Triplets Nastasija, Keira and Alexia Reddy are a little nervous, but ready for the first day of their school which starts at Durban Girls’ College pre-school. Yesterday was the end of the summer holidays for pupils in the coastal areas. They return to school today for the start of the new academic year.

No ‘major problems’ as school bells ring

Leanne Jansen

IT WON’T be entirely smooth sailing, but the year will be off to a generally good start for KwaZulu-Natal schools today.

Yesterday teachers’ unions said that while there were a few issues carried over from last year which had yet to be resolved, there were no major problems.

The provincial education department conceded that it had “pressure points” to attend to, but that it was “90 percent” better prepared for this school year than the last.

Department spokesman Muzi Mahlambi said some schools had parents at the gates, hoping to have their children enrolled at this late stage.

Mahlambi said the department was unhappy with schools which had not ordered stationery and textbooks by the deadline given last year and, as a result, these items were only delivered yesterday.

For Anthony Pierce, KZN head of the National Professional Teachers’ Organisation of South Africa, the only major concern was the skills of the teachers who had recently been promoted to principals or deputy principals.

“If the intention of the department is to ensure better school management it is imperative that they provide the newly appointed school managers with basic skills in personnel and financial management,” Pierce said in a statement.

Reniël Lodewyk, KZN secretary of the South African Teachers’ Union, said he had not heard of any “huge” problems.

However, there were schools starting the year with senior staff in acting positions, because the vacancies had only been published in the government Gazette late last year.

The December holidays meant the interviewing of the shortlisted candidates had been postponed.

Allen Thompson, deputy head of the National Teachers’ Union, said most schools would be ready to begin teaching today.

He was distressed that children in KZN were being denied education, either because certain schools who had the space were not accepting any more pupils than they had enrolled last year, or because their impoverished parents or guardians had not applied for fee exemptions.

Thompson said that the stalemate between unions and the department over a pay hike for Grade R teachers continued, but that these teachers were expected to report for duty tomorrow.