



Marchers protest about the conditions at Asherville Secondary and Lingcom Primary schools.

SCHOOLS UPDATE

‘Construction to resume in the new year’

In a meeting held with representatives of the Department of Public Works on 13 November, Ward 5 councillor Glenda Mackelina was assured that construction would resume on Asherville Secondary and Lingcom Primary schools in the new year.

The professional team for the project was appointed in 2015, and construction got underway in March this year. Payments were received for the professional services on a regular basis up until April 2017, when payments stopped.

In May, the architects notified the relevant departments that they would suspend their services if payment was not received forthwith, and at the end of June, the architects walked off site.

The other professionals followed soon after. Around the middle of August, the contractors had no option but to stop working, as they had run out of information as to what needed to be done next, due to the professionals leaving the site.

Despite local rumours to the contrary, the contractors had in fact been paid fully up until the time that they were forced to stop work on 22 August, according to the architects. For some of those involved, including the architect and the rest of the professional team, no payment was received for over 18 months. The main contractor has now been paid, and this should soon filter down so that local subcontractors can be paid. In the meantime, since August, the contractors have had to lay off workers.

“Apart from the devastating impact on the professional team and contractors, the children, teachers and the community are suffering the consequences of gross non-compliance,” said architect Albrecht Herholdt.

The situation at the schools now is untenable. Lingcom Primary buildings are very old prefabs, and the structure is literally falling apart. According to Cllr Mackelina, the front two parts of the building were broken off back in March, and now the building is open to the elements.

“The school is on

the mountain, and we are worried that the children may be bitten by snakes,” she said. “There are also strong winds, and unbearable heat, all of which is making it very difficult for the children, especially now in exam time” she continued. “The buildings and construction site are a safety hazard for the learners, with exposed electrical wiring, iron rods sticking up, and they do not understand the dangers”.

According to Shadow MEC for Public Works, Vicky Knoetze, the Democratic Alliance has investigated this 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, which has failed to transfer the necessary funds to Public Works.

"At the heart of this issue are 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," concluded Knoetze. In a late development on Tuesday afternoon, Herholdt contacted the Graaff-Reinet Advertiser with the news that he had been informed by the Eastern Cape Treasury that the payments to all the consultants had been approved, and should be paid next week.

This is very reassuring news for all involved, and it is hoped that last week’s promises will now be honoured and work can continue in January, to give the communities the facilities they deserve.

Many members of the community of Kroonvale marched to the Department of Education’s district offices in Graaff-Reinet on 27 September in protest of the conditions at the two schools, where Cllr Mackelina and PR councillor Daniel Williams handed over a memorandum to Nicky de Bruyn, office manager at the Department of Education’s district office in Graaff-Reinet.