

# Orefile Primary School - a dream come true

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PRETORIA: After spending almost four years at Philena Primary School, where 1 447 pupils were crammed into 10 prefabricated classrooms, it's no surprise that learners and teachers felt they were dreaming when they entered their new state-of-the-art school.

Orefile Primary School in Olievenhoutbosch opened its doors to learners early in January 2013, after being officially handed over last year in November by Gauteng Premier Nomvula Mokonyane together with Infrastructure Development MEC Qedani Mahlangu and Education MEC Barbara Creecy.

The R33.4 million school, the first green-school in South Africa, boasts 24 classrooms including three Grade R, eight Foundation Phase, nine Intermediate and four Senior Phase classrooms.

It also includes project classes for Science and Arts and Culture, an administration block; computer and multimedia rooms; storerooms; a sports field for both soccer and rugby and ablution facilities.

It also has sick bays as well as a pastoral office for children with problems at home, where they are able to open up and get advice on how to deal with their challenges.

Grade 7 learner Happiness Magudu, 13, who is among the pupils moved from Philena, said in the old school, classrooms were cold during winter and they couldn't concentrate. During rainy days, teachers wouldn't come into the classrooms because they were leaking.

"Teachers couldn't teach because we got wet including our books. But with the new school, the classes are cool when the weather is hot and warm when it's cold. In Philena, we squeezed in one class but now we are few and we can change the tables and decorate the classes.

"I'm now more focused and expecting my results to improve. Thanks to the government for making our dreams come true. We have prayed for this for many years and we will work for government when we grow up to thank them," said an elated Happiness.

The neat toilets, playground and big classrooms were the first things that got the attention of Grade 3 learner Sbongile Mlambo, 11, upon entering the school for the first time.

"I always feel happy every time when I wake up in the morning, coming to this beautiful school... I thank our principal for

making sure that we got a new school," said Sbhongile.

School principal Clever Shikwambane described Orefile as "the school with a view" because most visitors, including premiers from other provinces, are taken by the school's beauty.

"Philena was not conducive to learning and teaching, and we felt that we were going to be there for the rest of our lives. At the end of September last year, we were allowed to come and view the new place and one couldn't believe their eyes because when we looked at the structure, it was just something that one can only dream of.

"It was a dream come true for the community of Olievenhoutbosch and the school's staff. This is something that only happens once in a lifetime in a community. We are happy for the community who are the first to have a green school. When it was built, they thought that it was a university. All the compliments must go to the government. They've shown people that they really care," said Shikwambane.

He described Orefile as a home with pride. "It's our pride, the pride of anyone who believes in progress," said a proud Shikwambane.

The school has 840 learners, including Grade R, and 17 teachers. Some learners stayed behind at Philena Primary because some parents feared for their children's safety when crossing the road to Orefile.

"It was difficult to manage Philena as it had many children and 40 teachers and peer staff. Managing a company when you are supposed to manage a school is quite difficult but fortunately, the teachers were ready and prepared."

Shikwambane, however, warned that being in a beautiful school was a challenge for him including teachers, learners and parents.

"I hope and trust that our teachers will approach teaching with a different attitude. They will approach those children with a different attitude and will become parents to those children. I hope they will be committed to building their future and equipping them to cope with high school, which will then contribute to the higher pass rate," he said.

Already, the school has made use of the sports field by hosting the school athletics competition, where most learners who achieved positions 1 - 3 and were selected in a team that will represent the cluster.

"Even the teachers were eager to train them because they knew that the school is green all over and the children would not be complaining about stones and bottles. All the credit should go to the government," said Shikwambane.

In a bid to create interest in rugby amongst learners, Shikwambane told SAnews that he had consulted the Blue Bulls rugby team and they were willing to come and help the school introduce rugby in the area.

"If it's started, it will be the first team of rugby players from a black school in Olievenhoutbosch," he said.

During the handing over of the school, Gauteng Education MEC Barbara Creecy described the school as the site for young minds and future leaders.

"If the purpose of education is to make up for family background, the quality of the school and facilities contained in the school will start the long process of [helping] some of the children from informal settlements," said Creecy at the time.

The school forms part of government's Strategic Integrated Projects (SIPs). President Jacob Zuma, in his State of the Nation Address last year, announced an infrastructure plan for the country.

It lists 18 SIPs which cover a range of economic and social infrastructure projects across all nine provinces, with an emphasis on poorer regions.

The new school is part of SIP 13: National School Building. Over 9 000 school projects are in the pipeline to deal with the backlog.

In responding to additional demands for access to education, Gauteng MEC for Department of Infrastructure Development, Qedani Mahlangu launched the New Priority Schools Programme (NPSP).

"Nine schools to the value of approximately R700 million have been identified for NPSP implementation, which will enable schools to be completed within eight months using traditional methods of construction (brick and mortar)," she said.

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