

In South Africa the government prioritises bailing out SOEs instead of investing in adequate classrooms

By Desiree Van Der Walt MP – DA Shadow Deputy Minister of Basic Education

Voorsitter en Kollegas

My dank aan elke onderwyser , leerder, ouer, onderwysorganisasie en kollega wat in hierdie uitdagende tydperk werk om ons 12 408 755 kinders se onderrig in die 23 076 openbare skole te verseker.

Indeed Covid-19 has a detrimental impact on the education of our learners. So does the budget cut of R2 billion.

The opportunity for every learner to receive quality education should be non-negotiable. The Department should always strive towards that.

Yet, in South Africa, the government prioritise bailing out SOEs with billions of rands instead of investing in infrastructure which will ensure adequate classrooms at every school in which every learner will be seated at his/her own desk.

Schools, where learners and teachers will have proper ablution facilities, build by accredited contractors as a prerequisite.

And where every school is properly fenced to ensure the safety during and after school hours.

Plans in glossy documents, colourful presentations, SONA, SOPA and Budget speech promises (at quite a cost) seems to be forgotten as soon as it is presented.

Ondanks verskeie spesiale oudits en verslae, soos NEIMS, verskaf jaarliks inligting oor die stand van infrastruktuur maar skynbaar word dit nie ernstig opgeneem nie.

If we did take such reports and audits seriously and acted promptly on it, we would have been able to deal with the hygiene demands and protocols of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In South Africa the Covid-19 pandemic is used to make up for years of neglect:

1. Suddenly provinces, excluding the Western Cape, could identify 3 475 schools in need of critical water supply challenges. The Department could quickly sign a memorandum with the worst-performing and bankrupt Department of Water and Sanitation and Rand Water as their implementing agent and allocate R600 million to them to install water tanks and deliver portable water by water trucks to these tanks.
2. Suddenly we saw 1 960 schools with emergency sanitation needs on the Department's programme allocating 2 mobile toilets per school of which 1507 is in the Eastern Cape and 453 in Limpopo. Note that these two provinces also received National Lottery Funds of R10 million each to build ablution facilities at schools. In Limpopo, we could only find eight schools.

Neither the critical water programme by Water and Sanitation nor the sanitation projects by the Mvula Trust have been completed for the re-opening of schools to date.

Since the start of the lockdown, 1 718 schools have been vandalised. This is a serious setback, the Minister is correct. But what are we doing to keep our schools and thus education, safe? We will have to get funding to improve the security of our infrastructure and equipment.

As we know 9.7 million children benefit from the School Nutrition Scheme. For many of them from poor communities, this is the only meal they receive on a day. It is therefore commendable that the Western Cape Department of Education continued providing meals to children during the lockdown in order to combat malnutrition.

It is indeed a scandal that a Court of Law had to force the Department of Basic Education to continue with the nutrition scheme. All with thanks to some Unions trying to force their will, without acknowledgements and understanding scientific facts, to force the Minister to close schools. Minister, you are the custodian of Education, not the Unions. The threat by the unions to shutdown schools infringes on our children's constitutional right to education and should be rejected by all.

Protect our children's constitutional right - their education is important to their future life, their health and their food security.