

R2bn not enough for KwaZulu-Natal education needs — MEC

KwaZulu-Natal MEC of education says money allocated to his department for infrastructure development in the province is a drop in the ocean

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R2bn is not enough to address the education infrastructure backlog in KwaZulu-Natal, says Senzo Mchunu, the provincial MEC of education.

Speaking to Business Day this week at the launch of Nestlé's Centre of Excellence programme at Mpumelelo High School in Estcourt, Mr Mchunu said needs in education were immense, and that the sum of R2bn allocated to his department for infrastructure development would not suffice.

"I have mentioned to you that we have major challenges, including infrastructure backlogs," he said. "But this does not mean we are not doing anything. We are building schools, but infrastructure needs are huge in KwaZulu-Natal, considering that we've come from a past where the government never used to build schools for a large section of the population."

He said his department was working hard to address those backlogs and to eliminate "improperly built structures that we called schools — where communities would collect money to build a row of classrooms and call it a school".

"We have moved away from that," Mr Mchunu said. "Only the government builds schools now. There are a number of projects where we are building new schools altogether, or doing renovations or upgrading the schools so that they are the kind of schools we can all be proud of."

Ravi Pillay, corporate affairs director at Nestlé, said the company would invest R1,5m at Mpumelelo High School in a public/private initiative to build a computer laboratory and a library, upgrade classrooms and drill a bore-hole. The school also plans to generate solar power.

Sullivan O'Carroll, chairman and managing director of Nestlé, said the company had decided to adopt Mpumelelo High School because of its 100% matric pass rate for the past three years.

Speaking to students, Mr O'Carroll said education was the most important thing in their lives.

"If we can give each other good education, then we can compete in the world," he said. "We can have a better community. We can have a better life. We can have better enjoyment in our lives. The only way we can create those 5-million jobs that President Jacob Zuma is talking about is if we have better education."

Mr Mchunu said Nestlé's efforts were in line with the government's aim to provide quality education to all children in South Africa.

"We are driven by the understanding that we couldn't live with ourselves if, as a democratic government, we fail to attend to issues around education," he said.

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