

School infrastructure crisis a huge challenge, reveals report

A NEWLY released plan has revealed the extent of infrastructure backlogs at Western Cape schools with classroom shortages at 53 schools, 700 toilets needed at 96 schools and nearly 500 schools having no access to a sports field.

The Western Cape Education Department's proposed strategy to tackle these backlogs at public schools was published on

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Friday and showed that the province has:

- 207 schools which were built with inappropriate materials.

- 54 schools with no perimeter fencing.
- 496 schools with no access to a sport field.

- 830 schools with no access to a school laboratory.

- 165 schools with no access to a school library/media centre.

- 149 classrooms needed at 53 schools.

- A shortfall of 746 toilets at 96 schools.

According to the document, 1 455 schools had participated in a survey in the first quarter of 2014 and information from databases and other sources were also used to determine the backlogs.

Jessica Shelver, spokeswoman for Education MEC Debbie Schäfer, said the department was concerned about the backlogs.

"The main problem is in respect of

replacement schools. It is simply not possible to achieve the replacement within the time frames set, in terms of budget but also in terms of capacity.

"The time frame set for replacement - three years - was quite frankly not remotely achievable."

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PRIORITY: Umyezo wama Apile combined school in Grabouw is overcrowded.

PICTURE BRENTON GEACH

School infrastructure crisis

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The document said it was estimated that to eliminate all the current backlogs at schools an average of R377 million per annum would be required.

"No additional budget has been provided by national government."

Shelver said this meant funding had to come from existing budgets and that other priorities, such as maintenance and new schools had to be "geared back".

Not all the schools where backlogs have been identified will be included in the planned upgrades. Excluded categories of schools include those on leased properties and, in some cases, schools with fewer than 250 pupils.

The department said it intends to "consolidate these small schools into bigger schools which will offer a richer curriculum and assist with the eradication of multi-grade teaching".

There are 277 schools on leased properties while 323 schools have fewer than 250 pupils, 210 of which are on

leased properties.

The department was, however, looking at options such as mobile classrooms and other mobile facilities for these schools.

The 207 schools built with inappropriate materials include schools where asbestos, wood or metal was used and 72 of these schools will be prioritised in the current three-year budget and the target for the completion of the remaining schools was 2025.

The infrastructure implementation plans of all nine provinces were scheduled to be published on Friday.

Provinces are required to provide the basic education minister with these plans on an annual basis in terms of the regulations relating to minimum norms and standards for public school infrastructure.

These regulations set out what physical infrastructure and services all schools should have and the timeframes for their provision.

The regulations were released in

November 2013, a few months after advocacy group Equal Education secured a court order compelling the Department of Basic Education to promulgate such regulations.

This month, Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga said a submission would be made to National Treasury, indicating the cost implications of the implementation of the regulations, "and to consider soliciting additional funding to implement the regulations".

On Friday, Equal Education general secretary Brad Brockman said the group would have to review all nine provincial plans before commenting on it.

Earlier he had said that having access to the plans would allow schools to know if and when they were scheduled to be upgraded.

"This is important as many schools in very poor conditions have no idea when government intends to fix them. It is important that communities be able to monitor the implementation of the norms and standards."