

Parents dig in over schools

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Parents and members of school governing bodies in the northern areas say they will not rest until the department of education meets their demands for a new high school to be built in the area and for a permanent structure to be built for Alfonso Arries primary school.

The department, however, says it simply does not have the money to do so at present.

Booyesen Park community leader and parent Simpiwe Waka said the department had met residents from Ward 29 on Friday after a protest outside the district offices on February 6, but they were even unhappier afterwards.

The protests were aimed at highlighting overcrowding at Booyesen Park schools, including Booyesen Park, Cedarberg, Sapphire Road and Alfonso Arries primary schools.

Waka, who has four children in schools in the area, said as far as the community understood, a site had been allocated for the building of a high school and Alfonso Arries.

He said the parents would not accept the department's excuses as the school was meant to be built in 2015.

"We are fighting a war... construction of the school was rolled out in 2015 when the site was identified," Waka said.

Alfonso Arries has 1,695 pupils enrolled for 2019 and according to the department's

teacher-to-pupil ratio of one teacher for every 35 pupils, it should have 49 teachers.

"There are currently 36 teachers, including the principal and the deputy, who teach a minimum of four classes."

Waka said one of the biggest headaches involved children at the school who did not have identity documents. The department does not cater for undocumented children.

"These are learners that we have fought to be absorbed by the school regardless of them not having birth certificates," a frustrated Waka said.

Education department spokesperson Malibongwe Mtima said on Friday there were no funds available for construction of a permanent

structure for Alfonso Arries or extension to Cedarberg.

He said the building could not be done this financial year.

"However, the department will follow up on this matter as there are matters to be resolved first between the department of education and public works.

"As a result, all projects that are in the planning or starting stage are on hold due to insufficient funds."

He said an agreement had been reached that the schools list pupils without ID documents so the department could rope in officials from home affairs to help.

On Monday, he did not respond to questions about Friday's meeting and the concerns the parents had raised.