

Construction at schools halted due to non-payment

"Hundreds of learners in Graaff-Reinet have been left in the lurch as critical upgrades to their schools have ground to a halt, because the Department of Public Works has failed to pay service providers for more than a year," said Shadow MEC for Public Works, Vicky Knoetze, this week.

According to Knoetze, contractors, sub-contractors and consultants who were tasked with the upgrades at the Lincoln and Asherville schools have abandoned the sites after not being paid for 15 months, with many being forced to retrench workers, as they are owed in excess of R4.2 million.

"Children are forced to use overcrowded, dilapidated classrooms, while the adjacent work site stands vacant," said Knoetze.

"The incomplete building sites are a safety hazard for the learners, who can only imagine what the facilities would have been like, had they ever been completed."

The DA's chief whip in Graaff-Reinet, Eldan Carolus, recently paid a visit to these schools to investigate the matter. "The bathrooms aren't in any state to be used and other sections of the renovations have dangerous electrical wiring dangling all over the place," said Carolus.

He described the state of affairs as a "a disaster waiting to happen".

"The conditions at these schools are

definitely not conducive to a good learning environment and answers from the Department of Education and the MEC for Education in the Eastern Cape is now long overdue and desperately needed," said Carolus.

According to Knoetze, the Democratic Alliance has investigated the matter and has been informed that the Department of Public Works has been acting as the implementing agent on behalf of the Department of Education, who has failed to transfer the necessary funds to Public Works.

"At the heart of this issue is poor planning, poor budgeting and fundamental issues in terms of intergovernmental relations. And, while these departments point fingers at each other, the community continues to suffer.

"It is fundamentally unfair to learners and school staff, as well as to the service providers and community members that were retrenched as a result," Knoetze said.

Knoetze has since written to the MEC of Public Works, Pemmy Majodina to urgently intervene, and to ensure that funds are collected from the Department of Education so that these projects can resume and be completed.

The Department of Education was approached for comment, but, at the time of going to print, had not responded.



Bathrooms are in a horrific state.



Dangerous damaged electrical wiring on the ground.



Damaged plumbing.



A non-functional urinal.

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