

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 5157

DATE OF PUBLICATION OF INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 12/09/2025

INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: NO 38 – 2025

5157. Ms S Gcilishe (EFF) to ask the Minister of Basic Education:

With reference to her reply to question 2836 on 10 June 2025, wherein she indicated that her department will continue working collaboratively with other stakeholders to ensure that pit latrine toilets at public schools not identified for purposes of the Sanitation Appropriate for Education initiative are appropriately and urgently replaced with suitable sanitation facilities, what progress has been made in (a) this regard and (b) other broader efforts to eradicate pit latrines and unsafe school infrastructure in provinces such as Limpopo and the Eastern Cape, where learners including those at schools in Ga-Mashashane and Vaalbank are still forced to use dangerous and life-threatening sanitation systems, despite longstanding government commitments to eradicate them?

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 5157

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, including sanitation facilities at public schools.

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

Out of the 3 372 schools that were identified under the Sanitation Appropriate for Education (SAFE) initiative and funded through the School Infrastructure Backlogs Grant (SIBG), 3 293 projects (98%) have been completed. The remaining projects are at varying stages of implementation and are earmarked for completion before the end of the current financial year.

This progress represents a significant milestone towards eradicating unsafe and inadequate sanitation facilities across the basic education sector. The initiative has prioritised schools in the poorest and most rural parts of the country, ensuring that learners have access to safe, dignified and age-appropriate sanitation.

The work of government in eradicating basic pit latrine toilets at public schools must continue. In this regard, the DBE is continuing to work collaboratively with PEDs to ensure that basic pit latrine toilets at public schools not identified for purposes of the SAFE initiative are appropriately and urgently identified and 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 basic 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.

The 2025/26 financial year marks the final year of the SIBG allocation to the DBE for onward disbursement to PEDs. From the 2026/27 financial year onwards, funding for the eradication of remaining pit latrines – including those not originally covered under the SAFE initiative – will be incorporated into the Education Infrastructure Grant (EIG).

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 5157

As part of their infrastructure management planning, PEDs are identifying and developing plans for the eradication of basic pit latrine toilets not covered by the SAFE initiative. PEDs that identify any basic pit latrines not covered by the SAFE initiative – including PEDs in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo – are required to prioritise these in their Infrastructure Asset Management Plans (IAMPs) for implementation during the next financial year.

To strengthen oversight, delivery, accountability and long-term sustainability, the DBE is implementing a combination of measures in partnership with provinces and stakeholders. These include the following:

- **Targeted provincial focus:** The EIG will prioritise provinces with the highest sanitation backlogs, including the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo.
- **Improved planning and accountability:** PEDs' Infrastructure Asset Management Plans include specific sanitation eradication targets and timelines, aligned with available budgets and local needs.
- **Oversight mechanisms:** The DBE is enhancing monitoring through the Education Facilities Management System (EFMS). The DBE is also making use of the Safe Schools App, developed with Vodacom, which enables real-time public reporting of unsafe or non-functional sanitation infrastructure by school communities.
- **Capacity support:** Through the Division of Revenue Act (DoRA) Human Resource Capacitation Strategy, the DBE continues to make technical expertise – including engineers, architects and project managers – available to provinces to accelerate project planning and implementation.
- **Maintenance of sanitation facilities:** To ensure sustainability and prevent infrastructure degradation, the DBE has developed School Infrastructure Maintenance Guidelines and has trained provincial officials, who are in turn training School Governing Bodies (SGBs) and school principals on maintenance planning, budgeting and routine inspection of sanitation facilities.
- **Policy alignment:** The DBE is currently reviewing the Regulations Relating to Minimum Uniform Norms and Standards for Public School Infrastructure to clarify compliance obligations, strengthen accountability mechanisms and ensure that all schools maintain safe, functional and hygienic sanitation facilities.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 5157

Protecting the health, safety and dignity of learners is a constitutional obligation. The DBE remains committed to working with all PEDs and sector partners to eradicate all pit latrines and unsafe sanitation systems in South African schools. Efforts will continue to focus particularly on Limpopo, the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, where sanitation backlogs remain most acute.

Through targeted infrastructure funding, strengthened provincial planning, digital monitoring tools and improved maintenance capacity, the DBE aims to ensure that every learner is taught in a safe, dignified, and conducive learning environment.