

When school requirements cost more than school fees

A February 14 post on X by Human Rights Platform @Human-rights256 under the headline: "Which government institution/body regulates the prices of school fees/tuition?" caught my attention.

It referred to a circular by St Peter's Senior Secondary School Nalya, which had the following costs in their fees structures:

Shs200,000 as admission fees paid in cash, Shs850,000 for school uniforms, Shs150,000 development fee, Shs350,000 for study trips Shs50,000 contributions to the school administration PTA board Shs2.4m school fees for boarding students each term, Shs50,000 for DSTV subscription each term per student. The post ended with the key question: "After charging parents all this, what's the aim of paying school fees?"

There was a time when "back to school" meant paying tuition, buying a few text and exercise books, and maybe replacing a worn-out pair of shoes.

Those were the simple days, when school fees were the main financial shock of the term. Today, however, the real cost of education seems to lie everywhere except in the core fees. Increasingly, schools are issuing detailed directives that go far beyond uniforms and textbooks.

Parents are now being told exactly where to buy stockings, ballet dresses, school bags, and even belts and not just recommended vendors, but mandatory, school-approved suppliers. In some cases, items will only be accepted if purchased directly from the school.

One begins to wonder: where

exactly are schools heading? Standardisation is understandable. Uniformity promotes identity and discipline. But when institutions begin dictating the precise source of items that are widely available in the open market, often at significantly lower prices, the line between maintaining standards and creating monopolies starts to blur.

Parents are already navigating a challenging economic environment. Inflation, transport costs, food prices, and utility bills continue to stretch household budgets. Adding compulsory, single-source purchasing requirements, particularly for everyday items, raises serious concerns about affordability and fairness.

Education is meant to be about learning, growth, and op-

portunity. It should not feel like entry into a closed retail ecosystem. The troubling pattern is not the items themselves, stockings, belts, bags, but the creeping expansion of control over how and where families spend their money.

Today it is belts. Tomorrow it could be branded under wear only available at the school gate. The day after, who knows? At what point does safeguarding uniformity become overreach? It is important to note that parents are not resisting standards, they are questioning the excess. They are asking whether schools are prioritising learning or revenue streams. And they are right to ask.

If the cost of compliance begins to outweigh the cost of tuition, then something funda-

mental has shifted in the education model. Schools are pillars of society. They shape the next generation. That responsibility calls for balance, transparency, and sensitivity to the financial realities of the families they serve.

Because if education becomes unaffordable not through fees, but through mandatory add-ons, then the system risks undermining the very access it claims to promote. It may be time for a broader conversation about where school is going, and who ultimately pays the price.

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