

Ministry bans non-cash school requirements

By Betty Amamukirori

The Ministry of Education and Sports has ordered schools to stop charging cash and non-cash requirements outside the approved school fees.

According to a new circular released by Alex Kakooza, the permanent secretary in the ministry, all non-cash items must be catered for in the school budget. The circular dated October 24, 2017, is copied to the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) executive director, chief administrative officers (CAOs), town clerks of municipalities, all district and municipal education officers and inspectors of schools, head teachers of secondary and primary schools and boards of governors of schools.

"The ministry has noted with concern the unrealistic and prohibitive school fees which is denying access to basic and secondary education to a number of learners, hence compromising the Government objective of providing affordable education for all and increased access to primary and post-primary education," reads the circular.

Kakooza noted that schools have raised fees arbitrarily in the past, without following the official procedure to obtain permission from the ministry.

Hence, both private and government-aided schools have been forbidden from increasing school fees next year, for whatever reason without a written authorisation from Kakooza, CAOs or town clerks.

Universal Primary and Secondary Education (UPE and USE) schools, and Universal Post O-level Education and Training (UPOLET) institutions have been warned against charging emergency fees and excluding learners for failure to pay the charges. In cases where parents agree to pay the money, the schools have been directed to stop charging the money as soon as the emergency has been solved.

Kakooza said in case of need to employ additional teachers, permission shall be sought from him, CAOs or town clerks, to use part of the capitation grant towards payment of the additional teachers.

"Private schools must adhere to the approved staff employment guidelines. They should formally recruit, contract and effectively manage and develop staff on reasonable employment terms," he said.

Government-aided schools have been banned from taking commercial loans and in case of need, they must seek

GRAPHIC BY BRIAN SEKAMATE

Schools' guidelines

Dos

- Private schools must adhere to employment guidelines
- Minister of Finance to authorise public schools' commercial loans
- School must have functional Board/School Management Committee

Don'ts

- No increasing fees in 2018 without ministry approval
- No cash, non-cash requirements outside school fees
- Schools without valid licences should not open

LICENSED NOT LICENSED

authorisation from the finance ministry through the education ministry permanent secretary.

The schools have also been warned against changing their status to boarding before being approved by the ministry, operating without a functional board of governors and asked to openly discuss school budgets and submit them to the respective CAOs or town clerks.

When contacted, Aggrey Kibenge, the under secretary of the education ministry, said the guidelines were arrived at following a report on findings by the ministry's team that was tasked with assessing the charges that had been instituted by different categories of schools to find out if they are realistic.

He said the education minister set up the team following public outcry that schools were fleecing parents by demanding outrageous and unjustifiable payments.

"The team was to come

up with findings, giving a minimum expenditure of schools basing on their categories, that informs the fees charged by each. We wanted to know why schools charge different fees despite being under the same category," he said.

Kibenge said when the team submitted its report, they came up with guidelines that are in line with the mandate and vision of the ministry.

Godfrey Patrick Masaba, the headteacher Bunyambu Secondary School (USE) in Mbale district noted that the guidelines pose several challenges to the administration of the school.

"I was given only money for 30 students, yet the school has 300 students. When I asked why, they told me that the data was entered wrongly. This term we had national exams and I had to borrow money to run the school. This new guideline will now make it hard for me to do this," he said.

Benon Tugambejwe, the headteacher Kyeibare Girls Secondary School in Sheema said normally they employ teachers while in a crisis without consulting the ministry. These new procedures will make it hard for them to respond quickly when a crisis occurs.

However, he lauded the ministry for putting guidelines on schools changing status to boarding schools, saying they are very expensive for an average Ugandan.

Ecoku Lwanga, the headteacher of All Saints Oluvu (USE) was elated by the guidelines. He said they had no intention of increasing their charges because the school is located in the rural area and any increase can scare away parents.

Statement

In a press statement released yesterday in the *New Vision* newspaper, Kakooza also warned private schools against operating without a valid license certificate from the education ministry. He tasked KCCA, CAOs, town clerks and district and municipal education officers to enforce the directive. The schools will have to display their licences in the headteacher's office. The public has been urged to desist from enrolling their children in schools that do not have valid authority to operate. "All heads of schools and institutions are strongly advised to guard against flouting these guidelines. Stern disciplinary action shall be taken against any head of school operating contrary. Any private school that fails to observe the guidelines shall have its licence withdrawn," he said.

The back to school ritual of unrealistic school requirements is a thorn Ugandan parents have had to bear. Commercialisation of education seems to have pushed this practice a notch higher. Many schools are charging fees that supersede the cost of tuition for several degree courses at Makerere or other universities. Besides the fees, there has been public outcry over exorbitant requirements that different schools demand. These include cement, brooms, reams of paper and toilet brushes. Some parents and pupils *New Vision* talked to recently said teachers and school heads acquire the materials for their personal use at the expense of the pupils. "You can bring five rolls of toilet paper and the teachers keep them in the store, but even before the mid-term, they tell you it is finished," said a pupil in one of the schools in Makindye, Kampala.

SCHOOL REQUIREMENTS GRIEF