

Countdown to open schools

By Sue Valentine

WHILE many of South Africa's white schools stand half empty and dismally under-utilised, Department of Education and Training figures show that 159 840 classrooms are needed for black pupils.

These are among the stark realities that have prompted a host of groups such as the Open Schools Movement, the All Schools for All People campaign and the Democratic Party Youth to petition the government to desegregate education.

Thus far nine schools have directly requested the Department of Education and Culture for permission to open their schools to all pupils. These schools are: Glenwood High (Durban), Pretoria Boys High, Johannesburg High School for Girls and in Cape Town: Sacs High and Primary, Rondebosch High and Preparatory, Westerford High, Rustenburg High and Junior, Grove Primary.

Indirect requests to admit pupils of all races have come from Cape Town High School, Rhenish Primary School (Stellenbosch), three King Williams' Town schools - Kaffrarian High School for Girls, Dale College Boys' High and Junior - York High in George, Brebner High in Bloemfontein, Queens College Boys Primary in Queenstown and Maidstone Primary in Tongaat.

Minister Piet Clase has shown some encouraging signs, suggesting that at schools



Open classrooms: soon a familiar sight in government schools?

where parents support desegregation, classrooms may be opened to all. However he has yet to give any clear indication of change, offering only a stock reply to questions about the destiny of "whites only" schools and the possibility of opening such schools and teachers' training colleges to all races.

This reply states: "... the department is at present conducting an internal investigation regarding the provision of education. The investigation is making steady progress and the results will be announced once the investigation has been completed."

Just where the system of education in South Africa is headed has been touched on by Nelson Mandela who stated recently that the ANC would respect the many separate cultures within the country and

would allow each community to run its own schools.

This, he said, was in line with the ANC's policy of fighting all forms of domination. Speaking at a rally in Harare, Zimbabwe, Mandela said: "We have suffered for all these years, many of our children have paid with their lives. We know what hardship is brought by any form of racialism."

Whatever policy is pursued the financial facts of education in South Africa cannot be ignored. According to the executive director

of the Institute for Educational Research at the Human Sciences Research Council, Dr S W H Engelbrecht, South Africa cannot afford its present education system. He said if the per capita expenditure for whites (approx R2 500) was extended to other population groups, school education would cost the country R37 billion this year.

Dr Engelbrecht says desegregating schools and sharing of school facilities would not by themselves be the solution, but such measures would be part of an answer.

He added that by the year 2000, there would be 471 000 white children aged between 6 and 11 and 5,5 million black children in the same age group.

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