

90 "Hysterical" Pupils Admitted Into Hospital

Written by Rudi Prinsloo

Saturday, 14 March 2009 01:53 -



At least 90 "hysterical" high school pupils were rushed to Ladysmith hospital on Thursday after suffering from dizzy spells and "fits".

KwaZulu-Natal Health department spokesman Leon Mbangwa said the 90 pupils, most of them girls, were "screaming, jumping and (acting) hysterical".

Police spokeswoman Captain Charmaine Struwig said police were called to Windsor Secondary School in Ladysmith earlier on Thursday when many pupils had fallen ill.

"The children exhibited symptoms of dizziness, had difficulty breathing, fainting and in some cases the children had fits," she said.

Mbangwa said the matter was being attended to.

"We sedated all of them so that they can rest and we will carry out tests on all of them."

At this stage, he said, it was believed to be a psychological reaction or an imbalance of hormones, common among girls.

He said only some of the students affected had actually suffered fits.

"Health wise, they are not physically ill," said Mbangwa.

"But tests will be done..."

None of the patients were in a serious condition.

A similar incident was reported at Mahlenga High School in northern KwaZulu-Natal in 2007.

Classes were disrupted when pupils began crying and screaming.

The staff and pupils believed there were evil spirits at the school and a prayer meeting was subsequently held to rid the school.

Mbali Thusi, spokeswoman for the KwaZulu-Natal education department said they were aware of Thursday's incident.

"Girl learners started screaming, others fainted after displaying symptoms of what appeared to be fits," she said.

"Health officials could not pin-point exactly what could have induced the illness."

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She said health officials were working closely with district education officials on this case.

The rest of the school pupils had been sent home.

An urgent meeting -- to be attended by parents, health officials and education officials -- was expected to take place on Friday.

"...All stakeholders (will help) to find ways of dealing with the situation and to find a possible solution.

Classes at the school have been suspended and teaching is expected to resume on Monday.

Source : Sapa /ma/ml

Date : 12 Mar 2009 14:42