emphasising eating normal meals.

"Sometimes they just want to have one meal, and then they eat this junk food from the canteen," the school nurse says. "But as we kept on talking to them, they started eating a proper meal from the school. That is why the numbers were reducing."

Ms Kalemba adds: "Beans can worsen ulcers for those who have serious ulcers. For these learners, we advise them to use the soup, and then the canteen prepares some greens. So we advise that someone gets posho and gets greens for Shs500."

The school nurse says their intervention is working and that learners are responding well. "And we continue to discourage them from eating these fried foods. We are trying to talk to the people in the canteen to use proper and clean oil which has not been used repeatedly," she adds.

This experience is also shared by Ms Kamishani. "We stopped them from bringing snacks that you put in hot water (ready-to-eat highly processed foods), and those things that they always pack and carry to school. This reduced stomach pains," she reveals.

Dr Daniel Kyabayinze, the director of Public Health at the Ministry, referring to a 2024 Dietary Assessment of Secondary School Learners in and around Kampala, says they are in high gear to regulate what is sold in school canteens.

The report says the majority of learners are eating non-nutritious foods or those that increase the risk of developing non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and heart disease.

"Learners consumed more of non-communicable disease (NCD)-risky foods (sweet, sugar-sweetened beverages, salty and deep-fried snacks) compared to NCD-protective foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and nuts. School canteens provided more NCD-risky foods, and they need to be regulated," says Dr Kyabayinze.

Dr Kyabayinze says they would also regulate "the marketing and promotion of unhealthy non-alcoholic beverages and sugar-sweetened beverages in the school environment" and come up with "restrictions on the production and use of industrially processed trans-fats."

Mr Kirabira, on the other hand, believes that addressing the stomach aches would require a lot of intervention by parents and undertaking other internal reforms.

"First, we should ensure the learners feed on time, and encourage the changing of meals most of the time, especially for the learners in boarding school to favour those who cannot entirely feed on the diet, which escalates the problem," he advises.

"To the parents, we have always recommended they give proper treatment for the children before they start school because it is a growing concern, and it is something which you cannot do away with in a short period of time," he adds.

Mr Kirabira also calls for more involvement of parents in treating their children while at school. "They [parents] should give them at least some package of the drugs they have to continue taking at school, because sometimes it's tedious for the schools to keep on supporting these learners' health-wise. This results in schools not supporting them medically, and it also intensifies the challenge," he says.

"For the schools, we need to strengthen the health department and medication adherence. We should also agree with parents that when learners come to school, they have not come to prison, so we need to break that monotony of beans and posho," he adds.

Plan adequately, govt advises stakeholders as first term opens



A parent takes her child back to school yesterday as first term of 2026 opens. PHOTO/IBRAHIM KAVUMA

BY JANE NAFULA

KAMPALA: The government has urged school administrators and teachers to plan adequately and ensure teaching begins on time as schools reopen for the first term, warning against missed lessons and poor preparation.

The Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education and Sports, Dr Kedrace Turyagyenda, said teaching and learning must officially commence tomorrow, and proceed as planned to enable learners cover the curriculum effectively.

"Schools and teachers must prepare themselves in time so that learners can study at the right pace and understand what is being taught. Teaching must start on February 10," Dr Turyagyenda said in an interview on Sunday.

She stressed that no lessons should be missed, noting that timely teaching is essential for achieving the objectives of the curriculum.

Dr Turyagyenda also challenged parents to play a more active role in their children's education beyond paying school fees, including providing basic needs, packing lunch for day scholars, and offering guidance and counselling.

"We know that all children can achieve their full potential if they work hard and when every stakeholder plays their part," she said.

During the release of the 2026 school calendar, Dr Turyagyenda emphasised that teaching and learning must start promptly at the beginning of each term and warned that schools should not shorten the term without prior written permission from her office.

She reiterated that school hours remain from 8am to 4.30pm for primary and post-primary schools, and from 8am to noon for pre-primary schools.

Teachers have also been urged to report on time. The Secretary General of the Uganda National Teachers' Union (Unatu), Mr Filbert Baguma, encouraged teachers to resume work as scheduled, saying their welfare concerns are still being pursued through Parliament.

"We encourage teachers to go and report as leadership continues to follow up on the issue of their welfare," Mr Baguma said.

More than 100,000 Unatu members went on strike at the start of the third term last year over salary disparities between arts and science teachers. The strike was later suspended following talks with the Speaker of Parliament, Ms Anita Annet Among, who tasked the parliamentary committees on Education, Public Service, and Local Government to review the matter.

Mr Baguma said the committees had been slowed down by election season, but are expected to resume work now that political campaigns have ended.

"Although the school calendar was affected by the political season, the number of days learners will spend at school remains the same and must be utilised well," he said.

The Ministry of Education and Sports last month postponed the opening of the first term from February 2 to February 10, citing security concerns during the 2026 General Election, which ran from mid-January to early February.

Meanwhile, school proprietors and parents have raised concerns about financial hardships. Mr Thadeus Musoke Nagenda, a city businessman and director of Mpooma Schools, said many parents are struggling financially and urged schools to introduce flexible payment plans.

"Some parents were heavily involved in politics and lost, while others were affected by city floods that destroyed their businesses. Schools should allow payment in instalments so that no child is left out," Mr Nagenda said.

He also cautioned learners to observe school regulations and avoid carrying prohibited items such as mobile phones, alcohol, and drugs.

Mr Moses Kewaza, the headteacher of Buganda Road Primary School in Kampala, said the long holiday period had been marked by events that negatively affected some learners and parents, including the elections.

Assurance. Although the school calendar was affected by the political season, the number of days learners will spend at school remains the same and must be utilised well Mr Filbert Baguma, the secretary general of the Uganda National Teachers' Union

