

Schools hike fees despite Education ministry warning

Reasons. Schools and their regulators cite high cost of production and cost of living as the main reasons behind their hike of schools fees or extra charges.

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KAMPALA. Third term is here again; the shortest yet most demanding. Some schools will only allow into classroom children with zero balance, yet each day a child misses class can be detrimental as this is a promotional term.

As was expected, some schools have hiked school fees despite warnings from the Ministry of Education and Sports.

In February, Education minister Janet Museveni directed all schools to submit to the ministry their budgets for the last three years and were tasked to seek permission from the ministry's permanent secretary before increasing any fees.

Besides school fees, different schools have different charges to run other projects such as buying a school bus, building a school laboratory, library, and swimming pool.

Some schools now charge as high as Shs700,000 for a pair of uniform and probably Shs500,000 for development fees, end of year party, sports jersey, tour fees and many other activities. This is not to exclude other requirements, including baking flour (for students that take Food and Nutrition courses), rice, homework fee, cement, stationery, slashers, ream of papers and brooms that bring the total to nearly Shs3m.

Mr Moses Mukisa, a parent once had to pay a commitment fee of Shs500,000, which was nearly half the school fees he was required to pay within a set deadline for his son who was to join St Henry's College Kitovu. This fee is purportedly to guarantee a vacancy for one's child before the new term opens.

"The money is part of the school fees so you are sure your child has a place in the school but it's not refundable once you change your mind to take a child to another school," Mukisa says.

Lump sum versus top-up fees

Mr Deogratius Ssekakoni, the deputy head teacher of Seeta Junior School, says schools planning to charge extra fees should explain to parents what the fee is meant for or else it becomes a burden to parents.

"It is better for schools to incorporate the extra charges into schools fees and charged



Back to school. Students wait with their luggage to board a taxi in New Taxi Park, Kampala recently. As the third term begins, parents have to dig deeper into their pockets as several schools hiked fees on top of other charges. PHOTO BY ALEX ESAGALA

at once so that it does not become a burden to the parents," he advises.

But Mr Jamiru Buwembo, the headmaster of Kakungulu Memorial Secondary School, says should schools incorporate the extra charges into school fees, the parents would complain about the inflated school fees.

"School administrators should make proper communication to the parents to explain how the extra charge would ease the students learning, but indicating it as school fees would make the parents think that schools have increased fees," he says.

Mr Ssekakoni says some fees, including for study tours, are genuine and parents should pay for them without question because field tours are part of the school curriculum, but warns that schools should levy charges that are affordable.

"School tours are genuine, as for how much; may be difficult to establish because the tours may be within local or regional setting and the schools operate within the national economy where prices for most services and commodities are high," he says.

Unregulated entrepreneurs

A story published by this newspaper on July 3, cited conflict of interest among policy implementers and the State's surrendering of delivery of quality education to the private sector that auctions it to the highest payer.

Seeta High Schools, one of the private schools owned by State minister of Education John Chrysostom Musingo, has been mentioned by many parents as one of the schools that charge exorbitant extra fees.

Liberalisation of the economy by the government is thus presenting challenges on regulate of entrepreneurs in the education sector, forcing Uganda into a regulatory fix with top bureaucrats and politicians who, by law and deployment are tasked with enforcing the rules, are the very players in the sector.

KEY ISSUES

No guidelines. Mr Robinson Nsumba Lyazi, the director Basic and Secondary Education at the Ministry of Education and Sports, says the fees review committee chairperson has not yet submitted his findings so there cannot be any guidelines for the third term.

More charges. Ms Florence Nankya, a former student at Kitebi Secondary School, was asked to pay a fee of Shs 30,000, buy a school magazine and umbrella when she went to pick her A-Level exams results slip.

Some of the key officials in the Ministry of Education own some of the private schools yet they are supposed to regulate them; thereby creating an uncomfortable fix.

Mr Phillip Majweega, a parent says: "Competition is good for the education sector because it calls for better services, but there is need to compute the unit cost of providing quality

education as well as compel service providers to charge fees that correspond with the cost."

Way out?

Some parents painfully had to relocate their children from better-performing schools that charge more than they can afford to relatively cheaper schools even when they do not perform very well.

In some schools, parents are first offered a bank slips to pay Shs2.5m for school fees and thereafter are issued with a list of other requirements, but after first clearing the school fees.

"At this point, a parent is already in a fix because they have paid the biggest amount and there is no way to back out but to painfully pay the remaining expenses."

On August 30, it was reported that a commission of inquiry was instituted to investigate the fees structure for both primary and secondary private schools.

Mr Robinson Nsumba Lyazi, the director Basic and Secondary Education at the Ministry of Education and Sports, says the fees review committee chairperson has not yet submitted his findings so there cannot be any guidelines for the Third Term.

"We are planning to start implementing the regulation guidelines at the beginning of next year as the regulatory committee plans to give us a report by the end of the year. We shall therefore write circulars to all schools showing the various centres of expenditures we shall have agreed upon," he says.

But he says the ministry is handling only isolated cases of schools which have exorbitantly hiked the fees for now.