

“Fix our schools” Activists Tell Minister as Deadline Passes

By Masego Mafata

Minimum norms and standards set ten years ago have not been met, says Equal Education.

- About 50 members of Equal Education (EE) picketed outside the Department of Basic Education in Pretoria on Friday.
- EE is calling on the education minister “to urgently fulfil the obligations set out in the minimum norms and standards for public school infrastructure”.
- Published in the Government Gazette as regulations to the South African Schools Act exactly ten years ago, education activists say that the promises of the norms and standards have not been fulfilled.

Holding placards written “#FixOurSchoolsNow” and “10 years of broken promises”, about 50 education activists picketed outside the Department of Basic Education in Pretoria on Wednesday. The group called on Minister of Basic Education Angie Motshekga to meet the legal obligations set out in the [minimum norms and standards for public school infrastructure](#).

These were regulations to the South African Schools Act published in the government gazette exactly ten years ago on 29 November 2013. The activists complained that little progress has been made to improve public schools since then.

Supported by the Equal Education Law Centre (EELC), SECTION27, the Legal Resources Centre (LRC), the Centre for Child Law, the Bookery and Right2Protest, Equal Education members read an [open letter](#) addressed to the Minister. The group was met with closed gates; no representatives from the department came to engage with them.

The norms and standards set out the regulations for infrastructure in public schools, including the removal of all pit latrines, and the provision of a library in each school within 10 years.

But ten years later, says EE, [many schools still don’t meet the standards](#). This includes the 728 schools that still [only had pit latrines](#) as of August 2023.

“Too little has been done. You still find schools that consist only of mobile classrooms. We still have problems of overcrowding where one class will have 60 learners, and as learners we can’t maximise our potential in these conditions,” said Equal Education deputy chairperson Yonela Sewela.

Sewela, a grade 11 learner at a school in Etwatwa, Benoni, said many schools in the area were poorly maintained. “When it rains, sometimes the teachers tell us to go home because water comes into the classroom and we can’t have lessons,” she said.

In the letter, the groups demanded that the national and provincial education departments eradicate infrastructure backlogs so that schools are safe and conducive to learning, that there is sufficient funding for infrastructure and that the education department audits school infrastructure across the country.

According to the letter, “82% of schools do not have a laboratory, while 74% of our public schools lack a library, and the ones that do have libraries are often inadequately stocked”.

In September GroundUp [reported that the norms and standards target](#) of every school having a library by end of November would be missed. An [Education Facility Management System report](#) from August showed that as of August 2021, most public schools were without libraries.

Draft amendments first published for comment in June last year propose the removal of timeframes and deadlines from the norms and standards. This has been condemned by education activists.

Equal Education’s Noncedo Madubedube said they would request an action plan from the department on how the missed deadlines and targets would be met.

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