

Ministry should act on rising school demands

By Monday, May 28, all schools will have officially opened for second 2018. Taking children back to school is one of the most trying moments for parents and students.

It is a time when schools demand, and rightly so, that parents pay fees for their children to enable a smooth rollout of children's studies and associated activities. Indeed parents, guardians and students always endeavour to pay.

Problem is, these days, many schools, both public and private, demand on top of fees that students report to school with several items ranging from reams of paper (both ruled and plain), hoes, sugar, brooms, bags of cement, slashers, scrubbing brash, and boots, among others.

Then there are what school administrators call projects/programmes, for which parents are again demanded to contribute. These include money for a building project,

money for a school bus, money for children's tours, for revision package, etc. In some instances, students are even asked to contribute towards a private wedding of a member of staff.

Sadly, these limitless demands are forcing some families to painfully relocate their children, some very bright, from better-performing schools that charge more than they can afford, to relatively cheaper schools that post less-than-satisfactory academic results. Worse still, this impacts on the quality of our entire education system.

Question is, what has turned schools into such bottomless pits? In the past, the burden parents faced was more or less limited to raising money for tuition. Then uniforms, books, beds, and many other scholastic materials were provided at school. Yet the fees was not even as much as it is today. What has gone wrong?

This is where the Ministry of Education comes on the spotlight. Why should a ministry, supervised by four ministers and several technocrats, leave schools to demand items from parents as and when they choose? Why has the ministry, in spite of complaints from parents and students, not moved to guide on what schools should demand and what they shouldn't?

To her credit, the Minister of Education, Ms Janet Museveni, in February 2017, directed all schools to submit to the ministry, their budgets for the last three years. She also tasked them to seek permission from the ministry's permanent secretary before increasing any fees.

Why then has the ministry not ensured that the minister's directive is followed through, to date?

However, it is not too late for the ministry officials to stop offering lip-service and take remedial actions against schools that have made demands without getting clearance from the ministry's permanent secretary.

The issue:

School demands

Our view:

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