

Five pupils share a desk

School falls apart as Bhisho drags heels on promised new building

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Atwell Madala High School in Mthatha is so overcrowded that up to five children are crammed into a single desk.

In some classrooms, teachers have to stand close to the door as there are up to 90 pupils inside. The toilets are filthy and pupils have to relieve themselves out in the open.

Ceilings in some classes are starting to fall down piece by piece and prefab structures have holes in the floor.

Angry parents at the school have lashed out at education bosses for putting the lives of their children at risk by failing to honour a promise to build them a proper school.

Atwell Madala school governing body chair Ndoyisile Fudumele said the building was nearly 40 years old. Since the school started operating in 1980, the year after it was built, the buildings had never been maintained.

"We were promised a new school," said Fudumele. "Since there was never major maintenance, almost all the roofs are leaking. Ceilings are falling in every classroom. Even as pupils are writing exams, water leaks onto them."

The school has about 1,800 pupils. Three years ago it was identified as needing to undergo the state rationalisation programme, which saw grades 8 and 9 moved from junior secondary to high school.

Afterwards, it was provided with prefab structures to cater for the influx. Fudumele said the prefabs were starting to rot now, placing their children at



NOT CONDUSIVE: Pupils have to dodge holes in their classroom floor and endure the chill and damp that they let in. Picture: ZIYANDA ZWENI

huge risk. "There are huge gaping holes in the floor. In winter those structures are too cold and on warm days, too hot."

Principal Yalelwa Mfecane said according to the national department's policy and its norms and standards, a class was supposed to be no more than 40 pupils per teacher.

She declined to comment on the state of the school.

Deputy SGB chair Nobanzi Mcinga revealed that the school had no proper fencing. Last year, 20 tablet computers were stolen when thieves broke in.

Mcinga said the school had 40 toilets for pupils but not a single one is usable.

"They are all clogged up, meaning the pupils have to relieve themselves outside in the open."

The parents showed the Daily Dispatch a letter from the department of roads and public works which indicated that R81m would be spent on building a new school in 2016.

It stated that a contractor had already been appointed.

However, the parents claimed when they enquired

about it last year, they were informed the contract had lapsed and a new one would have to be drawn up.

Roads and public works spokesperson Vuyokazi Mbanjwa said an appointment letter had already been drafted with regard to the construction of the school.

"What we are waiting for is the department of education to confirm funds for the project," she said.

Provincial education spokesperson Malibongwe Mtima confirmed that public works

was the implementing agent.

He said a construction contractor was appointed in December. "Public works is waiting for budget confirmation from education because it is a requirement from Treasury," he explained, adding that a high-level letter detailing why the education department needed to do that had been forwarded by public works to education SG Themba Kojana on June 18. All that was now required was for him to sign the letter so that work on building the school could start.