

Winnie shocked at putrid state of school loos

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ANC STALWART Winnie Madikizela-Mandela was shocked when she saw the state of ablution facilities pupils of Polonia Primary School at Mmakau Village near Ga-Rankuwa have to use.

The school's toilet facilities have been dysfunctional for at least six years. The pit toilets, which are said to have been built in the 1960s, have cracked walls, smell terribly and are overflowing with faeces.

New toilets were built at the school, but the septic tank was too small and could not accommodate waste from the large number of pupils. The toilets got blocked within the first day of usage after being opened. The new toilets were, however, clean yesterday when the school was visited.

The situation was brought into the spotlight by the National Association of School Governing Bodies, with Trevor Mulaudzi, president of the South African Water and Sanitation Academy after they had seen worms falling from the blocked toilet seats which the children were still using.

After having exhausted all avenues without any success, they wrote to Madikizela-Mandela's office asking for assistance.

In their letter, they highlighted the dangers the pupils were exposed to as they would sit on the very same seats to relieve themselves



Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, centre, on her visit to Polonia Primary School at Mmakau Village near Ga-Rankuwa.

PICTURE: OUPA MOKOENA

and then have to deal with worms. the chairwoman of the Ga-Rankuwa branch, Nomonde Bozwane, was in tears as she explained the dire situation at the school.

"When it rains, the worms are like flowers on the floor and the children are forced to walk all over them. Children's health and safety are at risk," Bozwane said.

She said she tried to speak to the North West Department of Education in January to have the situation rectified but her pleas fell on deaf ears. She went to the depart-

ment with a team from the school. They were promised mobile toilets following day and they should lock the filthy toilets, but that never happened.

"That was on January 22 and the director of infrastructure development, Mr Jacobs, promised us that the following day they would deliver temporary toilets until the situation was better, but that never happened. He then called me to say I should never call his office again," she said.

The team then approached the

Human Rights Commission to lodge a case and it is alleged that it was only then that four mobile toilets were delivered to the school to serve at least 400 pupils.

Madikizela-Mandela, who visited the school yesterday in her personal capacity and as a mother, could not enter the toilets.

When the Pretoria News went inside, the team was met by a strong stench and faeces on the floor and in the clogged toilet bowls.

She said she was shocked when she received the letter detailing the situation at the school.

"It is just inconceivable that children are subjected to such unhealthy, unhygienic conditions and prominent people like Patrice Motsepe come from this area... We have to admit that somehow we have failed our children," she said.

Madikizela-Mandela said she was disturbed that the area was near Pretoria, on the doorstep of the Department of Human Settlements' head office.

She lambasted the situation and admitted that finances were made available to tackle the problem but the money never reached the needy places.

"I really do not understand what has gone wrong; we have to admit that somehow we have failed our children. This is a universal problem. I have travelled throughout the country and it is such a tragedy that money that is allocated for

sanitation never seems to actually get there.

"Somehow we have a serious problem with delivery and our greatest problem is implementation of policies we enact in Parliament," she said.

Madikizela-Mandela was joined by former minister of public works Gwen Mahlangu-Nkabinde and a team from Lateral Unison Risk Services - a company where Madikizela-Mandela is a non-executive director.

Manager for corporate social investment, Motlatsi Letsela, said they had come to see how they could assist the school.

"I have never seen such a thing in my life. This is a crisis for all of us. We can no longer say it's a problem for government - but for us all," he said.

North West Department of Education spokesman Paul Ntlatleng yesterday told the Pretoria News they did not have anyone by the name of Mr Jacobs in their department and that it was impossible for toilets at school to be dysfunctional for such a long time.

"It cannot be. Normally there would be inspections and the school would be closed for non-compliance," he said.

The Pretoria News, however, contacted Mr Jacobs who referred all inquiries to the communications team. He said he was not at liberty to divulge any information.