

Overcrowding in SA schools sees practical new solutions with mobile double-storey buildings

A shortage of space and significant overcrowding in some schools is a prevalent concern in the South African education sector. Highlighting this matter, the Education Minister of the Executive Council (MEC) Panyaza Lesufi has confirmed that 533 out of 1 856 schools within the Gauteng Education Department's (GED) domain have classroom shortages. Also, the GED has furthermore deduced, based on its survey of these regional schools, that an additional 1 069 ordinary classrooms are still required.

In light of these circumstances, the GED recently contracted mobile buildings supplier Kwikspace Modular Buildings (Kwikspace) for assistance at Kaalfontein Secondary School in Tembisa, Midrand in the Gauteng Province. Kwikspace provided a permanent structure as an urgent solution that is a benchmark in the industry, providing functional, efficient classroom space for approximately 1468 learners in a matter of weeks.

The mobile solutions company erected a first-of-its-kind, double-storey unit using alternative building methods that consisted of a steel and concrete structural frame. The project included the construction of 32 classrooms, 10 ablution units, an administration building, a nutrition centre and landscaping of the existing school grounds.

Comments Kwikspace Construction Projects Manager Con de Villiers: "The Kaalfontein project is a unique milestone for Kwikspace. We erected an alternative modular double-storey building for the very first time in South Africa, with a concrete slab on the second floor. This double-storey structure included an additional ablution unit that represents a new design style and methods of construction, incorporating classrooms and ablutions within the same block."

This project activity in the local community has provided a much needed boost by creating 95 local jobs and employing five local sub-contractors who have used their skills in paving, plumbing, electrical and general building applications.

Some stringent challenges were presented during the restructuring of the school. The construction site was occupied by 30 mobile classroom units and learners, all of whom had to be accommodated and relocated while

Kwikspace set to work. Construction proceeded without affecting the normal process of learning at the existing school. This meant that Kwikspace's engineers and managers had to plan all site operations and construction activities in five phases, to adapt to the school's daily programme. Further arrangements were made to relocate mobile classrooms to their respective designated locations and settle learners into their new spaces on a weekly basis.

In a statement made in his budget speech in 2015, MEC Lesufi said that the GED was committed to improving learning conditions by providing students with a safe, well-equipped infrastructure for an environment conducive to learning.

Comments Kaalfontein Secondary School Principal, KG Maduma: "The double-storey building is a miracle - our school is now the envy of all other schools around Thembisa and Kaalfontein."

Kaalfontein Secondary School was established in 2012, after a steep increase in the community population there, which almost doubled between the years 1996 and 2011, rising from 237 676 to 463 109 citizens.

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