

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 741.

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741. Mr M J Cuthbert (DA) to ask the Minister of Basic Education: to ask the Minister of Basic Education:

Whether she has been informed about allegations that R1,8 million budgeted for three new classrooms at the Unity Secondary School in Daveyton, Gauteng, in the 2022-23 financial year has not been spent on its intended purpose; if not, what is the position in this regard; if so, what are the details of the (a) measures her department has taken to investigate the allegations and (b) consequence management she intends to initiate in this regard?

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Response

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 PEDs and, in some instances, implements projects through programmes such as the Accelerated Schools Infrastructure Delivery Initiative (ASIDI) and Sanitation Appropriate for Education (SAFE) initiative.

As MECs for Education and their respective Provincial Education Departments (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. PEDs are finalising infrastructure plans that identify outstanding backlogs and outline strategies to address them.

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.

The Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement now outlines the integration of multiple conditional grants, including the Education Infrastructure Grant (EIG) and the School Infrastructure Backlogs 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.

Under the EIG, PEDs have submitted infrastructure plans that include the upgrading of existing facilities. These plans consider population growth, urbanisation and the distance learners travel to school.

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The DBE is in the process of submitting a budget bid to the Budget Facility for Infrastructure (BFI) to supplement the EIG, assisting provinces in eliminating backlogs related to overcrowding, infrastructure deficiencies and inadequate classroom availability.

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.

Minister Gwarube has not been informed of the matter referred to in the question concerning Unity Secondary School in Daveyton, Gauteng.

Given the above, the questions in relation to Unity Secondary School in Daveyton, Gauteng fall under the executive authority of the MEC for Education in Gauteng. The Honourable Member is kindly requested to refer the question to the MEC for Education in Gauteng as per section 92(3)(b) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and Rule 134 (5)(b) of the National Assembly Rules.