

Special focus on building school facilities

Backlogs in the education system are being eliminated methodically

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Hundreds of projects to tackle classroom and facility backlogs are under way in the Eastern Cape, with billions allocated for the purpose, the Eastern Cape department of education said.

The department noted in its Infrastructure Report for 2018/19 that the 556 projects for which a budget exceeding R6.6-billion is allocated, include basic services projects such as sanitation, water and electricity, classrooms, special schools, hostels and early childhood development centres throughout the province.

Four hundred and sixty-seven of the projects are in the rural parts of the province, in the OR Tambo, Alfred Nzo, Amathole and Chris Hani districts, where school infrastructure and basic services are urgently required. These will cost R4.71-billion, the bulk of the total budget allocated. The rest will be spent in the Buffalo City, Nelson Mandela Metro and Sarah Baartman districts.

Eastern Cape education superintendent-general Themba Kojana said providing adequate infrastructure is integral to delivering quality education.

“It is important to remember that the Eastern Cape has struggled with under-resourced, inadequate and dilapidated infrastructure that has made it difficult to provide the required standard of education to all learners in the province,” Kojana said.

He added that the province still faces a large infrastructure shortage, but is making progress by working hand-in-hand with the national department of education and various implementing agents with the necessary experience, technical expertise and capacity. These include the Eastern



Cape Development Corporation, Coega Development Corporation, the provincial department of public works, IDT, Mvula Trust and the Development Back of South Africa that deliver facilities and basic services in schools.

“The department’s fixed assets include approximately 5 500 operational schools, serving close to 1.8-million learners. About 49% of our assets are in excellent condition; the remaining 51% range from fair (42%) to very poor. Although the state of our infrastructure is not what we hoped for after 24 years of democracy, we are making steady progress in an ongoing effort to raise the standards of schools within the province,” said Kojana.

He said it is estimated that the province still needs billions to eliminate all the backlogs. “We still have severe backlogs

to eliminate before we can rest on our laurels. The estimated backlogs are in the region of R65-billion and the ever-changing needs of our schools are dynamic.”

Director of infrastructure delivery Tsepo Pefole, who joined the department in 2016, said the two critical factors for success are effective management and effective communication among implementing agents.

Infrastructure projects are managed through the Education Facilities Management System (EFMS), a web-based property register and programme management system for education infrastructure developed by the department. The EFMS data repository system was designed for specific use of implementing agents, contractors and consultants to co-ordinate communication with the department.

The system helps the department with

smooth management of projects and building human capacity to manage their implementation.

“We have come a long way these past few years, although there is room for improvement. I am happy to report that we now have a defined centre for infrastructure delivery. We know where we are, which projects we are rolling out, where these projects are located and how much are we spending,” said Pefole.

Zama Mnqanqeni, chief director: physical resource management, said high on the agenda was eliminating mud structures and ensuring that schools are safe environments for children. He added that efforts to eliminate infrastructure backlogs are aligned to the national education department’s Accelerated Schools Infrastructure Delivery Initiative.