

25 November 2020

Equal Education media statement: Latest provincial school infrastructure reports show some progress in delivery, but education departments are failing miserably to comply with the 2020 deadline of the Norms and Standards for Public School Infrastructure

#FixOurSchools!

“For me personally Norms and Standards for Public School Infrastructure are important because they ensure that public schools are catered for. They promote equality in education. Just because a school is public doesn't mean it should have minimum facilities. It shouldn't be quantity education but quality and equal education.” - Ntombi Mngomezulu, Grade 12 learner member of Equal Education (Equaliser), KwaZulu-Natal.

“The Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure are important because learners can't learn productively in schools that aren't safe for them to learn in. [Schools lack] laboratories, libraries, sports fields and those kinds of things. Schools in my area... lack so much of the things prescribed by the Norms and Standards. Some schools don't even have proper fencing.”
- Likho Mendisi, Grade 11 learner member of Equal Education (Equaliser), Western Cape.

With less than a week left before the 2020 deadline of the [Norms and Standards for Public School Infrastructure](#), the latest government reports on progress with delivery show that there have been important wins since this law was adopted seven years ago, but government is very far behind in meeting its own targets.

According to the Norms and Standards, all schools should have been provided with **enough** classrooms, electricity, water, and toilets, **and** with fences, telephones and internet by 29 November 2020 (this Sunday).

Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga signed the Norms and Standards into law in 2013, following years of tireless campaigning led by Equal Education members (learners, post-school youths, teachers and parents). Since then, thousands of schools have received water, electricity and decent toilets, and hundreds of schools made of inappropriate materials, such as mud and asbestos, have been replaced. Getting these victories has not been easy - we have had to carefully monitor the implementation of the law, mobilise affected school communities and take to the streets **often** to demand accountability.

However, change is too slow - there are still huge backlogs, especially in our schools of Black working class and rural communities! The Department of Basic Education (DBE) and provincial education departments (PEDs) could have been much closer to fulfilling their legal, political and moral duty, but they have not shown the political will to ensure that our schools are fixed with the urgency needed.

Our engagements with education departments, and our analysis of the latest provincial school infrastructure reports, show that the departments still struggle with the basics such as accurate and accessible data, clear and coordinated planning, as well as making sure that the implementing agents and contractors that build schools on behalf of government are held accountable. National and provincial governments are also not putting enough money toward building and fixing our schools.

To access these reports, we had to submit a Promotion of Access to Information (PAIA) request to the DBE - even though the [#FixTheNorms court judgment](#) of 2018 ordered Minister Motshekga to make the

reports and plans public to ensure that learners, teachers and parents can hold the government accountable. The law requires the education MECs report to Minister Motshekga every year on their progress and plans to fix our schools. These reports also have the potential to be powerful tools for proper planning and budgeting between various government departments. The full copies of the provincial reports submitted to Minister Motshekga are available [here](#). They show that:

- **Although very slow, infrastructure delivery is progressing**

According to the [2013](#) National Education Infrastructure Management System (NEIMS), the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education's (KZNDoE) had 2 809 schools with plain pit toilets. The latest KZNDoE progress report says there are 1 099 schools with plain pit toilets - but the law says that plain pit latrines should have been replaced by now! There are 30 schools that now need electricity in the province, compared to 1 483 in 2013 - but the law says all schools should have had electricity by 2016!

The Limpopo Department of Education's (LDoE) progress report says that between 2013 and 2019, almost 3 000 classrooms have been built, 740 schools have been provided with toilets and 222 schools have been provided with water - but there are still 472 schools with only plain pit toilets and 821 schools with an unreliable water supply according to data from the latest NEIMS report of the DBE. In the Eastern Cape, schools without electricity have decreased from 1 090 in 2013 to the 87 in the current progress report - but the law says that all schools should have had electricity by 2016!

