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# Concern over Kokstad school upgrade

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DESPITE an investment of R65 million on upgrades, pupils and teachers at a rural school in Kokstad have been left without access to running water, among numerous other defects.

These findings were made during a recent oversight conducted by the KwaZulu-Natal public works portfolio committee at Xoloxolo Primary School in Bhongweni, Kokstad.

The inspection was initiated as part of a close-out report based on the auditor-general's recommendation.

Almost a year after the project's completion, critical upgrades remain incomplete.

The absence of grey water left the school reliant on collected water to flush toilets. Furthermore, the school's taps ran dry, leaving pupils and teachers without drinking water.

Additional concerns presented to the committee included substandard workmanship, evidenced by broken stairs, railings and downpipes, and expensive imported locks that are costly to replace.

Moreover, the installation of 3-phase power led to a monthly R15 000 bill, irrespective of usage, burdening the school's budget.

Marlaine Nair, DA spokesperson on Public Works in KZN, decried the department's inaction.

"This school was handed over in August last year. Despite the principal having reported the outstanding issues to KZN's Department of Education, not a single departmental official has come to their aid and not a single issue has been dealt with. Meanwhile, KZN's Department of Public Works has claimed it was not made aware of the problems.

"The only assurance offered by this department was that it had taken a

retainer from the contractor – but could not specify an amount."

She said during the KZN Public Works budget debate earlier this year, the DA had brought up dissatisfaction with the department's poor craftsmanship, even within the province's Human Settlements Department.

The party also drew attention to the lack of efficient systems, enabling defaulting contractors to secure work in different government spheres or municipalities.

Nair accused the ANC-run government of "ticking boxes and spending public money with no intention of producing quality results".

Mlungisi Khumalo, spokesperson for the Department of Public Works said the department acknowledged the water issue previously experienced at Xoloxolo Primary School in Kokstad.

He said prior to the oversight visit conducted this month, the department had no knowledge of the water crisis due to a miscommunication with the Department of Education.

"All major construction projects under the Department of Public Works have a Defect Liability Period which states that for a period of 12 months after completion, the department is still responsible and liable for any defects and challenges with the structure. In this instance the water crisis stemmed from two issues.

"First, a burst pipe. Secondly, nobody at the school knew how to operate the backup system/pump. The water has been up and running from the day of the oversight visit," Khumalo said.

He said that after learning of the problem, the Department of Public Works immediately dispatched and deployed a team.

"The team is currently on site working on resolving the matter," he said.

