

**NATIONAL COUNCIL OF PROVINCES**

**WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 350.**

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**350. Ms N N Chirwa-Mpungose (Gauteng: EFF) to ask the Minister of Basic Education: to ask the Minister of Basic Education:**

***Condition of school infrastructures***

(1) (a) How will her department intervene regarding the condition of school infrastructure in the North West (details furnished) and (b) what are the priority schools with the worst conditions in the said province;

(2) whether any schools in the North West reported to have pit toilets; if not, what is the position in this regard; if so, (a) how many and (b) what interventions has her department made in this regard?

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##### **Response**

(1) In terms of the South African Schools Act, read with the Government Immovable Asset Management Act, provinces are responsible for the planning, provisioning, management and maintenance of public school infrastructure. Liability for acts or omissions arising in the use of provincial property is regulated by the Government Immovable Asset Management Act.

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), including the North West Department of Education, and, in some instances, implements projects through programmes such as the Accelerated Schools Infrastructure Delivery Initiative (ASIDI) and the SAFE Initiative.

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. 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 Backlog Grant. 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.

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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.

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.

The questions fall under the executive authority of the Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for Education in the North West. In terms of Section 92(3)(b) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, and Rule 134(5)(b) of the National Assembly Rules, the Honourable Member is therefore kindly advised to refer the questions to the MEC for Education in the North West.

(2)

The DBE has advised that 100% of all pit toilets identified in the North West as part of the SAFE initiative have been replaced with appropriate sanitation facilities to date.

The SAFE initiative was premised on 2018 data, which may not be complete and, therefore, may not account for pit toilets that may still exist in some of schools in the North West but for a number of reasons were missed by the 2018 audit. While we have made extraordinary progress in replacing pit toilets with appropriate sanitation facilities, we must acknowledge that the job is not done.

To that end, the DBE is working towards a new audit to ensure that any public schools missed in the 2018 count are identified and included in sanitation development plans of PEDs going forward.

While this requires significant funding that is not readily available through the public fiscus, we need to be resourceful, drawing on the contributions of civil society and our corporate and social partners, to ensure that we build an accurate database that is

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complete and that will enable us to ensure that every learner in this country can access safe and dignified sanitation facilities while they are at school.

As we take these urgent steps, members of the public can assist us in identifying any pit toilets that our audits could have missed or which could have sprung up after the 2018 audit. Members of the public and schools can report any remaining pit toilets through our online app at [safeschools.gov.za](https://safeschools.gov.za).