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Woodlands school rebuild finally back on track



KZN Public Works and Infrastructure MEC Martin Meyer (left) and Woodlands Primary School principal Claudelle Manuel addressing the media yesterday about the construction. **PHOTO: CHRIS NDALISO**

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After years of delays, abandoned construction and millions already spent, Woodlands Primary School is finally set to get the permanent classrooms its more than 1 200 pupils have been waiting for.

KwaZulu-Natal Public Works and Infrastructure MEC Martin Meyer yesterday handed over the construction site to a contractor, with the project expected to cost a further R43 094 586.

The move marks the latest attempt to complete a project plagued by years of delays, disruption and administrative failures.

For nearly five decades, generations of pupils have been taught in temporary asbestos class-

rooms that have become increasingly dilapidated and structurally unsafe. While the resumption of construction has brought renewed optimism to the school community, pupils will remain in the ageing classrooms until the new facilities are completed.

The project involves demolishing the existing asbestos buildings and replacing them with permanent classrooms and other school facilities.

Phase one, which has already been completed, included the installation of park-home classrooms to accommodate senior primary pupils while construction takes place. The remaining phases will include the construction of new senior primary classrooms, a media centre, junior primary and Grade R classrooms, as well as a sports field,

parking area, walkways, a gatehouse, boundary wall, refuse area and an attenuation pond.

Speaking during the site handover, Meyer acknowledged that pupils had endured unacceptable learning conditions for years. "Woodlands Primary is a product of a system that was designed to hold some back and help others to progress in life. This community never gave up but fought for its rightful place and recognition," he said.

Meyer blamed the project's collapse on poor project management and the department's failure to pay contractors, rather than corruption. "The unfinished construction shows exactly what the problem was in this department. Sloppy project management and non-payment of contractors were some of the challenges the department faced," he said.

He added that an investigation into the previous contractor's abandonment of the site found no evidence of corruption in the awarding or management of the tender.

"It was a matter of the department failing to pay the contractor, and that resulted in the company abandoning the project. We have made progress in ensuring timeous payment of service providers and this project will be concluded on time," Meyer said.

The department has already spent R29 million on the incomplete project, while completing the school will require a further R43 million. The project is expected to create at least 39 local employment opportunities in line with the Expanded Public Works Programme guidelines, with targets for women, young people and persons with disabilities.

The contractor, Mboniseni Ndlovu, said his team was confident of meeting the 15-month deadline and could complete the work in 12 months if construction proceeds without interruption.

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Scan the QR code to watch MEC Martin Meyer talk about the plan to rebuild Woodlands Primary School.