

## Centre for Child Law responds to Gauteng School Placement Woes

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

18 January 2019

The beginning of the 2019 academic year saw some parents scramble to find places for their children in Gauteng schools. On 7 January 2019, it was reported that just over 17 000 learners still needed to be placed in grades 1 and 8 classes. The Centre for Child Law (the Centre) is concerned by the persistence of school placement shortages in the province. The Centre calls on the Gauteng Provincial Education Department (GPED) to remedy this through review of its planning process. In line with this call, the Centre is completing a study to highlight the problems faced by the GPED and possible solutions.

In 2016, the Centre for Child Law (the Centre) compiled a report, titled *Budgets and Bricks: Progress with School Infrastructure Following the Rivonia Primary School Case*,<sup>1</sup> to track the Gauteng Provincial Education Department's (GPED) compliance with its promises to the Constitutional Court to spend R1.7 billion – or 40% of its annual budget – on building new schools.

The report showed that GPED only complied with this promise in the 2011/12 financial year. By 2014, there was already a backlog of 160 schools or 1 500 classrooms. There was also a shortage of 726 toilets and almost 500 libraries.

Currently, the Centre is concluding a follow up study titled **Provision of School Infrastructure in Gauteng – Progress and Obstacles**, the study assesses the Gauteng Provincial Education Department's ability to plan to provide sufficient schools for learners in the province.

### Preliminary research findings

#### **GPED's information management is not optimal for effective infrastructure planning.**

- From 2017, the Department of Basic Education launched the *Learner Unit Record Information and Tracking System* (LURITS), this system records learner data and tracks learners from school to school, both within and across provinces. This is a positive step forward and forms a good basis for planning.
- The Department of Basic Education does not publish summaries of the LURITS data on its website or anywhere else. Nor does the Department of Basic Education publish any information on provinces' school infrastructure plans.
- There are issues with data collection and data management by the department. The most recent data from SNAP Surveys on learner numbers is unreliable and therefore cannot be used as a basis for planning school infrastructure.
- Currently, there is no available data on school classrooms. Without classroom data, it is not possible to determine if there is sufficient learning space in schools in any of the provinces.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.centreforchildlaw.co.za/images/stories/Budgets\\_Bricks\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.centreforchildlaw.co.za/images/stories/Budgets_Bricks_FINAL.pdf)

**The national and provincial departments of education do not adequately fulfil their roles as oversight manager and implementing agents respectively.**

- There is a lack of leadership as well as oversight in planning and delivery by the national Department of Basic Education. As far back as 1998, there was an intention and a plan to ensure that the Provincial Education Departments worked systematically to eliminate backlogs in school infrastructure. However, a review of education infrastructure plans developed since then shows that most PEDs have failed to comply with these regulations. Similarly, the DBE has failed to exercise oversight and enforce compliance.
- Data from the first infrastructure plan from GPED (2014) does not indicate that migration patterns or other learner fluctuations have been taken into consideration in the 3-, 7- and 17-year targets.
- There is lack of accountability when contractors deliver substandard work. Where there are service delivery failures, the officials have merely recommended that another service provider be appointed to fix the problems. There are no instances (in the public domain) of officials recommending the blacklisting or fining of service providers that fail to deliver.

**Government has made several decisions that impact negatively on the availability of funding for basic education infrastructure.**

- The revenue flowing into the fiscus is constrained. Not only has the economy as a whole taken strain, but government has made a number of decisions that have impacted on the availability of funding for basic education infrastructure. In the 2018 Budget, funds were redirected away from school infrastructure towards higher education. This placed a burden on provincial departments to lower their expectations and extend their planning horizons.

**GPED no longer prioritises the funding of education infrastructure.**

- In light of a reduced budget, the GPED is now concentrating its efforts on adding classrooms and upgrading existing schools. This is a sensible approach to creating more space but it does its shortfall which is the deprioritized spending on building new schools.
- Overall, Gauteng province is deprioritising spending on school infrastructure: it has cut planned allocations from its Provincial Equitable Share funds to school infrastructure and relying only on grant funding from national government to fund new school infrastructure.

The Centre for Child Law (the Centre) notes with appreciation the efforts made by the Gauteng Department of Education (GPED) with regards to school placements in the province. Media reports show a sharp decrease in the number of learners that still needs to be placed in the 2019 academic year as compared to 2017 and 2018.<sup>2</sup>

At the beginning of the 2017 academic year there were between 40 000 and 58 000 learners who still needed to be placed in Gauteng schools alone.<sup>3</sup> In 2018 the number decreased to 31 000 learners.<sup>4</sup> 2019,

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.iol.co.za/the-star/news/thousands-of-grade-1-and-8-learners-still-waiting-to-be-placed-in-schools-18736520>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/sahrc-worried-about-pupils-not-being-placed-at-schools-20170112>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.itweb.co.za/content/R8OKdWqDxRbqbznQ>

saw another significant decrease with just over 17 000 learners who still need to be placed in classes.<sup>5</sup> The Centre notes these changes and appreciates the efforts being made by the department to ensure that learners are placed in schools on time.

The Centre is of the opinion that more could and should be done to effectively deal with placement shortages. The Centre notes that some of the problems with late placements is as result of non-compliance and late applications by parents, but the Centre is of the view that these problems also stem from wider systemic issues such as poor infrastructure planning and delivery by the GPED, as well as the lack of quality education in ALL schools leading to migration for purposes of accessing better education

In light of all the above, the Centre calls for an evidence-based approach to the issue school infrastructure planning so as to address the lack of school places. To this end the Centre calls on the GPED to publish its current infrastructure plans so as to demonstrate to the public how it is addressing the issue. 2020 should see no learners scrambling for school places while others are in class already.

## Ends

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For more information, please contact:

### [The Centre for Child Law](#)

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