

Closed schools to become training centres

The department recently approved a proposal to convert 24 schools

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After years of closing down small unviable schools in the Eastern Cape and not having a plan for the closed structures that often end up being vandalised, the department of education finally has a plan to convert some of them into skills training centres for unemployed youths.

The department recently approved a proposal to convert 24 schools that were closed in the past three years into centres that would offer skills training in sectors such as agriculture and construction.

In 2012 the provincial government introduced the school

rationalisation programme which intended to close schools with very low enrolment figures and merge them with larger ones for more effective schooling.

Initially, the number of schools to be closed was 2,077. Last year the figure was reduced to 1,902 and 616 were reported to be already not operating because there were no pupils.

According to the department, since the programme was implemented in 2013, 113 schools were closed last year, 769 are currently gazetted for closure and 404 will be closed next year.

While the plan was approved and carried out, it became evident there was no plan for the closed structures and some of the schools were reduced to empty shells by vandals.

For the past two years the Dispatch has reported on sev-



STRIPPED: The Vulindlela Technical High School in Mdantsane NU1 has been vandalised, with windows, pipes, the roof and other removable items missing. Picture: MICHAEL PINYANA

eral closed schools that were stripped bare by vandals.

One of the schools is Vulindlela Technical High School in Mdantsane in NU1 that was once considered to be one of the best technical high schools.

Vulindlela stopped operating

in 2017 after it was closed by the department and merged with a neighbouring school.

When the Dispatch visited the school last year, about 50 people were hard at work, breaking down whatever was left of the structure.

At the time, the education and the public works departments were passing the buck on who should be responsible for the closed structure.

On Tuesday, the spokesperson for the education department Malibongwe Mtima said

the proposal to convert 24 of the closed schools in areas including Buffalo City Metro, O R Tambo and Joe Gqabi, was recently approved by education superintended-general Thembisa Kojana.

“The plan is to convert at least two of these schools in each of our 12 districts into training centres,” said Mtima.

The proposal was submitted by the department’s skills development facilitator, Lukhanyo Sidiya, saying her aim was to use the available infrastructure as a place to skill and re-skill unemployed youth to reduce the unemployment rate in the province.

“The centres will focus on skills that enable unemployed youth and graduates to create work opportunities and not to rely on government appointments,” said Sidiya.

According to Sidiya, the

handing over of the school structures was the initial stage and no funding was required.

To fund the centres, Sidiya said the plan was to approach other departments such as public works, agriculture and human settlements to finance the centres from their unemployed youth budget.

“Now that the structures have been released, an inter-governmental task team will be formed to develop a concept document that will have detailed financial implications of each participating department,” said Sidiya.

Sidiya said the next move was to rope in all the skills education training authorities for funding and capacitation.

“We hope to have these centres up and running by next financial year and the plan is to increase the target number from 24,” she said.