It is difficult to get 100% accuracy on measuring progress in school infrastructure delivery because data sets provided by national and provincial departments of education contradict each other. For example, the 2019 progress report of the Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDoE) says there are 74 schools with no access to water, but the [2020 NEIMS](#) says there are zero schools without water. Without accurate data it is almost impossible to plan and get rid of infrastructure backlogs on time.

- **Government still produces data that is incomplete or inconsistent, and plans that are poor quality**

Many of the reports reflect that PEDs are not taking seriously the legal duty to report properly to the public on progress and plans. The PEDs have not used the same template for their reports, and this makes analysing them difficult. Following our [call](#) for the DBE to provide a template to the PEDs, that ensures that the reports have all the necessary information, and are easily understandable, the DBE did create a template, but provinces have not used this document!

The Gauteng Department of Education's (GDE) 2019 report, is very similar to its 2018 report. According to the 2018 report, the classroom backlog stood at 4 103, and the latest report provides the exact same figure, without providing detail on the reasons the figure remains the same!

Some of the reports explain only certain backlogs and not others. For example, the Western Cape Department of Education's (WCED) report is silent on backlogs for schools that don't have fences that are built according to what the law demands (1.8m high) or *enough* water and electricity, and if any need electronic connectivity. The KZNDoE report also has too little information on its backlogs tied to the 2020 deadline, and does not report on electronic connectivity and how many schools don't have *enough* water and sanitation.

The reports of all five provinces in which we are organised - Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal - fail to provide proper plans for wiping out backlogs. The ECDoE report

speaks about some backlogs and what it will cost to get rid of these backlogs, but does not explain any plans or timelines to do that.

The WCED report has no timeframes for getting rid of any of the existing backlogs and only vaguely mentions that the timeframe for replacing school buildings made of inappropriate material will be in the 2020 progress report - despite the deadline for replacing these buildings being 2016! The reports filed by the PEDs do not offer budget information in a clear way. The KZNDoE report has an estimated budget only for getting rid of asbestos schools.

As long as PEDs neglect to provide proper plans and budgets, learners, teachers and parents cannot properly monitor the implementation of the law.

- **National and provincial governments are not putting enough money toward build schools**

The reports of the KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and Western Cape education departments say that not having enough money will impact their ability to get rid of infrastructure backlogs. On the other hand Limpopo has failed to spend all the money it got for school infrastructure every year since 2011/2012.

The WCED report says 77 schools cannot be replaced in the near future because it has too little money. The KZNDoE report says that there are 463 projects planned to replace asbestos schools and estimates that it will be a challenge to get the R2.5 billion to do this. With the negative financial impact of Covid-19 on both national and provincial government, it is likely that PEDs will have less funding in the next few years. They must demand that National Treasury give them more money!

- **Some provinces are not doing enough to hold implementing agents accountable**

Implementing agents (IAs) build schools on behalf of government. Some provinces, including KwaZulu-Natal, complain that IAs who do a bad job or don't have the ability to do the work, are affecting how quickly schools can be built. However, none of them say how they would make sure that IAs are held accountable. Other provinces that have complained before about IAs, such as the Eastern Cape, say nothing about monitoring the performance of IAs. After our [report](#) on IAs was published, the DBE responded positively to our demand that [guidelines](#) must be created for appointing IAs, which is a step in the right direction. But, provinces must make sure that there are serious consequences by blacklisting IAs and contractors for unacceptable performance - no education department has ever done this!

Conclusion

With the 2020 deadline here, Minister Motshekga and the Education MECs still haven't complied with the 2016 Norms and Standards deadline! Learners and teachers in Limpopo, KZN and Eastern Cape are still using plain pit latrines that threaten their safety and violate their dignity. Gauteng and the Western Cape, still grapple with schools made of inappropriate material and classroom shortages.

Our advocacy around the Norms and Standards for Public School Infrastructure, recognises that safe and proper school infrastructure is a critical part of ensuring quality education, along with other important factors such as teacher training and support, curriculum, textbooks, school safety and scholar transport. The failure to comply with the Norms and Standards for Public School Infrastructure undermines the right to education. Minister Motshekga and the Education MECs must ensure that this right is realised!

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