

Are private schools meeting educational needs?



The ever increasing private schools have raised the question of standards. Are they giving holistic learning or simply money-making ventures?

Co-curricular activities are part of holistic education.
PHOTO BY RACHEL MABALA

Milagre also boasts of her young girl's rich skills in ballet dancing, which she acquires from rehearsals in the ballet classes at school. Kampala Parents School provides Ballet, French and music classes as well as Scouting which give survival skills to the pupils.

Disappointed

"During my studies at St Mary's College Kitanda, O-Level students were charged about Shs700,000, whereas A-Level students were charged Shs800,000," shares Brian Barasa, an alumni in the A-Level class of 2012. Barasa, however, expresses his discontent in some of the school's co-curricular activities. "Our Sports Day was not as vibrant as that of other schools. We did not even have music, dance and drama. The school only capitalises on football. But you cannot meet all the students' need with only football?" retorts Barasa. "But I enjoyed the meal times as rice was served on a daily with other foods including chicken, beef and posho."

Many private schools score highly in as far as investing in infrastructure is concerned as it is one of the requirements of setting up one. Some cater for children with special needs and physical disabilities such as Ntinda School for the deaf, Nagsari Hill Preparatory which catered special needs education and Bishop West Primary school in Mukono which gives special classes to deaf and dumb pupils among others.

But above all, a private school must be fully registered with the Education ministry to be able to be fully operational.

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According to the Education Act, private institutions were inaugurated with the aim of improving the education sector in Uganda. However, this has come at a cost of, high school fees rates, usually more than an ordinary Ugandan parent can afford, and sometimes compromised standards.

The question is; are these private schools meeting educational standards or just milking money for the proprietors?

Edward Ssebuku, the assistant commissioner for private schools in charge of monitoring and support supervision says, "Many times, parents have different reasons why they enroll their children into private schools. Sometimes, it could be because they want them to excel academically."

According to Ssebuku, the Education ministry recently issued a circular directing all schools to report to the ministry's permanent secretary before any attempt to increase school fees. Because of focusing on

PUNITIVE ACTION

In January this year, more than 250 private schools in Ntungamo District were barred from opening because they were not meeting the minimal operational requirements. At least 198 nursery schools, 85 primary schools and 14 secondary were affected because their facilities are poor and the schools were found not to be using the national curriculum.

the "value for money," there are certain standards that private schools and institutions should be able to meet.

The guidelines

The Education ministry lay out 13 benchmarks that private schools must comply with in order to provide quality education and training. "Institutions are expected to provide an all-round education including sports, character-building, music and dance, and also academic excellence," emphasises Ssebuku.


Kampala Parents School charges about Shs1,650,000 as school fees although it varies with classes. Claire Ndagire, a parent at the school, however, says she does not regret parting with that amount because her children get value for money. "My daughters' grades greatly improve each school term because the teachers are always on the look out for their academic needs. I also do not have to worry about their safety, since whenever I send my sister to help me pick them up, I inform the class teacher who writes a letter permitting her," explains Ndagire.

The legal question

Ismail Mulindwa, the assistant commissioner private schools in the Education ministry, says education in Uganda was liberalised and anyone is free to start a school but within the guide-

lines. "We have the Education Act, which is precise on how a school should be established. Therefore, the schools coming up should be within the framework of the Act. However, there are some schools which start without our permission; some start

as a business, others just to offer a service such as the faith-based institutions," he says, adding that it is these you may find starting a school without a licence and they (the Ministry) are traversing the whole country to put them in order.



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