

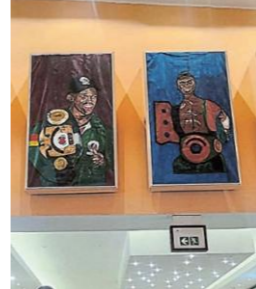
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# Daily Dispatch

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MEYERS MOTORS

# New term off to troubled start

**Our kids are being set up for failure, angry parents lament as protests halt teaching at two East London schools**

SITHANDIWE VELAPHI

Teaching was disrupted at two East London schools on the first day of term on Tuesday when parents demanded pupils vacate classrooms in protest at the failure of authorities to address several key issues.

Pandemonium broke out at Buffalo City Metro Inner City High in Arcadia as parents protested against a shortage of teachers and the poor quality of teaching at the school, while at Pefferville Primary, pupils were ordered out of their classrooms when parents complained that the school environment was unsafe.

Parents at the fee-paying school, housed in the premises of the old Grens Primary, said they had decided to protest after the Eastern Cape education department failed to resolve issues they had repeatedly raised.

Four hours later, after police had been called to calm the situation, pupils were allowed back into their classrooms.

Fezeka Nkushubane, parent of a grade 12 pupil at the school, said the frustrated parents decided to order pupils out of their classrooms.

"The department is taking us for granted. There is no proper schooling. Our children are lacking basics.

"Their books are empty. The school is used like a dumping zone for children who do not have a place to study. There are no proper systems in place to cater for the influx.

"Our children are here on their own, with not enough teachers. They are being set up for failure and we are really worried this will affect grade 12 pupils who are supposed to go to tertiary institutions next year," Nkushubane said.

"There is no proper control in this school and the department does not seem to care.

"When the school was started in 2019, there were proper measures but these seem to have degenerated.

"Buffalo City Metro Inner City High is a quintile 4 school and we pay about R1,100 a month, yet there is no value for money," Nkushubane said, adding they had resolved to write to the national department of basic education about the school's problems.

Shaun Jacobs, father of a grade 8 pupil, said the department had failed the school.

"Our children are walking around the field when they are supposed to be in class because of the lack of teachers.

"We have been to the district offices many times. The department promised they were going to send teachers but they have not done so."

Eugene Weimers also accused the department of failing the school.

"As parents we are not fighting each other, but we are all fighting for the future of our children.

"The department must come to the party and fix the issues that we have been raising."

DA MP Chantel King visited the school after she heard of the disruption of classes.

"It is unacceptable that parents come to the school to disrupt schooling," she said.

"The issue here is shortage of teachers. There are 14 school governing body teachers.

"I was told there is no English teacher for the matrics.

"I am going to raise these issues with the minister of [basic] education."

Provincial education spokesperson Mali Mtima said a team had been established to look into problems at the school.

"We call upon parents to desist from destructive engagement and follow prescribed protocols," Mtima said.

"We are calling on parents to work closely with the team that has been set up to resolve the issues faced by the school."

Mtima confirmed the school was a quintile 4 fee-paying school, with 959 pupils and 23 teachers, of which only nine are paid for by the department, leaving 14 posts to be paid by the SGB.

Themba Mtyida, provincial education's deputy director-general for institutional operations management, told the Dispatch that since last week they had been working through the problems facing the school, adding these would be resolved in "the next few days".

Meanwhile at Pefferville Primary, pupils were ordered to vacate classrooms until the department undertook to repair the school still damaged after being vandalised in December.

Parent Charmaine Morris said: "For several weeks we have been waiting for authorities to do the right thing, which is to make sure that our children learn under safe conditions.

"This is so frustrating, hence parents decided to close the school until the department comes to the party and does repairs."

Windows, roofing and water pipes are broken, as well as chalkboards and desks, and a number of taps and other bits of infrastructure stolen.

Some fixing was done earlier this year but the building is windy and cold, unprotected from winter weather.

Another parent said: "Our children are not safe at this school.

"We have been calling for the authorities to fix the school, to no avail. All they've given us are empty promises."

