

Buck passing over school sewage mess

STAFF REPORTER

THE PARENTS of pupils at Pescodia Primary School barricaded the roads around the school with burning tyres and rocks yesterday morning and have threatened to close the school until the sewage problem is sorted out.

Responsibility, meanwhile, to fix the problem is being tossed around with both the Sol Plaatje Municipality and the Department of Education pointing fingers at each other, while absolving themselves.

"The sewage problem at Pescodia is not a departmental problem," Department of Education spokesperson Lehuma Ntuane said yesterday.

"This issue must be raised with the municipality as the problem emanates from the sewerage pipe network of Roodepan township. The parents know about this and the school knows that as well."

Municipal spokesperson Sello Matsie said, however, that although the municipality had sent a team out to unblock the pipes at the school, the problem was with the Department of Public Works. "It is their pump that is not working," Matsie said.

Frustrated and angry parents, many holding placards, gathered outside the school's premises yesterday and demanded that permanent solutions be found to the overflowing sewage at the school.

"Exams start soon but the children are all sick because of the bad

smell and the situation here at the school," one parent said yesterday.

"Every time someone flushes the toilet the contents come back up and flood the floor, while the drain outside is also always overflowing with foul-smelling green sewage water. As a result, this sewage water floods the grounds outside. Sometimes it is so bad that the water flows into the classrooms and the children cannot even use the sports grounds because of the sewage water lying around.

"This is not a new problem – we have been struggling with the sewage for more than five years and each time the department comes up with another temporary solution. We are tired of temporary solutions – we want a permanent solution to the problem," the parent added.

He said the parents had a meeting with the district director from the Department of Education. "According to the department, the Department of Public Works should have started work laying new pipes to redirect the sewage to Midlands. The existing pipes are broken and cannot cope. However, it is already May and no contractor has been appointed and instead we are still sitting with the same problem."

The parents stated that they met as a parent body on Tuesday night. "A decision was taken to protest to get officials to address the issue. If nothing is done we will close down the school."

Yesterday, parents waited for



FED UP: Pescodia Primary School parents protested outside the school yesterday.

Picture: **Danie van der Lith**

more than two hours before an official from the Department of Education arrived. "They know about the problem and that the parents are protesting outside the school but they are choosing to ignore us. It is our children who are suffering."

One parent pointed out that children as young as six years old were developing infections as a result of the situation.

"There are more than 1 000 pupils at this school. When we complain, the municipality sends someone out to unblock the drains but with so many pupils it blocks up again within a matter of hours. The municipality needs to accept responsibility and unblock the drain on a daily basis and probably a few times every day. They need to be proactive and not reactive by only coming when we call them."

According to the parents, not only are the children sick but so are the teachers. "There are a number of teachers off sick currently. Our children are not being taught because of what is happening."

Another parent said the children were not able to focus on their studies because of the terrible stench of raw sewage which hangs over the area. "My child is sick today. She has diarrhoea and has been vomiting but I have to send her to school because they start exams soon and she cannot miss out on schooling. She has not been able to eat anything or keep any food down."

Other parents said the lunches they packed for the children came home untouched. "Who can eat with this terrible smell?"

"The department is waiting for a child to die before something is done. There are many children attending this school who have asthma, diabetes and other health issues and the situation aggravates their illnesses. If we lose a child at this school, we will burn it down."

Some of the parents requested that portable toilets be provided for the pupils, especially during the period when exams are being written.

"We want portable toilets and these must be cleaned every day. The municipality must appoint a contractor because they are seemingly not capable of providing proper services on a regular basis."

The parents pointed out that

the situation was exactly the same at the high school as well as at the nearby Lovelife Centre. "The centre caters for the youth but they cannot use the facilities or play games there because of the overflowing sewage."

A spokesperson for the parents said that a meeting was held between officials from the Sol Plaatje Municipality and the Department of Education following yesterday's protest action.

"The parents made it very clear that they want the situation regarding the sewage to be fixed once and for all, while they want mobile toilets be supplied in the meantime. If there are no mobile toilets at the school for the children to use by today (Wednesday), we, as the parents, will close down the school, despite the fact that assessments are due to start."

By yesterday afternoon the mobile toilets had not yet been provided.

Spokesperson for the Department of Infrastructure and Public Works, Crystal Robertson, said that Public Works was no longer undertaking maintenance for the Department of Education as this mandate had been taken over by the latter department. "This is therefore an issue between the Department of Education and the Sol Plaatje Municipality."

She added, however, that the sewerage pipe was the responsibility of the municipality to repair and maintain.