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# Stockholm syndrome

Relationships between government departments are putting pupils at risk

OPINION  
Imran Keeka

The Democratic Alliance has repeatedly stated that the triad for quality education consists of honest and proper leadership, sound infrastructure and intense parental involvement. Yet they have all deteriorated.

Two former KZN MECs for Public Works and now a third, if asked, would confirm in responses to DA parliamentary questions that this department is constantly cut off at the knees by delayed payments from the province's Department of Education (DoE). While the DoE considers Public Works to be among its pre-

ferred implementing agents, it takes advantage of the relationship like an estranged ex-spouse not wanting to pay child maintenance. KZN's Transport MEC will soon find this out when the funds for pupil transport run out and this programme is the next disaster that can be averted.

The DA has several concerns relating to infrastructure and the situation within the DoE. If Public Works still agrees to do business with Education after hearing them, then there can be no doubt that it is suffering from Stockholm syndrome. Between the 2021/22 and 2022/2023 financial

years, the infrastructure budget saw a steady decline. The 2023/24 financial year sees a moderate rise, with the allocation of just over R3,2 billion in grant funding as an addition, and then another chop in the next cycle.

KZN's DoE spends 91% of its budget on salaries, leaving a meagre nine percent for everything from learner transport, which is about to collapse, to textbooks, early childhood development and to ensuring that most Grade 4 pupils can read for meaning, which they cannot. The province still has at least 73 schools not connected to electricity, 1 048 schools damaged by storms since 2014 — of which 356 were damaged last year alone — with only a fraction repaired. With only 23 schools currently at various stages of repair, it can be assumed (if no more schools

are damaged), that it will take at least 50 years to catch up with past repairs.

Yet, when the DA tells the ANC about the Western Cape's rapid school build programme, where they have the same budgetary constraints as KZN, it is mocked rather than seeing any replicating of the good that is being done in the Western Cape. Think about it: Why is it that the Western Cape can build the Saxons School in just 65 days from scratch?

KZN still has a backlog of 980 schools with asbestos roofs and hundreds of schools with pit latrines. This while the DoE claims that there are only 106 schools with pit latrines remaining. The former MEC, Kwazi Mshengu, announced that all KZN pit latrines would be eradicated by 2022. Was his commitment not the usual misinformation peddled by

many who lead government in KZN? Between 2012 and now, the DoE has closed almost 251 schools and plans to close another 255 this financial year. A further 1 005 will be closed between this year and 2028. Instead of being in the business of properly forecasting, planning and opening more schools, KZN's ANC Taliban faction government is doing the opposite. Many of these sites are the responsibility, if not the property, of the Department of Public Works.

The KZN Premier stated that Public Works is one of the departments, in collaboration with the DoE, that is tasked to manage what happens to schools once they are closed. This despite a dismal history in this regard. The schools that have closed are now ugly, unholy and have become dens for drug users and crooks who cause

havoc in communities. The DA has long held the view that Public Works is redundant and that the line functions can be performed by the respective departments. Regrettably, if the DoE had to do so under the current leadership, it would botch things up even more.

While infrastructure grant allocations have increased over the past three financial years, and while there are upgrade projects in progress, they are affected significantly by under-performance and poor workmanship by contractors. The result is delays, and ultimately service delivery failures. Yet there is little or no proper oversight to ensure that some unscrupulous contractors and their corrupt political connections have been adequately dealt with. Some projects are standing still. Others are victims

of the construction mafia that hold everyone to ransom, with little or no consequences for those who are connected insiders. The reality is that KZN still has mud schools. It still has incomplete projects and pit latrines. It still has schools that are not maintained and are structurally unstable without roofs and toilets. It has massive potholes on access roads and no proper access for the many children who are still crossing rivers to get to school. This while there are millions of rands worth of boats, intended for this purpose, sitting unused at the Sharks Board.

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- This article is based on a debate in the KZN Legislature on June 29.