

# School closures go ahead

The department is rationalising 1902 dysfunctional schools with low enrolment numbers

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ABOUT 697 small Eastern Cape schools are to be closed by the department of education and pupils moved to bigger schools by the end of this year as part of the rationalisation programme.

In an attempt to improve the quality of education, the department announced in 2012 its intention to close 2077 schools with very low enrolment figures and merge them with bigger ones for effective schooling.

Department spokesperson Mali-bongwe Mtima says the process of the rationalisation of schools is ongoing and the department is still consulting with stakeholders.

"A total of 1902 schools are in the process of being rationalised," Mtima said.

Scholar transport is not guaranteed for the pupils affected by the merge but the construction of hostels will be proposed in instances where schools are too far away for the children to travel to.

Mtima said this was a very emotional process for some community members because some of the schools being closed carry a lot of history and the legacy of its people.

Equal Education spokesperson Mila Kakaza said central to this plan of school rationalisation and realignment is to have functional and productive schools.

"School rationalisation and realignment is aimed at reducing the number of schools with few pupils or large dysfunctional schools through closing or merging a total of 1902 schools.

"Equal Education supports the province's school rationalisation and realignment, if it is done in a consultative democratic manner and is aimed at fixing schools and realising deadlines



**BETTER INFRASTRUCTURE :** Pupils from smaller schools in the Eastern Cape will be moved to bigger and better resourced schools as part of the rationalisation programme in the province.

outlined by the norms and standards for school infrastructure," Kakaza.

Kakaza said a proper consultation process must be completed in alignment with the South African Schools Act (84 of 1996) in which the MEC may close public schools after public hearings and due consideration.

After the consultation process and school closure is complete, all assets and liabilities of the school go back to the department of public works and those structures can be used as resource centres for districts.

Earlier this year community members, parents and teachers in areas where schools are being rationalised and realigned complained about a lack of consultation and community engaged

approach from the department.

The department gave the assurance that teachers, principals and support staff would not lose their jobs during the process.

Mtima said the department will go the extra mile to ensure pupils are not stranded.

He says parents move their children to the best performing schools and the other schools don't have enough pupils to function.

He says if a high school has fewer than 200 pupils and a primary school has fewer than 135 pupils, there is a high likelihood it will be rationalised.

"We want to provide public quality education with the equivalent ratio for teachers and pupils," Mtima said.

"Teachers cannot be overworked and quality education expected."

Transport MEC Weziwe Tikana said the budget for the increased need for scholar transport will only come from savings from the efficiency of school rationalisation.

"The implications of closure, merger and realignment of schools has escalated the demand from last year's 98 000 pupils to 114 000 pupils who are now in need of scholar transport," Tikana said.

With the increased need for scholar transport due to the rationalisation plan, Equal Education is concerned that the departments of education and transport are failing to plan adequately for the province's pupils.

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