

State-of-the-art school for special needs learners opens in KZN

Ululation and tears of joy were the order of the day, when KwaZulu-Natal Premier Sihle Zikalala, cut off the red ribbon to mark the official opening of the state-of-the-art Pholela Special School at Bulwer in the Harry Gwala District Municipality.



Opened on Tuesday, Pholela Special School will cater for the needs of learners with intellectual, physical and sensory disabilities.

The school has an enrolment of 350 learners in the Midlands location.

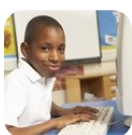
The rebuilding of Pholela Special School with an investment of about R220 million, boasts an administration block, activity block, media centre, computer lab, special needs classrooms and therapy, multi-purpose centres, and accommodation facilities for learners and teachers.

The building also includes a consulting dispensary with sickbays, male and female game rooms, kitchen, dining hall and laundry. The external works consists of covered concrete walkways, seating areas, and basketball and netball courts.

Speaking at the event, Zikalala said the school is a milestone achievement for a caring and people-centred government.

“We are unable to contain our joy because today, in word and indeed, our government is able to demonstrate that we treasure all our learners equally. Today, we can attest that with dedicated support, all children can learn and reach their full potential.

“This Tuesday, the 30th of March 2021, we can confidently say that this school is a cornerstone of our vision for an inclusive education and training system. Such a system is geared to actively work to minimise barriers to learning and to meets the needs of all learners,” Zikalala said.



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He said the rebuilding of the special school and turning it into a state of the art educational institution in a deep rural area like Bulwer, is part of ensuring that development restores the dignity of people, especially people in rural areas.

“As government, we are supporting rural development and growth through the delivery of critical social infrastructure like schools,” the Premier said.

Special schools identified for upgrades

Meanwhile, Zikalala has announced that 22 schools in other districts have also been identified for renovations and upgrades. This is so as to ensure that disabled learners receive quality, relevant education and skills in safe environments.

“Currently, the Department of Education has built a total of 75 special schools in all 12 districts of KwaZulu-Natal [and] no less than 19 790 learners are benefitting from these schools. The schools employ 1 762 educators and about 161 therapists, including speech therapists, physio and occupational therapist.



“In addition, there are 101 full-service, ordinary schools that we have built to cater for the needs of learners with barriers. We have also identified learners in 42 care centres around the province who are eligible for formal educational programs in special schools. Our aim is to place these children and other out-of-school youth in quality education and training programmes.”



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Non-viable schools identified for conversion to special schools

The Premier added that the provincial government has instructed districts to identify small and non-viable schools for conversion to special schools, especially in “districts where there is inadequate provision of special education and where learners have to travel long distances to attend existing special schools”.

“It is for this reason, for instance, that we are currently converting Mvundla Primary School in King Cetshwayo District to become a special needs school. From King Cetshwayo, we are looking at converting a further 10 schools in various parts of the province. Our province remains committed to support learners with autism.

“It is clear that there is an increasing need for schools for autistic learners. Plans are afoot to build new units that will be established in 34 special schools to provide therapeutic support and care to autistic learners. Sensory rooms which provide essential calming support will be set up in at least six additional schools from next year,” said Zikalala.

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