

# Action promised on stalled school buildings

## REPORT FROM: P1

Road Committee secretary Wayne Brown said the provincial public works department had initiated the infrastructure project at the school 2½ years ago after declaring that it was too small.

“Our understanding was that they were going to rebuild the whole school.

“We were happy with that. But after about a year, work stopped and since then it has not continued.

“It’s an eyesore and it’s dangerous,” Brown said.

“There are piles of building material and weeds all over and empty spaces between places where they were working but never finished. The property attracts gangsterism.”

He said the department had installed temporary classrooms on the school’s only playing field and this had created its

own problems. “The space for the children to move around in is now reduced and with Covid and the need for social distancing it creates a risk.”

He said even with the temporary classrooms there was insufficient space and this had already had an impact on teaching last year.

“Because of this and the need for social distancing, the grades were rotated coming in at different times.

“It affected teaching and learning.”

The school and the community were also concerned about the safety of the temporary classrooms, Brown said.

“Already there has been a fire there.

“We want to know from the department when will it be continuing with the project and how is it going to ensure there is enough space for the

kids when teaching starts next month.”

At David Livingstone yesterday, staff were busy in classrooms on the east side of the property but the building site on the west side was fenced off, all the gates were locked and there was no sign of any activity.

Scaffolding, piles of building material, half-built structures, excavations and swathes of weeds surrounded the existing brick school building.

A resident in Kohlberg Street on the north side of the school, who did not want to be named, said it was heart-rending to see her alma mater in its current state.

“My neighbour and I both matriculated there in the early ‘80s.

“Our kids did the same.

“You could not get a better school [at the time].

“There were flowers there along the fence.

“It’s heartbreaking to see the way it looks now.”

At Bethelsdorp Comprehensive School, another of the 10 Nelson Mandela Bay schools earmarked in early 2019 for renovation, the construction site was similarly quiet and dotted with abandoned building material and unfinished infrastructure.

Mzuyanda Mtulini, site supervisor for Yikusasa, the construction company contracted by public works, said they had been forced to stop work in April 2019 as they were not being paid.

“We are now waiting for a letter assuring us that the funds are available.”

He said the site was now secure but thieves had in earlier months broken in and stolen piles of materials.

Gqebera Northern Areas Centre for Human Rights, History and Activism head Branton Jonas, a graduate of David Livingstone, said the centre had been working to educate the community on what they could reasonably expect from the project and how to address the challenges they were experiencing.

“More than 1,000 people signed the petition drawn up by the community on this issue and we used our facilities to scan and e-mail it for them to the speaker of the Bhisho legislature.

“We sent it to her because it seems there have been some problems with whose mandate it is to implement the project.

“The speaker has oversight, so both the public works and education MECs should have to respond to our questions.”

The Bay schools infrastruc-

ture upgrade project was launched in early 2019 on the back of a R36.3bn education budget.

By May that year, however, the construction sites had been abandoned.

In September 2019, the education department admitted that its refurbishment and expansion plan was overambitious, and presented a new list of five schools where, it said, it would focus.

These included Mfesane Secondary School in Motherwell, James Ndulula Primary School in Uitenhage, Noninzi Luzipho Primary School in Uitenhage, Bethelsdorp Comprehensive and David Livingstone.

However, education MEC Fundile Gade subsequently announced these projects would be delayed due to an infrastructure backlog.