

Pretoria — Public Works Deputy Minister Jeremy Cronin says the appointment of 330 Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) non-teaching staff at 209 schools across Nelson Mandela Bay will contribute to the stability of schools in the municipality.

The move, the Deputy Minister said, will also alleviate poverty and unemployment in the metro.

Deputy Minister Cronin launched the EPWP Metro-wide Schools Ambassadors Programme at Helevale Recreational Centre in Port Elizabeth.

The Deputy Minister said the programme will enable teachers to focus on delivering quality education to learners in a safer environment.

The programme will provide work opportunities for 330 community members.

"The participants will be responsible for a range of duties at schools, including providing general maintenance work, cleaning, providing security and general administration work.

"The programme is critical as it will ensure that teachers no longer have to perform administrative work that takes them away from their core teaching duties. It will also ensure that the process of learning and teaching occurs in a safer environment," Deputy Minister Cronin said.

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"This is not a ... short-term programme for some narrow short-term political process. We want to run this programme in an efficient and sustainable manner. We are not making any promises but we must all work together to make this programme sustainable."

The work opportunities created through the programmes contribute to the overall target of creating over six million work opportunities by 2019.

In recent years, some schools in Nelson Mandela Bay have been plagued by problems of gang violence, drugs, vandalism and shortage of staff, particular non-teaching staff.

The EPWP Metro-wide Schools Support Programme is an initiative of the Department of Public Works, Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality, Eastern Cape Department of Education, as well as the Independent Development Trust (IDT).

At the launch ceremony, Deputy Minister Cronin was joined by the Executive Mayor of the Metropolitan Municipality, Danny Jordaan, MEC for Roads and Public Works Thandiswa Marawu, MEC for Education Mandla Makupula and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the IDT, Johan Pakade.

All the political heads emphasised that the programme was the outcome of cooperation of all three spheres of government.

Mayor Jordaan said the programme would address two critical issues in the municipality -- jobs and quality education.

"There are two things that people want - a job for himself or herself and education for his or her children. These are the two fundamental things that all of us want.

"The EPWP Metro-wide Schools Ambassadors will contribute a lot in the provision of these two important needs. We are truly happy about the launch of this programme and I congratulate all the participants who have been appointed to this programme," Mayor Jordaan said.

#### Skills development

The participants will receive theory, practical and experiential learning while serving in the programme. It is envisaged that some of the participants will be empowered with skills to pursue employment in the open job market or pursue self-employment.

Pakade said the launch of the programme was "a historical moment for the people of Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality".

"Today we are witnessing what government has always spoken about -- partnerships among our people."

Both MECs Marawu and Makupula hailed the launch of the programme.

"This programme will contribute to our wider strategies to tackle challenges facing our schools," MEC Makupula said.

The programme is one of several EPWP initiatives to alleviate poverty and unemployment in Nelson Mandela Bay.

Last week, Mayor Jordaan unveiled 20 new trucks linked to the Water Ambassador Programme to address water leaks.

Another initiative is 'Sophakama' in KwaZakhele township. It is a non-profit organisation that employs about five volunteer caregivers who work with the local clinics to care for patients.

The NPO employs over 273 caregivers, mainly women.

Speaking on behalf of the participants, Kenneth Mlungiseleli thanked government for the opportunity.

"The wages we are receiving through this programme help us to look after our loved ones. EPWP has removed us from the streets and gave us opportunities to work.

"Today our families no longer go to bed hungry. Others may see our wages as being little but to us, the wages give us life. We truly thank the government for EPWP," he said.