

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 5344

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5344. Mr S W Mkhize (MK) to ask the Minister of Basic Education:

Considering the current state of dilapidated and increasingly deteriorating school infrastructure, which compromises the right to quality education in terms of Section 29 of the Constitution of the Republic, 1996, what is the justification for her department's plan to build only 30 new classes in the 2025-26 financial year, while schools like the Sibongintuthuko Primary School and thousands of other schools in farms and rural communities remain hazardous with deplorable working conditions?

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Response

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) acknowledges the pressing challenges posed by ageing and inadequate school infrastructure, particularly in rural and farm communities, and reaffirms its commitment to work with Provincial Education Departments (PEDs) to ensure the realisation of the right to basic education as enshrined in Section 29 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996.

In terms of section 3 of the South African Schools Act, as amended, each MEC for Education is required to ensure that there are enough school places so that every child of compulsory school-going age who lives in his or her province can attend school.

Furthermore, section 12 of the South African Schools Act, as amended, requires the MEC for Education to ensure the provision of public schools for education of learners out of funds appropriated for this purpose by the relevant provincial legislature. The accommodation of learners in public schools is therefore the responsibility of provinces.

The role of the DBE, as the national department responsible for basic education, is to support, monitor and guide PEDs in their school provisioning, ensuring that no learner is left behind. As such, the DBE has been working closely with all provinces to ensure that the necessary infrastructure plans are developed and in place at a provincial level.

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.

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. Due to significant budget constraints, PEDs face challenges in accelerating the delivery of school infrastructure at the required scale.

The recent developments announced as part of the Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement must be noted, which outlined the integration of multiple conditional grants, including the Education Infrastructure Grant (EIG) and the School Infrastructure Backlog Grant (SIBG).

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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. All school infrastructure delivery will therefore be the sole responsibility of PEDs, funded primarily through the **EIG** and their equitable share allocations. PEDs have collectively planned to provide **4 378 additional classrooms over the 2025 Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF)** period.

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

The 30 classrooms mentioned in the question for the 2025/26 financial year form part of the **overcrowding programme and were** funded through the **SIBG**. This intervention was designed to assist provinces to address severe overcrowding pressures and augments the infrastructure development that must be undertaken at a provincial level. The intervention has targeted 97 classrooms at seven schools, of which 67 were completed in the last financial year, with the remaining 30 scheduled for completion in the current financial year.

Beyond new classroom construction, the DBE and PEDs are addressing infrastructure backlogs through a multi-pronged approach including the following:

- **Maintenance and Rehabilitation:** The majority of the EIG is directed to upgrading and maintaining existing infrastructure, which is critical given the levels of deterioration in many schools.
- **Sanitation Appropriate for Education (SAFE) initiative:** Ongoing replacement of inappropriate sanitation facilities.
- **Infrastructure upgrades and additions:** Renovations, fencing, water supply, electrification and rehabilitation of hazardous structures.
- **Rationalisation and realignment:** Relocating learners from small, unviable schools to better-resourced facilities.

The DBE has also submitted a bid to the **Budget Facility for Infrastructure (BFI)** to supplement existing allocations and accelerate the eradication of unsafe and dilapidated infrastructure. In addition, a **review of the Regulations Relating to Minimum Uniform Norms and Standards for Public School Infrastructure** is under way to strengthen oversight mechanisms, improve provincial reporting, and ensure accountability in eliminating hazardous conditions in schools.

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Cases such as **Sibongintuthuko Primary School** underscore the urgency of these interventions. The DBE, in collaboration with the Eastern Cape Department of Education, is monitoring such schools to ensure that immediate interim measures are implemented (such as mobile classrooms) while longer-term infrastructure solutions are planned.

In conclusion, while the figure of 30 new classrooms may appear limited in isolation, it reflects the final phase of a national backlog grant. Provinces have significantly larger plans under the 2025 MTEF, and together with targeted national initiatives such as SAFE, rehabilitation programmes, and enhanced oversight, the DBE is committed to progressively ensuring that all learners have access to safe, dignified and enabling school environments.