Mtima said a new construction company had been appointed to do the repairs at Pefferville Primary, with the site handover scheduled for this week.

## Honouring Madiba



Statues of the late icon Nelson Mandela were unveiled in Mthatha and Qunu on Tuesday. Hundreds of people attended both the events. For this report and more on Mandela Day, see Page 6. Picture: LULAMILE FENI

## Squeals of joy as toddlers open gifts, snack on Happy Meals

ROSA-KAROO LOEWE

In the blazing heat and amid the deafening sounds of construction in Moore Street, Quigney, a group of toddlers squealed with joy as they tore open gifts and snacked on burgers and chips.

For this year's Mandela Day, the Daily Dispatch and Buffalo City Metropolitan Development Agency collaborated on collecting donations of items and cash for the Future Roses Care Centre NPO, which looks after more than 50 children.

A pile of gifts was set up outside the centre's walls for the toddlers on Tuesday.

They were escorted outside by Future Roses founder Linda Beja, who cried out in delight to see McDonald's Happy Meals, groceries, cleaning supplies, second-hand clothes, party packs and wrapped toys laid out alongside a giant blue cake.

"I'm overwhelmed and surprised, this is out of this world," Beja said.

The care centre, which opened in 2016, is a refuge for

more than 50 children from different backgrounds, some of whom live in the bush with their families at the bottom of the road.

But on Tuesday, the little ones tottered about happily, unwrapping gifts and hamburgers.

Beja said the centre had faced many challenges over the years.

"At times we wanted to close, but we said, what are these children going to do?"

"This 2023 Mandela Day has opened doors for us. For the first time I understand the meaning of Mandela Day."

The NPO cares for 37 children from birth to six during the day, and 16 preschoolers who attend aftercare, sometimes until 6pm.

"Half of our kids are from healthy families and the other half are from hopeless situations.

"We've got parents who are not working, parents who are prostitutes or amaphara."

Beja said regular donations

meant they could give the children breakfast and lunch, but paying the monthly rent of R5,850 was a big struggle.

"In the mornings I'm cheerful because I'm going to see their happy smiles, but at night I don't know what is going to happen to them.

"Sometimes we let the kids go in the afternoon and in the morning we are told the child was raped."

Holding back tears, she said: "We wish we could open for 24

hours, but our resources don't allow us to."

On Tuesday, the youngest child, just three weeks old, was sleeping in a warm cot inside the centre.

"Her situation is hopeless, I wish someone could come and rescue her.

"Her mother is a sex worker. I saw her walking past when she was pregnant and asked her what her plan was.

"She said that she didn't have one. I told her I could take care

of the baby during the day.

"This is the only place saving children in Quigney."

The Dispatch's support services manager, Nalita Nayo, became emotional when she recounted the stories she had heard about the children's lives.

"When Linda told us a Happy Meal would make a happy memory, we wanted to do that and more.

"Linda told us some of the stories — she once got ice cream donated for the kids, and some of them were scared to eat it, because they had never eaten ice cream before.

"When we heard that some of these children live in the bush, we saw it as an opportunity to partner with the Buffalo City Metropolitan Development Agency, to collaborate.

For us, Mandela day is about ubuntu, and making a lasting difference."

The development agency's spokesperson, Mizzie Zokufa, said the creche was close to her heart.

"I have a passion for helping people, and seeing the smiles on these children's faces, I wish we could do more."

Zokufa has her own foundation, which assists the Mzomomhle community, and pledged to look after the Future Roses children and help them grow.

"I pledge to mentor them, to visit, to talk and play with the children until they enter tertiary education.

"Both organisations will also lobby and rope in government departments, especially home affairs, as most of the kids are without birth certificates, and the department of health to intervene on certain medical issues."

The development agency's CEO, Mxolisi Sibam, said: "We have to make sure we are a caring agency.

"When the Dispatch came to us and suggested this collaboration, it was a no-brainer.

"We joined and want to make sure we make a difference in these kids' lives."



HAD ENOUGH: Angry parents protest outside Buffalo City Metro Inner City High in Arcadia. Picture: SITHANDIWE VELAPHI