

Every child matters

>> why we close schools

The Western Cape Education Department (WCED) has started a public consultation process on whether to close 27 schools in the province. The proposal has generated considerable debate. Here are the answers to the many questions that members of the public are asking.

Q Why is it necessary to close schools?

Our aim is to improve opportunities for the children in these schools. We would like to place them at schools that are better equipped to provide a quality education.

Q What is wrong with the schools you plan to close?

The situation differs from school to school. Most of the schools we would like to close are very small rural schools that do not have the resources needed to deliver the full curriculum. This does not mean that these schools are bad. It simply means that other, larger schools are better equipped to provide a quality education. We have to consider

alternatives, including closing schools, if learner numbers are dropping, if buildings are delapidated and do not belong to the department, and if learners are more likely to achieve better results at another school. The department will inform each school community on the specific reasons why the department would like to close the school.

Q What policies apply to closing schools?

The WCED is acting in terms of the South African Schools Act and national Guidelines on the Rationalisation of Small and Non-viable Schools. The guidelines apply to both urban and rural schools.

Q Why don't you appoint more teachers to the small rural schools?

We allocate teachers to schools based on the number of learners at these schools. Many of these schools only have enough learners for one or two classes. This means that children in these classes are usually in more than one grade. We call these multigrade classes. Teachers use special methods to teach multigrade classes, but they cannot cover the same ground as larger schools with single-grade classes.

Q How can I comment on the proposals?

You can make representations at a public meeting organised by the department. You can also make representations in writing to the Director of your education district.

Contact your school or your local education district office for further details.

For contact details, visit the WCED's web site at wced.school.za.

Q Why close schools when some are overflowing?

The schools are not always where you need them to be, for example, in remote rural areas or in older urban communities where there is less demand for schools. We would prefer to place learners in quality schools closer to their homes so that they don't have to travel long distances to get to school. Some of our old schools are very delapidated and are not worth maintaining when we can accommodate learners in better schools nearby.

Why is that?

A teacher teaching learners in seven grades in one class, for example, has to prepare and deliver 50 lessons a day to cover the same ground as seven teachers in a larger school with a class for each grade. This is difficult to do.

Q How will my child benefit from school closures?

Our aim is to improve opportunities for your child. We would like to place your child at a school that is better equipped to provide a quality education. We guarantee that we will place your child in a better, safer learning environment.

Q Are you talking to the people concerned?

Yes. Public participation is central to the whole process. Our education districts review resources on an ongoing basis in consultation with the schools concerned. The department proposes closures to the Minister of Education if it believes that

they are necessary. The Minister interrogates the proposals on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the school communities concerned. The Minister starts by consulting the School Governing Body, and then the

broader school community via a public participation process, as required. He will make his final decision after carefully considering representations from all role players. He will base his decision on the best interests of the learners concerned.

Q Is the Western Cape the only province closing schools?

No. For example, provincial education departments closed more than 1 000 schools across the country during the period 2006 to 2010, according to the Department of Basic Education.