



Headteachers of secondary schools taking part in the selection of Senior One students in 2015. This year's selections for Senior One take place today. Photo by Richard Sanya

# Fewer students to get free education

By Conan Businge

At least 146,500 students, who were meant to benefit from the Universal Secondary Schools (USE), programme in private schools now have to scramble for vacancies in government schools with the programme or pay their own fees.

Yesterday, the Government announced that it was phasing out the USE partnership with 792 private schools in the country. These schools had 48% of the students who were under USE.

Details show that of the 146,500 planned beneficiaries, 130,000 were meant to join Senior One and the 16,500 were those waiting to join Senior Five.

Education ministry publicist Patrick Muinda said: "The education ministry has planned for a smooth and structured phase-out of USE programme in private schools to minimise possible disruption of the learners, parents or guardians and schools."

The statement noted: "Beginning with Term I of

2018, the Government will not sponsor new students (Senior One and Senior Five entrants) in private schools under USE or the Universal Post O' Level Education and Training (UPOLET) in an area where there is a Government USE school with adequate capacity within a radius of 6km."

It added: "However, continuing USE and UPOLET students (S2-S4 and S6) in these schools will continue to be sponsored until they complete the respective cycles."

Communication regarding the development has been sent to the affected PPP schools and lists of the same have been sent to districts.

By press time, some school heads were yet to get the formal communication. Allan Kizito, the headteacher of Bright Future Vocational SS, Kawempe, said: "The Government has not yet communicated to us. But we still like the programme. We were not ready to quit the arrangement. Much as they were not giving us so much money, it is better than

nothing."

A source in the ministry noted: "The breach of the set guidelines of the partnership, is making the Government change its policy direction of USE in the country."

"To safeguard the interests of the learners and the public, the Government will terminate the public-private partnership agreements wherever a school is found to be flouting the implementation guidelines," the statement read.

The ministry called on the schools "to work closely with the designated officers to ensure a smooth and non-disruptive process".

A source said this policy move will partly help Government save money, which was initially being misused by some private schools under the partnership. "But there were also some good schools, which have done a commendable job in this arrangement, over years."

Meanwhile, selection for Senior One students is scheduled for today in Kampala



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