

Holidays. Students wait to be transported home at the New Taxi Park after breaking off for holidays. Wakiso District education authorities have threatened to penalise school heads for breaking off before the official calendar date set by government. PHOTO BY MICHAEL KAKUMIRIZI

Schools face penalty over early closure

Costs. Some private schools close early due to the huge administrative costs of running private institutions.

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WAKISO. Education authorities in Wakiso District have threatened to penalise private school proprietors and head teachers whose schools are breaking off for first term holidays before the official calendar date set by government.

According to Mr Henry Lwanga Ssempijja, the Wakiso District education officer, some schools in the district, especially privately owned schools, sent students back home on the eve of Easter weekend for holiday, which he says violates the designed school calendar, which must be observed by all schools across the country.

"We have a calendar which every school must follow, but some school proprietors, for reasons only known to them have chosen to close the school term before the official date. We have information that some sent students back home on the eve of Easter holiday. This is unacceptable. We are going to summon the head teachers of those schools to explain why they did so," he said during an interview at the weekend.

Mr Ssempijja said violation of the school calendar calls for disciplinary action against the head teachers.

"Many of the culprits are private schools, but they must know that government policies have to be followed by all schools," he added.

According to the 2017 school calendar issued by the Ministry of Education last December, all schools are supposed to close for first term holidays on May 5 and report back on May 29.

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Some of the school proprietors who spoke on condition of anonymity, revealed to *Daily Monitor* yesterday that they sometimes close before the official date due to the huge administrative costs of running private institutions.

"Sometimes, we find ourselves in a fix and the only alternative is to close the term prematurely and start planning for the next term. Take the example of food. It (food) is very expensive these days and is really illogical to keep pupils at school when funds budgeted for meals have been exhausted,"said a female school head teacher in Wakiso Town.

Last week, *Daily Monitor* exclusively reported that many schools in Masaka Sub-region had suspended breakfast due to the rising prices of maize flour in the area.

Some school administrators revealed that the cost of running their institutions had become too high due to the hard economic situation in the country and some had halted some planned activities to divert funds to buy food.

Number of private schools

Currently, there are at least 20,000 private schools across the country and 3,600 of them are in Wakiso.

Private schools are the most expensive to operate-because of their perceived high education standards and some charge twice what is paid in public schools.

Government liberalised the education sector in the early 1990s giving way to wealthy individuals to set up private schools which attract students from Kenya, Tanzania, Burundi, Rwanda and South Sudan.

Despite charging high fees, most parents prefer taking their children to private schools ostensibly because they offer high quality services as compared to government-aided schools.

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