

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 5668.

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5668. Mr V Pambo (EFF) to ask the Minister of Basic Education:

What (a) are the reasons that pit toilets remain in some schools and (b) is the role of fiscal oversight in accelerating the eradication of pit toilets?

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Response

(a) While notable progress has been made through the Sanitation Appropriate For Education (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 continued presence of basic pit latrines in some public schools is therefore due to a combination of financial, technical, administrative and environmental factors that have slowed the complete eradication of unsafe sanitation infrastructure.

Key contributing factors include, for example:

- Incomplete coverage during the initial audit: Some schools were omitted from the rapid audit conducted in 2018, which informed the establishment of the SAFE initiative. To address this, Provincial Education Departments (PEDs) are conducting updated condition assessments to identify any remaining schools with basic pit latrine toilets and include them in project lists for immediate planning and implementation.
- Contractor and implementing agent performance: Since the inception of the SAFE programme, 168 contractors (including 28 in the current financial year) have been terminated for poor performance or non-compliance with contractual terms. These terminations delayed progress, as new contractors needed to be procured and mobilised.
- Delays in donor-funded projects: While the SAFE initiative has achieved 98% completion of identified projects, progress has been hampered by delays in donor-funded projects, where only 74% of donor-funded commitments were fulfilled. Moving forward, stalled donor projects are being transferred to PEDs for direct oversight and accelerated implementation.

To address these challenges, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) is taking decisive action, including terminating underperforming contractors, enhancing security at project sites, and strengthening project management capacity at both national and provincial levels.

Recognising that some public schools were not identified during the 2018 audit, condition assessments are being conducted by Provincial Education Departments (PED's) to identify these schools and include them in the project lists for immediate planning and implementation.

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The public is encouraged to report any remaining basic pit toilets or unsafe facilities through the Safe Schools App (www.safeschools.gov.za), developed in partnership with Vodacom, which enables real-time reporting and oversight. The DBE refers all matters reported via the Safe Schools App to the relevant provinces for further attention.

The Minister has emphasised that maintaining newly built sanitation facilities is critical to preventing regression and ensuring sustainability. Accordingly, the DBE has implemented sanitation management and maintenance measures, including:

- Ring-fencing infrastructure maintenance budgets within PEDs to ensure dedicated funding;
- Strengthening oversight by district officials, school principals and School Governing Bodies (SGBs) through maintenance training and compliance monitoring; and
- Expanding the National School Hygiene Programme (NSHP) in partnership with Unilever, UNICEF and GIZ to promote safe hygiene practices and school cleanliness.

(b) Fiscal oversight plays a critical role in accelerating the eradication of basic pit latrines by ensuring that public school infrastructure funds are utilised efficiently, transparently and in accordance with the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) and the Division of Revenue Act (DoRA).

The following oversight mechanisms are in place to strengthen accountability and improve the efficiency of spending within PEDs:

- Rigorous financial reporting: PEDs must submit quarterly and annual performance reports on expenditure and project progress under both the School Infrastructure Backlogs Grant (SIBG) and the Education Infrastructure Grant (EIG), which are reviewed by the DBE, National Treasury and the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME).
- Monthly monitoring and gateway reviews: The DBE monitors implementation through the Education Facilities Management System (EFMS), allowing early detection of underperformance and budget underutilisation.
- Consequence management: The DBE enforces accountability for non-performing contractors and implementing agents (for which the DBE is responsible) through termination, recovery of funds and, where applicable,

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disciplinary or legal action. PEDs are encouraged to do the same in respect of contractors and implementing agents for which they are responsible.

Through these combined oversight, fiscal and operational measures, the DBE remains firmly committed to the complete eradication of basic pit latrines in all public schools ensuring that every learner in South Africa has access to safe, dignified and hygienic sanitation facilities that uphold their right to health, safety and human dignity.