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Department: Project expected to conclude in December

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of the findings, to which they initially disagreed.

The matter further escalated when the Mbombela building inspector, Goodman Mokoena, got wind of the situation and inspected the site at the school himself. Mokoena issued a legal notice with the fire prevention officer's report instructing the principal agent to comply with the regulations. The school also communicated the situation to the Mpumalanga Department of Education before the June/July holidays began.

No reply was received by either party at the time.

During the holiday, Impisi General Construction used the excavator, initially intended for demolishing the foundations, to completely demolish the staircase to the foundation phase building.

Concerned about compliance with the legal notice, Laerskool Laeveld inquired about the completion date of the

second staircase, as the school's reopening was imminent. On July 11, Nkuna first mentioned they could not comply with the legal notice. Space challenges were cited as the reason for this. This was the first communication since the notice had been issued more than a month earlier.

In response to the principal agent's message, Laeveld raised critical questions about learner safety and the responsibility of opening the school without proper safety regulations. It proposed three options and insisted on a quick response, but yet again, none was received.

Moreover, another group of engineering consultants that had been appointed in June, proactively responded several weeks before the legal notice and the Fire, Rescue and Emergency Services' report were compiled and issued, and quoted to

erect a temporary emergency staircase in order to prevent a possible legal violation of Act 103. However, its advice was disregarded by the principal agent, Nkuna, and the engineer was told that he should rather 'focus on his mandate'.

The structural engineering consultants, however, went ahead on Monday and erected a temporary fire escape within two days.

At the time of going to press, Nkuna had not responded to Lowvelder's enquiries.

In January, Lowvelder reported that the planned expansion project of Laerskool Laeveld, as was given by the Mpumalanga Department of Education, was finally back on track. According to Laerskool Laeveld, the Department of Public Works had told the school at the time that if everything went as planned, the

building work would be completed by September 30.

The timeline for the project stretches as far back as February 27, 2020. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, its start was postponed until January 2022.

New contractors were

appointed in February.

More than half of the year has passed, and still no foundation has been laid for the construction of the new classrooms.

Bongani Dhlamini, the spokesperson for the Department of Public Works, Roads and Transport, which is responsible for the project, told Lowvelder that it was expected to be completed in December.

According to him, ongoing infrastructure and technical meetings have been held on a monthly basis. Laerskool Laeveld confirmed to the paper that it did not have any knowledge of such meetings.

The construction project and the associated limiting factors are beyond Laerskool Laeveld's control, the school stated - to such an extent that it might be a limiting factor for the school's intake for 2024.

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