

School vacant, vandalised



PATSY BEANGSTROM
NEWS EDITOR

CONCERN has been expressed about Redirile Primary School in Seochoareng Street, which has been severely vandalised after the school was closed several years ago.

The Northern Cape Department of Education indicated yesterday that the school building would be reopened as an English medium primary school in the 2019 academic year.

"The school was initially closed due to a decrease in pupil numbers and proved to be not viable for the department," department spokesperson, Geoffrey van der Merwe, said yesterday.

"However, we are experiencing a sharp increase in requests for English medium schooling, especially in the Frances Baard District. Reparation work to this building will commence early next year and this school will definitely release some of the pressure that we are experiencing in the Kimberley area," Van der Merwe said.

However, members of the public have questioned why the department allowed the building to "go to wrack and ruin".

"Initially, when the school was first closed, there was a guard stationed at the school and everything was fine. However, the guard has been withdrawn and the building has been allowed to be vandalised, at a great loss to the community and taxpayer," a member of the public said yesterday.

He added that the situation also posed a security risk to the neighbourhood as criminals could use the old building for their activities.

"The building is really an eyesore. The gates are open and part of the fence has been pulled down. There are no doors left and the windows have been smashed. Even the ceiling boards have been pulled

down.

"There is almost nothing left of the infrastructure."

He pointed out that a house on the premises, which was used as accommodation, had also been left unoccupied by the department.

"This too has been vandalised. All this infrastructure has gone to waste and one day we will hear about a body being found here because criminals will move in and take over – if they haven't already."

He appealed to the department to step in and salvage whatever infrastructure could still be saved.

Several government-owned properties in Kimberley have been abandoned and left to deteriorate into slums, including several houses in Memorial Road, which were initially used by the Department of Education.

Almost a year ago, the DA queried the status of the houses, including whether there was any plan to renovate, utilise and secure the properties in question.

"The houses are not only an eyesore and are negatively affecting property values in the area, but are also placing local residents at increased risk of crime," Melinda Hattlingh, the DA's provincial spokeswoman for Roads and Public Works, said at the time.

According to the Department of Roads and Public Works' spokesperson, Crystal Robertson, the department, as the custodian of all immovable property, handed the houses in Memorial Street to the Department of Health for the purpose of accommodating doctors and nurses.

"As government we take cognisance of the concerns of the public. We assure the public that the Department of Roads and Public Works and the Department of Health are working collaboratively to determine the way forward in terms of these state houses," Robertson said at the time.

However, there has still been no progress on the houses, to the concern of nearby residents, who pointed out that the houses had been left to become dilapidated ruins, which were attracting vandals and thieves.

The resident questioned why houses, belonging to the government, were left to stand vacant and become dilapidated, while millions of rands every month was being spent on renting office space or building new offices.

"Just a few houses away are the semi-detached cottages, which were built by Cecil John Rhodes in the 1890s to accommodate the Viennese philharmonic orchestra, that have also been left to rot away. The cottages also belong to the Department of Health.

"We are expected to pay hefty rates and taxes to live in this residential area but the value of our properties are dropping because of the eyesore that these houses have become," a resident said.

"They also attract vandals, as well as criminals."

RUINED:
Concern has been expressed about Redirile Primary School which has been severely vandalised after the school was closed several years ago. Ceiling boards have been ripped out while most of the doors have been removed.

Picture:
Soraya Crowie

