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**Site:**  
vernondickason.com

**Email:**  
connect@vernondickason.com

**Address:**  
Cape Town, South Africa

## **Special Schools Face Closure Amid Funding Crisis**

### **Inclusion Interrupted: When Promises Go Unpaid**

*Author: Vernon Dickason*

#### **Opening Reflection**

Education is meant to include, not exclude. For learners with disabilities, the classroom is more than a place of learning, it is a sanctuary of dignity, care and possibility. But when special schools in KwaZulu-Natal were told to suspend operations due to unpaid subsidies, the silence spoke volumes. It reminded us that inclusion is not just a policy, it is a daily commitment. And when that commitment falters, the most vulnerable learners are the first to feel the cost.

#### **What Happened**

In October 2025, 76 special schools across KwaZulu-Natal reported severe financial distress due to delayed subsidy payments from the provincial Department of Education. Some schools were forced to reduce operating days, while others considered temporary closure. Parents, educators and advocacy groups such as SANASE raised alarm, warning that learners with disabilities were being denied their constitutional right to education. MEC Sipho Hlomuka acknowledged the crisis, citing administrative delays and promising urgent resolution. However, the damage, both logistical and emotional, was already unfolding.

#### **What It Reveals**

This crisis exposes the fragility of inclusive education in South Africa. It reveals how systemic neglect, budgetary mismanagement and bureaucratic inertia can undermine the rights of learners who already face multiple barriers. From a systems-thinking lens, this is not just a funding issue, it is a failure of stewardship. It reflects the need for proactive planning, transparent governance and a culture that prioritises care over compliance.

## Why It Matters

Special schools are not optional, they are essential. When they falter, entire communities suffer. This moment demands more than apology, it demands accountability. Philosophically, it touches on Ubuntu, educational justice and human dignity. Inclusion must be resourced, not just rhetorically affirmed. Otherwise, we risk turning equity into an empty promise.

## Reflective Responses

### What does meaningful inclusion look like in practice?

It means consistent funding, trained staff and environments that honour every learner's potential.

### How do we protect vulnerable learners during systemic failures?

By building safeguards, emergency funding, community partnerships and legal recourse that prioritise the child.

## What systems must be in place to prevent recurrence?

- Transparent subsidy tracking
- Early warning mechanisms for financial distress
- Dedicated support teams for special schools
- Public accountability for departmental delays

## Sidebar: Facts and Philosophy

### Legal Context and Stats (2025):

- 76 special schools affected by delayed subsidies in KwaZulu-Natal
- Some learners attend school only one week per month due to transport and staffing shortages
- SANASE warns of long-term developmental harm if closures persist

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| <p>"The situation has reached a breaking point. These children deserve better."<br/>- Khehla Khumalo (SANASE)</p> |
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