



The Belfrost Primary School in oThongathi, which has been closed by the Education Department, has been vandalised.

PICTURE: DOCTOR NGCOBO/AFRICAN NEWS AGENCY (ANA)

# Criminals ransack closed schools

Nathi Olifant

KWAZULU-NATAL schools that have been closed and abandoned due to the department's transformation of the schooling system geared at consolidating and eliminating small, satellite and mud schools have fallen prey to criminal elements.

In last year's budget speech, KwaZulu-Natal Education MEC Mthandeni Dlungwana said the department had been able to consolidate or merge 171 non-viable and satellite schools, streamline typologies of 121 schools and finalise the change of 51 school names.

The department still has 865 schools to rationalise – 664 primary and 201 secondary schools. This would be done in phases until completion this month.

The DA's Rishigen Viranna said that during an oversight visit last week to oThongathi's now abandoned Belfrost Primary school and its neighbour Trubel Primary School, he had found that the schools had been vandalised.

## Complaints

Viranna said they had received complaints about Belfrost's infrastructure vandalism and they found that doors, windows, roofs, toilets, pipes and manholes had been severely vandalised while the library, which was fully stocked with books and resources, had been ransacked.

"This is a shameful situation when there are other local schools that could have benefited from these items. The DA also found that the school prop-

erty has become a place where truant learners from the local high school hide from authorities," he said.

Both the departments of Public Works and Education should have come up with a plan to make use of the abandoned infrastructure, he said.

"All good and well to close the school but it would seem these departments do not collaborate on this. Normally desks, posters and books are left behind, things that could be very useful to other struggling schools," said Viranna.

They had written to KwaZulu-Natal Public Works MEC Ravi Pillay calling for his immediate intervention to rectify the current situation.

"We also tabled a motion calling on the MEC to urgently investigate selling or handing the Belfrost Primary School

property over to willing investors.

"The DA believes that there is an opportunity to transform this abandoned property into a job creation initiative in the Tongaat area," he said.

Pillay confirmed yesterday he was aware of the issue.

"We are engaging the Department of Education for the release of the property (Belfrost).

"It will be part of a programme of several other schools that are not used or severely under-utilised that we wish to put to other uses. There are at least three other schools in other areas, including Chatsworth," said Pillay.

Provincial education spokesperson Muzi Mahlabi said the process of dealing with the transformation system was ongoing.