

Probe PLE absentees, says minister

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The First Lady and Minister of Education and Sports, Mrs Janet Museveni, wants an investigation into the continued high number of absentee candidates in national examinations.

Last year, a total of 640,855 candidates from 12,591 centres registered for national examinations, but only 625,540 pupils turned up for the exams. This means that 17,295 pupils did not show up for the national examinations, which the First Lady says, "is unacceptably high".

"The districts and schools contributing to this high number of absentee pupils must be informed and follow-up action initiated to investigate this issue," the minister said yesterday while releasing the 2016 Primary Leaving Examinations in Kampala.

She was flanked by the state minister for higher education, Dr J.C. Muyingo and several directors and commissioners from the education ministry.

The number of absentee pupils in national examinations has been high for years. In 2015, there were 19,614 absentees, up from 17,788 in 2014. In 2013, a total of 19,959 pupils registered but did not sit the examinations while in 2012, there were 20,989.

Some educationists argue that some of the absentees might



UNEB chairperson Prof. Mary Okwakol hands over the 2016 PLE results to Janet Museveni, the education minister, during their release yesterday. Photo by Roderick Ahimbazwe

be 'ghosts' who go through the education system, but can hardly be 'presented' for the final examinations.

Meanwhile, the First Lady also stressed the need to step up efforts to ensure that girls attend and complete school. She noted that much as the Government and parents, "have managed to make a good progress towards gender parity under the goal of equitable access, boys are performing better than girls".

"It is certainly not a question

"The districts contributing to this high number of absentee pupils must be informed and follow-up action initiated." Mrs Museveni

of inability on the part of the girls, but rather a reminder that we need to examine the entire support system for girl-child education and eliminate any

remaining barriers," she said.

Later, in a related press conference after releasing the results, when asked about the issue of few girls doing sciences

ABSENTEES BY DISTRICT

The central and eastern regions had the highest number of absentees. Ten of these are: Gomba, Kyankwanzi, Kotido, Mityana, Buvuma, Mubende, Ssembabule, Mayuge, Bukomansimbi and Butambala.

at secondary and university level, Mrs Museveni said she was aware of the situation and that the Government was working out a solution to address it.

She also noted that she had been alarmed by the number of suspected cases of malpractice from some districts. The Uganda Examinations Board is withholding examinations for 1,886 candidates, pending the completion of investigations.

The minister said they will work out a way with the UNEB, to find a solution for this growing vice.

"I also challenge the leaders in these districts to take a firm position and address this serious problem."

She also noted that since the inception of Universal Primary Education, the number of PLE candidates have been steadily increasing.

"This programme has enabled a big number of our citizens, who would have otherwise

missed out on school," the minister noted. She explained that the Government has at least managed to bring about better access to education and gender equity.

Mrs Museveni was impressed by the improvement in the pupils' performance.

"I have noted with satisfaction an improvement in performance, especially at the higher grades and the fact that more children have qualified to join post-primary educational institutions."

She also noted that the country has been implementing the thematic curriculum and other important reforms.

"While some members of our society appear to think that teaching in local languages (mother tongues) is detrimental, the opposite is true," the minister noted.

"Learners who are able to read and write in their mother tongue are better and able to read in other languages," she added.

Her argument is well-grounded in studies. A new policy paper by the United Nations has recommended the use of mother tongue during teaching for at least six years of early learning.

The report says teaching a language "other than one's own language" negatively impacts a child's learning ability. It stresses that mother tongue instruction is needed so that gains from teaching in mother tongue are sustained.