

Stop the bickering and build schools as promised

It is no secret that our province has the biggest backlog of proper school infrastructure. As highlighted in the recent Equal Education report, we have 197 schools without water, while 53 have no toilets and another 2,127 use pit toilets. Then there are 245 others without electricity.

Therefore it is disheartening to learn that there are 37 school-building projects that have stalled due to non-payment – as contractors and consultants were owed R113m by the government.

Responding to a question in the provincial legislature, public works MEC Pemmy Majodina blamed the education department for the delay, saying that they had not paid over the funds to her department, as the “implementing agent”.

Majodina said the builders and consultants would only be paid once funds had been received from the education department.

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According to the service level agreement (SLA) between the two departments, public works pays the contractors on behalf of their education counterparts. The education department then reimburses public works whatever is owed to them.

Majodina’s response has elicited an angry retort from the education department, which accused public works of presenting “half truths” on the matter.

Today, we report that the the department of education has issued an ultimatum to public works to either comply with the requirements of the SLA or lose out on the projects. The bickering between the two departments is not only unnecessary, but it should not come at the expense of service delivery.

Already the national department of basic education has missed its own deadline to improve school infrastructure standards by 2016.

The norms and standards for South African school infrastructure were adopted in 2013.

That we still have schools lacking the most basic amenities is not only embarrassing but also infringes on the basic rights of pupils and teachers.

However, it is reassuring to hear that both departments have since resolved the issue and the outstanding money will soon be paid over to the contractors. The power and ego trips between government departments should never inconvenience teachers and pupils, who are already struggling at the affected schools.

We need less bickering and more service delivery.