
KZN behind only E. Cape with pit toilets at schools

JANET HEARD

SINCE December, it has been illegal for pupils to not have access to basic infrastructure such as water, electricity and sanitation, yet 4 624 schools in the country have pit toilets.

Pupils in the Eastern Cape are most affected by shoddy delivery of basic infrastructure, with 1 585 schools relying on pit toilets. Described as a serial offender, the province also has 61 schools with no toilets and 58 schools functioning without water.

KwaZulu-Natal has 1 379 schools with pit toilets and Limpopo 932.

These figures were revealed by Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga in a written parliamentary reply this week.

In the Free State, there are 196 schools with pit toilets, 23 schools with no water and five schools with no toilets.

Mpumalanga has 392 schools with pit toilets, the North-West 130 and Northern Cape 10. The only provinces not listed with pit toilets are the Western Cape and Gauteng.

Motshekga also listed about 1 000 schools that have been built with inappropriate materials such as wood, mud, asbestos and zinc. Again, the Eastern Cape provides the poorest service, with 800-odd schools listed. The Western Cape has 129 inappropriately built schools, Free State 18, Mpumalanga 16, North West 5, Gauteng 20 and Northern Cape 31. There are no listings for KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo.

When it comes to electricity, the worst-performing province is KwaZulu-Natal, with 343 schools without power, 187 schools in the Eastern Cape, 25 in Free State, 13 in Mpumalanga and three in North West.

Some of the statistics are similar to figures provided by Motshekga in November last year ahead of the department reaching its crunch deadline to pro-

vide basic services to meet minimum uniform norms and standards or face litigation. In the minister's reply this week, two bulky annexures are provided with reams of names of all the affected schools.

The DA MP who asked the parliamentary question, Nomsa Marchesi, said the minister's replies were alarming. "The Eastern Cape in particular is a serial offender. We have had schools with inappropriate structures for a long time, and this infringes on the rights of pupils. It is inexcusable, irresponsible and now also illegal."

She plans to ask further questions around budgetary allocations to provinces for the erection of properly-built buildings because it was clear that targets were not being met.

In follow-up media queries to the minister, her spokesperson Elijah Mhlanga said that pit toilets were a reality "that will be with us for a long time to come".

The challenge went beyond resources and they were monitoring progress and providing support to ensure that the department complied with the legal requirement to supply basic infrastructure to all schools.

Tshepo Motsepe, general secretary of Equal Education (EE), which is taking the minister to court in a bid to hold her accountable to ensure that all schools have basic infrastructure, said there was a tendency for the department to use the blame game when explaining infrastructural failures. "We want the minister to be liable, to take responsibility and not shift the blame to contractors or the Department of Public Works. It is not good enough."

A court date in the Bhisho High Court has not yet been set.

Three years ago, Motshekga published regulations for improving schools with deadlines set for minimum norms and standards to be met.

Since November 29, schools that still do not comply are violating the law and individual schools may litigate against the minister or provincial ministers to get their schools fixed. Motsepe said to date, no school had filed a case.