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news

Eastern Cape
SCHOOLS

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get six-year-old Zizipho Ngatho. She's one of the smartest children in her class and wants to be a social worker.

Her class teacher at the dilapidated Lumkwana Senior Primary School, in Kwazwelishsha near Mpane beach, is Nomaza Ganudle. She says Zizipho is shy but bright, and likes to participate in all the classroom activities.

Zizipho and her brothers, Alexander (11) and Ntandla (10), live with their grandmother, Nokhanyile Ngatho (49), because their parents have died.

Ngatho helps the children prepare for school when they wake up at 6:30am for the 6km trek to school and back.

Zizipho's school, built by villagers decades ago without state assistance, is one of the 442 that the Eastern Cape education department has classified as an inappropriate structure.

It could have been fixed by now.

Last year, then finance minister Nhlanhla Nene allocated "R7.4 billion to the replacement of more than 500 unsafe or poorly constructed schools" in terms of the programme for schools-infrastructure

backlogs. But the Eastern Cape government recently returned R530 million to National Treasury.

Loyiso Pulamani, the Eastern Cape education department spokesperson, has defended the return of the money.

He said that, of the 442 poorly constructed schools, about 242 were under construction or had their improvements completed.

"We subsequently experienced an exit of some key people in the infrastructure-delivery unit. This meant that in the year we had the biggest budget allocation, we had to start afresh rebuilding the capacity of this unit."

City Press visited three schools experiencing teacher and classroom shortages: Zizipho's, at the top of a hill in Kwazwelishsha village, the Nguberamba Senior Primary School in the Mkhathazo administrative area, and the Xora Mouth Junior Secondary School near Nguberamba.

Zizipho's acting principal, Neziswa Gqothongo, said they needed five teachers and at least six additional classrooms.

She said they combined several grades in a single classroom. The school has 195 pupils from grades R to 6. Two teachers, including the principal, resigned early this year.

"It's the gaping cracks from the walls of the classrooms - a danger to all of us, especially the children - that give me sleepless nights. The slightest provocation, like strong winds, could make these walls collapse," said Gqothongo.

On Wednesday, the department finally delivered 189 desks to the school. This meant that the children would not have to sit on bricks or beer crates, or write with their books on their laps.

There is no administration block or principal's office. It has a single

laptop, but no photocopy machine or telephone line, and there are pit toilets.

The Nguberamba primary school has a single block of five classrooms constructed from a mixture of bricks and mud by local communities in 1995.

There is no electricity, water or proper fencing.

When City Press visited the school on Thursday, it found the Folokhwe community gathered in a small tent in the school grounds. They were praying.

School principal Bukwe Mfundisi said the school, which has 196 pupils and eight teachers, had not received textbooks for two years. They have 24 desks for the entire school.

Mfundisi said they combined several grades in single classrooms. "We have been asking for a school and the department tells us there is no money and we are on the waiting list," she said.

In spite of being established in 1959, the Xora Mouth Junior Secondary School still has only three usable classrooms for teaching and the rest are temporary structures that have been there since 2013.

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