

Pholela Alumni take matters into their own hands to repair the school

The recently formed Pholela Institute Alumni Association joined forces with current pupils and staff to paint the inside walls of Pholela High school as part of new efforts to repair the badly depilated school. “We engaged the school management and the School governing body in April this year to ensure that we understand the current problems in order to inform our role as the Alumni. From those engagements we agreed that our Mandela Day activity must focus on painting the inside walls of the school, while we await the department of education and public works to do the other urgently needed maintenance work, says Zobuzwe Ngobese, the spokesperson of the Pholela Institute Alumni Association.

The intervention comes on the back of ongoing delays in the starting of the much publicized school refurbishment project estimated at R45 million. It appears that the delays in the project have to do with a legal dispute between the Presbyterian Church and the Department of Education, according to which the Department has failed to honour its lease agreement signed in 2010 which compels the department to do maintenance at the school.

“We have been caught in the middle of this dispute and the sad part is that the school is still in a bad shape despite many promises we have received from high profile politicians and departmental officials. When the Alumni held a meeting with us earlier this year, we saw a ray of hope and we have been impressed with their energy and commitment to seeing their old school returned to its former glory. We know it’s a long road ahead but we as the school management and SGB remain hopeful that the department will honour its commitment,” says Sikhakhane, the school principal at Pholela High School.

One of the critical issues the school faced recently was the cutting-off of electricity supply due to non-payment. This had major implications for the day-to-day running of the school. “The issue was the unusually high bill that we received from Eskom, which we could not afford with our budget. Numerous visits from Eskom technicians could not established why the bill was so high but there was suspicion that two neighboring farms were also consuming the school’s electricity. However, this was never officially confirmed. Our appeal to Eskom is that our system get converted to prepaid meters so we can monitor and manage usage much better,” says Sikhakhane.

The electricity has since been restored following arrangements made between Eskom and the School.

The Alumni Association raised funds to the tune of R16 000 from former pupils in order to buy paint and painting materials for Saturday’s event. The walls now look in a much better shape following the Mandela Day painting. “We know R16 000 is not much given the large numbers of pupil but it is a start. Our challenge is reaching as many generations as possible to be part of the Alumni and we are making positive inroads in that regard. Since our establishment as the Alumni we have also encouraged all former pupils to join the Woolworths My School programme so that they can contribute to Pholela in a very

practical way. We are currently finalizing our website, which will allow us to have a broad appeal and our NPO status will allow us to do a number fund raising events for our school," adds Ngobese.

The Alumni Association is scheduled to meet the department of education in the near future to facilitate the resolution of the dispute with the Presbyterian Church. "We have already met the Church to get their side of the story and we now want to meet the department to make sure we understand their side of the story. Our interest is a speedy resolution of any disputes so that development can commence as a matter of urgency," concludes Ngobese.

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