



PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION

Written Question

29/2022. Hon. Simione Rasova to ask the Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts, and Local Government – Can the Minister update Parliament on the status of OHS compliance in all primary and secondary schools in the rural and maritime areas –

a) listed by classification (Government or community owned) and Division; and

There are 277 schools which fall under rural and maritime areas, 193 Primary and 84 Secondary. There are only two Government owned schools and the rest 275 are community owned schools. The two government owned schools are Bucalevu Secondary in Taveuni and Vunisea Secondary School in Kadavu.

As far as divisional demarcation is concerned, they are located as follows in the respective divisions:

- 82 Primary and 14 Secondary in the Central Division
- 78 Primary and 11 Secondary in the Western Division
- 112 Primary and 13 Secondary in the Eastern Division
- 111 Primary and 70 Secondary in the Northern Division

It is to be noted that the community owned schools were primarily built by the community or faith based organisations using rural or community based carpenters.

In those days buildings were built without a proper building plan and also without an engineer's certificate. Some of these buildings were built before independence or immediately after independence. These are very old structures and over the years have started weathering.

Health and safety is a shared responsibility when it comes to schools and for other community owned structures such as community halls and churches. For community owned schools, the school management committee is mainly responsible for the OHS compliance because the building belongs to them. The Fiji First government is aware of the deteriorating state of schools, so it is supporting the schools with the Free Education Grant which they can use for the maintenance of the school buildings.

Free Education Grant has one of the allocations specifically for building and compound maintenance which is 20% of total grant given each Term, to ensure school infrastructure is safe and conducive for learning.

So far the Ministry has provided funding in the form of capital projects for schools approximately \$4 million over the past 6 years to carry out rehabilitation and renovation work for schools under FEG.

Therefore, with the grant support from the Ministry, it is the responsibility of the school management to improve the infrastructure to make it OHS compliance.

The two government schools, Bucalevu Secondary and Vunisea Secondary are also built long time ago where buildings were built in line with the requirements in those days but as the owners of the building, Ministry has been using the Grant for the upkeep of the building and to be OHS compliance. Even the recent building done at Vunisea Secondary by the Japanese Government worth of \$ 589,791.70 is OHS compliance.

b) Plans for compliance if the school has some defects.

To comply with the OHS requirements, the schools can utilize the grant from the respective allocation and where needed, they can also apply for virement, which will be processed by the Corporate Services team and approved by the Permanent Secretary for Education.

Also, as the way forward, all school buildings (community or government owned) built by the government or through donor agencies as facilitated by the government after 2016 (post TC Winston) is under the initiative of building back better. All schools built by the Government and donor agencies comply with OHS requirements.

Under building back better, a rigid process is followed. For example all new buildings constructed needs to have a plan, stamped by a structural engineer and endorsed by the Municipal Councils, ensuring all statutory requirements are met. After the building is completed, OHS, NFA, Engineers check the building to ensure compliance is met before completion certificate is issued by the Municipal Councils.

The Government has spent \$248 million in school rebuilding since TC Winston with other donors contributing over \$9.3 million dollars for rebuilding, schools that meets statutory requirements including OHS compliance.

The Australian Government has allocated AUD \$12.5 million dollars to rebuild schools in the North that were damaged by TC Yasa. All these schools will be built to OHS requirements.