

WHY R130M SCHOOL UPGRADE STALLED

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Where is the money? That is the million-dollar question in the minds of Gamble Street High School staff teaching in overcrowded classrooms, after R130m earmarked for renovations has failed to materialise.

In March 2018, provincial education spokesperson Loyiso Pulumani said R130m had been budgeted for upgrades to the school.

The figure was confirmed in July by another education spokesperson, Malibongwe Mtima, who said the project was in the process of going out to tender.

However, when asked on January 9 about the progress of the project, Pulumani said: "There is no major project at Gamble Street."

The project is the second multimillion-rand plan for the school which has failed to get off the ground, with the school yet to see a cent of the initial R6m earmarked for renovations in 2011.

On Thursday, Mtima

changed his tune, saying: "Yes, there is a R130m plan but currently it's not funded."

The school suffered a further blow in August 2017 when a fire broke out on the second floor of the girls' hostel.

"Funds are being sourced in the meantime to conform with political instructions to deal with the [school] and the hostel issue there," Mtima said.

This contradicts Mtima's statement in July, when he said that all the necessary paperwork for the R130m upgrade had been completed by the Independent Development Trust (the implementing agent for the project) and the department of public works, with tendering and committee selection scheduled to follow.

On Thursday, he said the R130m had to be reprioritised to attend to schools damaged in other parts of the province due to adverse weather conditions late in 2018.

But Gamble Street principal Anne Radcliffe and teacher William Human – the school building committee chair – said the issues had arisen well be-

fore 2018. They said they had been sent from pillar to post since 2012, all the while hoping for something to come of "all the broken promises".

Human said that for at least the last three years he had, on numerous occasions, made inquiries at the district offices.

Sometimes he was told the

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William Human

GAMBLE TEACHER

school was on the list for renovations and other times he was told it was not.

He said the initial plan – to renovate the condemned boys' and girls' hostels and construct a new school wing with 24 classrooms – had fallen by the wayside.

Pulumani said previously that the department had never allocated R6m – despite Human showing The Herald building plans and minutes of

meetings held in this regard.

"It is so frustrating. For years we have been fighting for these upgrades, not for ourselves but for the pupils," Human said.

"We can't provide quality education to the school's 1,300 pupils in classrooms built to accommodate 25 people.

"All we get is broken promises. And what's worse is the initial project actually started with the department of public works appointing someone to demolish one of the condemned wings of the school.

"We were then provided with prefab classes to house the pupils temporarily.

"Yet those prefabs are the only thing left of this project as classes are forced to continue in them – the land which was cleared for the project remains as empty as the day they removed the rubble."

District director Ernest Gorgonzola directed all questions to the education department's provincial office.

Speaking at Uitenhage High School on Thursday, education MEC Mlungisi Mvoko said: "I

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