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"EP 6"

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So many Questions: Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga

Apr 1, 2012 | Chris Barron

The DA has blamed the collapse of education in the Eastern Cape for the overcrowding of schools in the Western Cape. Chris Barron asked Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga ...



You placed the Eastern Cape Education Department under administration. Has it helped?

Far from it: it has not, because the intervention has had lots of resistance.

From?

From the administration in the province. We were supposed to take over complete control but we met a brick wall.

What is the situation now?

Cabinet has restated that we have to take full control of education in the province. I am preparing an interdepartmental team to go there next week to implement the decisions that were resolved by cabinet. Among others is to say: "If the Eastern Cape want to take us to court, then let them take us to court."

Has the province threatened to take you to court?

They've thrown the book at me. They are saying what I am doing is not allowed in terms of the constitution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Chris Barron'.

They are putting legal obstacles before us all the time. So it was difficult to move against them.

Don't you feel desperate for the children?

We have expressed to cabinet the extreme frustration of seeing things collapse in front of you, when you know things can be corrected ... And then you have adults sacrificing the future of kids for legal niceties and technicalities.

How would you describe the situation in the province?

It's a horror story. That's why we had to take this thing to cabinet again to say: "We've not been able to implement because of legal niceties," and I think it's a tragedy.

When did the government announce it was going to place the department under administration?

In March 2011.

So you've been trying for more than a year?

In the first four months we were able to stabilise issues that were causing immediate problems, such as scholar transport, school nutrition, learner support materials. Then cabinet said to us: "Go into the underlying causes so we don't have a repeat of the problem." And that's where we had a problem. So in the first four months we were able to do the work, but beyond that we have not been able to deal with ... the root of the problem.

Do you know what is at the root of the problem?

Their teacher deployment and management. For years they have not been able to match teachers with learners ... It has cost them billions to have teachers in areas where they don't need them, and then don't have teachers in areas where they do need them. But there are a lot of other [problem] areas we have picked up.

You say you stabilised the issue of learner support materials. Have pupils received their books for this year yet?

No, that's where the problem is for 2012.

Are they still waiting for their books for 2012?

The province didn't have enough money to buy books for every child.

But they haven't been spending their budget?

That's other budgets. They've been overspending their human resources budget, and that's what has caused the collapse. If they underspend on infrastructure, they can't use that money for something else.

Is that why children are being taught under trees?

The province has a huge infrastructure backlog.

You say these problems go back years. Couldn't national government have acted quicker and more decisively?

That's why cabinet said we didn't act with the necessary decisiveness to deal with problems when they presented themselves.

Do you appreciate the problems this has created for the Western Cape, because parents are sending their children there to be educated?

I think that's a real red herring and an exaggeration of what is happening there, which is urban migration, period. It is parents moving in first for jobs, and then bringing their children.

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