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**BIG R716,4 MILLION CUT LIMITS WCED'S ABILITIES**

# 'Schools are full'

■ ESMÉ ERASMUS  
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**W**estern Cape schools are full! says the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) in a media release, blaming it mostly on recent major budget cuts by die national government.

Many parents are desperate to get their children enrolled in either Grade 1 or Grade 8 next year, but are walking themselves into a wall with their schools of choice.

However, they are fighting to place learners despite a massive R700 million blow to the budget, says David Maynier, provincial minister of education in the statement.

"Over the past five years, on average, the number of learners at Western Cape schools have increased by 19 000 each year," he said, "and additional learners continue to need places every year."

## LARGEST BUDGET

To address this demand for placement, the Western Cape government passed the largest budget for education that the province has ever seen in March 2023, including a R2,9 billion infrastructure plan to build 21 new schools and 289 additional

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- David Maynier

classrooms at existing schools.

"This plan was to build on the success of the Rapid School Build programme implemented in 2022," said Maynier, "and our delivery of 788 additional classrooms for the 2023 school year, which was a dramatic increase in the pace of delivery compared to previous years."

He said in June 2023 the WCED's plan came to an abrupt halt when the National Treasury indicated there would be serious cuts to provincial allocations.

"They could not specify how severe these would be. Frustratingly we had no choice but to pull the handbrakes on spending until further clarity was provided. This created an environment of extreme uncertainty with an immediate impact on our plans for infrastructure, as we could not enter into contract agreements without having any certainty that we would have the funds to pay them," he says.

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“The National Treasury has decided not to provide all the funding owed to our province to cover the wage increase it negotiated for public service in this financial year,” according to Maynier. “Instead, our department will receive only 64% of the funding due to us, which means we are being short-changed by R537 million.”

#### DISPUTE

The Western Cape Government has declared an inter-governmental dispute on the shortfall for funding the increased wage bill with national government to ensure that they get their fair share, he said.

“At the same time, the Department of Basic Education cut our conditional grants by R179,4 million, the education infrastructure grant has been cut by R156,9 million, the maintenance component of the early-child development grant by R14 million and the mathematics, science and technology grant by R4,3 million. The expanded public works programme grant has been cut by R207 000, among other cuts.

“The national government has dealt a massive R716,4 million blow to our ability to build and maintain schools, and pay teachers. As a result we face a R248 million cut to our infrastructure budget within the financial year.

“What makes this cut particularly devastating is that, for the first time ever, these cuts were made within the current financial year, and take effect immediately, at exactly the time when the demand for placement is highest.

#### FIGHTING HARD

“Despite this blow we are fighting hard to expand the number of places available at schools in the Western Cape. We will still build nine new schools to accommodate the learners applying for the 2024 school year as well as 496 classrooms in areas of high demand for placement. In total, our revised

plan aims to deliver 608 additional classrooms across the province, which is still more than double the average number built annually before 2022-'23.

From 22 November this year places have been allocated for 119 110 or 98,7 %, of the learners from whom applications were received for Grade 1 and 8 for the 2024 school year.

“Placement is in progress for 1 568, or 1,3%, Grade 1 and 8 learners,” Maynier said. “Of these, 636 are learners, from whom late applications were received after the admissions window closed, with some arriving as late as this past week.

“We understand this is a stressful and anxious period for parents. As a department we are asking parents to work with us as we try to accommodate their children as soon as possible. We are exploring all available options to find a place for these learners for the start of the school year.”

#### EXTREMELY LATE APPLICATIONS

“We have put a great deal of effort into encouraging parents to apply on time during the admissions applications window – between 13 March and 14 April 2023,” the minister continued. “We provided pop-up sites across the province for parents to be assisted if they could not apply online. And our district offices have been accepting walk-in applications since the online applications closed.

“Despite this, we know many thousands of learners will arrive in the first term next year needing placement. We do not know where they will seek placement, or what their grades, languages, ages or subject choices will be. Planning our resource allocation for these extremely late applicants in advance is very difficult, and parents will have to wait some time before their child is placed.

“We’ll work to place every learner from whom an application is received, but be clear Western Cape schools are full, so we appeal for patience from parents submitting new applications as placement won’t be before the first term’s end.”