

# High School Deteriorates Amid Municipality Neglect

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Velile Senior Secondary School, located in Bathurst in the Eastern Cape under Ndlambe municipality, has been deteriorating over the last 10 years, much like many others in working class communities. The school was built in 1997 as a temporary solution and is built using wood. There are no sports facilities or computer laboratories, making the situation even more challenging for students at the school.

Students have been complaining about the state of the school, but have not received any help, only empty promises. The school yard around is not big enough, and the classrooms have falling roofs, the desks and chairs are broken, and the toilets are mostly unhealthy and unclean. Students have been crying out for help for a long time as the school's state worsens every day. Despite these challenges, Bathurst Community stakeholders recently celebrated an improved matric pass rate. The students feel ignored with the state of the school.

The members of the former ruling party, the African National Congress, have been involved in events hosted at the school. They have given away sanitary pads and stationery with success but have not been able to deliver when it comes to the school building.

One of the students who have been complaining tried to get help from the community. In desperation, he ended up crying, pleading for help in community communication groups, many Bathurst residents remained silent.

“It has been more than 10 years since the school started collapsing, but we only get empty promises from our political parties when the time for elections is near. The ANC comes and sells us promises to help build our school, but [have done] nothing,” an anonymous student posted in the groups.

Jennifer George, a member of the ANC, admitted that the school is in a bad condition. [When] it is raining [one gets soaked] while inside the classrooms as there are no roofs. It is very cold, and the students cannot sit properly in desks as they are broken.”

The state of the school has been worsening, and there has been no response given to the students who continue to struggle with the same conditions.

“We have supported the students at the school since the problem has been recognised, and we did a lot by writing letters to the Department of Education, but there has not been any action or progress other than that,” says George.

George concluded that the problem should also be reported to the community and the Department, saying it is up to them to act.

Siphosethu Ndabeni, an Isikhalo activist and a community stakeholder, responded that the school situation is stressful to the community. When she completed her grade 12 in 2016, the condition of the school infrastructure was horrible, but she cannot imagine how unbearable it is now.

“It is very worrying that the school condition has become a political way of getting votes, as the students say, because no one understands the pain of students like they do,” said Ndabeni. She concluded saying that Isikhalo will take a stand and support students even if it means that they have to close down the school before it kills students.

Phillip Tamana speaks of how much they tried to speak out with the help of teachers, hoping they would be heard.

“We wrote countless letters to the Department of Education telling them about the school building condition, but we [have] never received any action response. [It is] just letters that the school will be fixed for many years,” says Tamana.

The former treasurer in the school committee between 2016 and 2018 concluded that he is worried for the safety of students in the school and wishes that they will finally be assisted. Bathurst ANC Councillor Mzwandile Sweli also commented on the state of the school admitting that he has seen the condition of the school as they host events for students and never stop seeking help.

“I write letters to the Department of Education, and I also call to make sure they are aware of the school situation. The last response I got was that the building of the school process will start by the end of March 2025. I hope we knock on doors until we get answers with the help of the community,” said the councillor.

Elam Ncwadi, a student at Velile High, added his voice on the condition of the school and how it affects them as students.

“We spent most of our lives here in school, but we live under a sad and horrible situation in the same school that is supposed to help us get a bright future. Classes are overcrowded and some are burnt down, there are certain classes we cannot use when it’s cold and raining. And the toilets are not healthy and dirty, it is not a good condition at all,” the student concluded that they need help before the building kills them or the coldness and the rains.

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