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No action to repair crumbling school

Education Department dragging heels despite danger to learners – DA

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IF THE walls of Ferndale Primary School col-lapsed on pupils, parents could hold the Education Department responsible since it had ignored calls to repair the school for almost a year now. This was according to the DA in KwaZulu-Natal.

Speaking to the *Daily News* yesterday, DA spokesperson on education in the legislature Dr Imran Keeka said he had been constantly raising the issue with the department's infrastructure unit but nothing had been done.

He said the unit told him there was no budget for school repairs, which he said was not an acceptable explanation since the unit was failing to prioritise.

Keeka said he had warned the department it would be held responsible for anything that might happen as a result of the department's failure to repair the school.

"The school is near the river whose banks have been flooded a number of times. Slowly the land near the school is being eroded and this is a recipe for disaster, but the department is dragging its feet. The problem is that this department only wants to react to, not prevent, disasters," said Keeka.

Despite almost a year having passed since dangerous infrastructure was identified at the school, the Education and Public Works departments were yet to rectify extremely unsafe conditions for learners and staff, Keeka said. This information formed the basis of a written parliamentary reply by KZN Education MEC Mbali Frazer to questions posed by the DA, he added.

The questions were prompted by a DA oversight inspection in June after numerous complaints from the local community.

Keeka said in her reply the MEC had said the department conducted an

assessment in August last year after massive cracks appeared in pillars, creating the potential to cause instability within the entire structure. Despite being fully aware of the seriousness of the situation, the department and its implementing agent, KZN's Department of Public Works, had dragged their heels.

Keeka said it was now 11 months since the infrastructure dangers were first identified.

Additional work which requires urgent attention includes the ablution facilities, for both boys and girls, which are in a dire state. There is also a mobile classroom – currently used as a Grade R classroom – which still requires repairs.

"At the very least, children require safe and proper infrastructure for a conducive learning environment," said Keeka.

It was only a DA-led government that could rescue pupils from the vicious cycle of poor-quality education and the resulting vicious cycle, Keeka said, adding that the 2024 election would present citizens with the opportunity to save the province.

Frazer said she would get information on the matter, but at the time of going to print she had not provided answers on what action the department would take on the matter.

Frazer said the DOE placed the provision of infrastructure to schools at the top of its priority list.

"We have teams from our infrastructure management and delivery doing a frequent assessment of our schools from time to time so that we get to understand which schools are under strain in terms of infrastructure," Frazer said.

With regard to Ferndale Primary the DOE allocated an implementing agent to undertake repairs on the ablution facilities. The DOE said the agent had completed the conditional assessment and was scoping the work to be implemented. Frazer said by August 31 the work that needed to be done would begin in earnest.

"Through our assessment, it was also identified that some of the pillars required rehabilitation. This forms part of the work that will be done."

The school is plagued by a high rate of criminal activity which has seen the fence of the school being vandalised, Frazer said.

"This vandalism has even spread to some of the mobile classrooms with one severely being damaged," Frazer said.

Public Works spokesperson Mlungisi Khumalo also did not respond to questions sent to him.



THE crumbling walls of Ferndale Primary School are a cause for concern. | SUPPLIED.

