

PUPILS IN DRIVE TO HAVE SCHOOLS FIXED SO THEY CAN LEARN

Shattered glass, broken system

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ON FRIDAY, 300 pupils from every high school in Khayelitsha will gather outside the Western Cape Department of Education. We will read poems and stories, sing songs and present petitions in order to explain the bad conditions in our schools. We will also ask that the 800 broken windows in Luhlaza High School be fixed immediately.

There are many physical problems in our schools.

Some schools are worse than others. Some of the problems we describe are not uncommon in Khayelitsha.

The toilets leak and smell very bad. There is water and urine everywhere. If there is no fence, people come in and out of the school, including criminals. This leads to pupils getting robbed at school and feeling unsafe.

Many schools do not have a kitchen for the feeding schema, so cooking is done in a classroom. Some pupils do not have textbooks, and many schools don't have libraries. In the computer labs there are few computers and most are not working.

We also have difficulties with our teachers. Some of them are absent from time to time.

If a physical science teacher is absent for two months, we just sit in the classroom, or try to get help from pupils who know some of the work. Sometimes, even if the teacher is present, he or she just sits there and tells us to do work from other teachers. There is a lack of connection between teachers and pupils.

We try to give feedback, but teachers don't accept responsibility. As pupils, we must also accept responsibility for some of the problems.

Robbery is also carried out by pupils. Some get drunk and smoke at school. We have seen knives and guns at school. There is a serious problem of pupils coming late to the first period in the morning. Sometimes insults are written on the walls, like in the toilets.

There are also positive things to say. We do have teachers who are willing to meet us in the holidays, or even at their houses, to help us with our work. They try hard to make the schools safer, and give us guidance, but it is difficult when there are 60 pupils in a class.

New sports fields have been built at certain schools.

We are part of Equal Education, an organisation that is working to fix our schools. We meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and make friends from different schools.



FREEZE FRAMES: Pupils at a city school look through the broken windows of their classroom. A campaign by pupils aims to get school facilities fixed.

At our meetings, we have learnt about human rights, gender equality and how people in history made society change without using violence. We read books by authors like Es'kia Mphahlele and have learnt about leaders who fought for justice, like Chris Hani and Mkhoseli Jack, and some who changed for the worse, like Robert Mugabe.

Learning about these leaders has made us stronger and given us the power to know our rights.

We also discuss our schools and how we would like to improve them. Equal Education makes us feel that we can help change the situation and fix our schools.

The main issue we have taken up

as a campaign is the problem we have of broken windows in our schools. Over the past few months we have informed pupils about the campaign. We have collected over 1 500 signatures for a petition to fix the 800 broken windows at Luhlaza.

We have informed our parents and have found that they support us. Many teachers and caretakers have also signed the petition.

Our leaders have met with the school management and the Western Cape Education Department to discuss the problem.

Equal Education is also prepared to contribute some money to fix the windows, but needs the school and the department to contribute.

These windows have been broken for about five years. An official in the Department of Education told our leaders that the scheduled maintenance for Luhlaza, including windows, will be in September 2010. This means we will have to learn through another cold winter. We are happy that MEC Yusuf Gabru is trying to get this to happen sooner.

It is not easy to learn and teach in cold classes. Pupils are falling because they would rather stay home, bunk, or stay outside than be sitting in the windy classrooms. It is hard to concentrate in the cold and hard to be motivated in that environment.

Once the windows are fixed, we

need to work to ensure they remain whole. If a class breaks a window, that class must be responsible for that window. It would help if there were burglar bars to protect the windows, like in the newer schools.

After we have fixed the windows we can work on other problems, like broken doors and lack of textbooks.

Join our gathering on Friday at 2pm outside the Western Cape Education Department at the Golden Acre building in Adderley Street. Call 021 361 8160 for details.

● Shushwana is a Grade 8 pupil at Luhlaza High School. Mzandisi is a Grade 11 pupil at Kwa-Mfundo High School. They are Equal Education members.