructure backlogs in (i) rural and (ii) township schools and (b) is the timeline for ensuring that all schools meet basic safety and sanitation standards?

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Response

It must be noted that in terms of the South African Schools Act, read with the Government Immovable Asset Management Act, provinces are responsible for the provisioning, management and maintenance of public school infrastructure.

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) is responsible for setting norms and standards for public school infrastructure. The DBE provides support and oversight to Provincial Education Departments (PEDs) and, in some instances, implements projects through programmes such as the Accelerated Schools Infrastructure Delivery Initiative (ASIDI) and the Sanitation Appropriate For Education (SAFE) initiative.

The sector provides infrastructure through several programmes that are targeted at addressing infrastructure challenges and backlogs with a particular focus on township and rural schools. These are as follows:

- The **Provincial Infrastructure Programme** is implemented by **Provincial Departments of Education**. The current allocation on the programme amounts to R14b and a further R49b is allocated over the 2025/26 MTEF to address infrastructure challenges, including overcrowding and related infrastructure challenges. The Provincial Infrastructure Programme is focused on
 - New and replacement schools;
 - Maintenance;
 - Repairs and renovations; and
 - Upgrading and rehabilitation.
- In **2011**, the DBE launched **ASIDI**. This programme focused on the following:
 - Appropriate building for **schools made entirely of inappropriate materials**;
 - Appropriate water supply to schools with **no water**;
 - Appropriate sanitation at schools with **no toilets**; and
 - Appropriate electricity supply to schools with **no electricity supply**.
- In **2018**, the DBE launched the **SAFE** initiative. This programme focused on appropriate sanitation at **schools dependent on basic pit toilets**.

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Both the ASIDI and SAFE programmes are funded from the School Infrastructure Backlog Grant (SIBG). The ASIDI and SAFE programmes will be coming to an end at the end of the 2025/26 financial year and the provincial programme will remain the main infrastructure programme for the sector.

Further, in a bid to address the identified and still growing infrastructure backlogs, the DBE, together with PEDs, is working with National Treasury to access additional funding from the Budget Facility for Infrastructure (BFI). The BFI is a budget reform initiative established to support priority infrastructure projects through a more rigorous project planning, appraisal and selection process. The intention is to support enhanced project outcomes and improved value for money to government. To date, two provinces have been successful in accessing additional funding through the BFI, namely Gauteng and Western Cape. In 2026/27, several bid windows will be open for submissions and the sector will submit for the remaining seven provinces.

Following successful implementation of the Classrooms Self-Built Programme in Gauteng, the sector consulted National Treasury for approval to transfer the Education Infrastructure Grant (EIG) to public schools to fast-track the building of additional classrooms in line with guidelines issued by the DBE. In this programme, education districts experiencing learner admission and overcrowding pressures are identified and supported.

As MECs for Education and their respective PEDs are responsible for the provisioning of public school infrastructure in their respective provinces but do not report directly to the Minister and Deputy Minister of Basic Education or the DBE, heightened collaboration and oversight between the national and provincial education departments is required 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 Regulations Relating to Minimum Uniform Norms and Standards for Public School Infrastructure require PEDs to include their annual progress reporting information on how infrastructure backlogs will be addressed. Under the EIG, PEDs have submitted infrastructure plans that identify outstanding backlogs and outline strategies to address them, considering population growth, urbanisation and the distance learners travel to school.

PEDs, in collaboration with the DBE where necessary, are continuously working to address infrastructure challenges in public schools. Plans for infrastructure improvement are prioritised based on available funding and urgency. The timelines for implementation are determined by PEDs based on their respective infrastructure delivery plans.

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The Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement now outlines the integration of multiple conditional grants, including the EIG and 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.

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.