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BY YAHUDU KITUNZI

The Inspector General of Government (IGG) has uncovered serious irregularities in Mbale City, exposing both inflated enrolment figures at a government primary school and poorly executed road construction.

The findings have sparked outrage among residents, who say the failures reflect deeper issues of mismanagement and neglect in the city's administration.

City authorities are under scrutiny following allegations that officials deliberately inflated pupil numbers in Universal Primary Education (UPE) schools to secure higher capitation grants.

The city education department is accused of declaring false enrolment figures at Umar and Yumbe Primary School in order to obtain higher grants from the Ministry of Education and Sports.

Investigations conducted by the Office of the IG over the last three financial years revealed glaring discrepancies. While physical headcounts consistently showed fewer than 30 pupils enrolled each year, records submitted to the ministry indicated between 243 and more than 300 pupils, figures now deemed fraudulent.

This revelation came to light during a spot check by IGG officials led by Justice Naluzze Aisha Batala on Friday last week. The team found fewer than 30 pupils present and only one teacher on duty, further confirming the falsification of records.

Justice Batala has vowed to take action against those responsible, stressing that such practices undermine the integrity of the UPE programme and deny genuine schools access to much-needed resources.

Mr Fredrick Oketch, the manager Anti-Corruption at the IGG, revealed that his office has conducted three physical headcounts of pupils together with Mbale City officials over the last three financial years.

Each time, they found no more than 30 pupils enrolled, contrary to the 243 to over 300 figures submitted to the Ministry of Education and Sports for capitation grants.

He explained that during every visit, only one teacher was found at the school — a teacher reportedly suffering from a mental illness and due for retirement on medical grounds. The rest of the teachers were absent, despite signing the attendance book.

"In the 2024/2025 financial year, the headcount showed just 10 pupils in Primary Seven, yet the official PLE results indicated that over 100 pupils had sat for the exams. Investigations suggest that the school was bringing in pupils from private schools to sit for P7 under its name," said Mr Oketch.

He added that government funds were being released for 300 pupils, while in reality fewer than 30 were enrolled. In lower primary classes, pupils were often found teaching themselves without supervision. Upper classes



IGG officials led by Justice Naluzze Aisha Batala and Mbale City officials during an inspection of Umar and Yumbe Primary School on Friday last week. PHOTO/ YAHUDU KITUNZI

IGG unearths ghost pupils, shoddy roadworks in Mbale

such as Primary Five and Primary Six were combined into a single class — a practice that violates education standards.

Mr Oketch criticised Mbale City authorities for being aware of the irregularities yet continuing to secure funds based on inflated enrolment figures.

The school is situated just a few metres from the city headquarters offices along Tororo Road. However, it faces several challenges, including inadequate classrooms, poor washing facilities, a shortage of desks and a lack of proper blackboards.

Discrepancies

During the visit, the team led by Justice Batala observed that each class had fewer than seven pupils. Some classes had to be combined due to the low number of learners.

Ms Jolly Hasoho, the Deputy Town Clerk of Mbale City, revealed that pupil numbers at the school have continued to decline due to an ongoing land conflict.

She explained that land grabbers have been intimidating pupils, forcing parents to transfer their children to other schools. She clarified that at the time of submitting enrolment figures into the system, the school had around 300 pupils.

"I will task the Education Department to strengthen supervision and investigate why teachers are frequently absent from the school, adding that disciplinary action will be taken against those found negligent," said Ms Hasoho.

The revelation has fuelled anger among residents, who see it as part of a broader pattern of corruption and mismanagement.

"If officials can lie about the number of children in school, how can we trust them with our future?" Mr Patrick Madoi, a resident, said. The IGG also un-

covered evidence that officials in Mbale City constructed a road that was allegedly substandard and incomplete.

The road was built with only one layer instead of the required three, lacked access routes to homes and businesses, was narrow and had no street lighting.

Ms Madina Mugala, a resident, argued that the poor workmanship has turned it into a hotspot for accidents, with limited access routes leaving families and business owners stranded.

Justice Batala conducted a spot check on the 2.5km Nakaloke-Namagumba road in Northern City Division, Mbale City. The inspection revealed that the project was incomplete and riddled with poor workmanship. The road has taken three years since it was commissioned. Mr Savio Kakooza Ntensibe, the director of Ombudsman Affairs, noted that the road was supposed to have

three layers but only one was laid.

"The potholes had already developed within six months of completion, and drainage channels remained clogged. There is no value for money and no accountability," said Mr Kakooza.

Mbale Northern City Division Mayor George Bwanika accused city authorities of failing to implement key aspects of the plan, including access routes to residents' homes. Residents of Mbale City have expressed frustration over the narrowness of the newly constructed road.

Ms Aisha Nagawa, a resident, described the situation as dire. "The road has become a death trap because of accidents. We want the authorities to expand it, but right now it is too small," she said.

Ms Nagawa said the road design has disrupted livelihoods. "The customers cannot easily access their shops, while families struggle to reach their homes without proper entry routes. This has led to economic losses and daily inconveniences that could have been avoided with better planning," said Ms Nagawa.

Ms Nagawa said the shoddy road works and inflated school figures paint a troubling picture of governance in Mbale City.

"We are demanding urgent reforms to restore confidence in public institutions. We want the road expanded to ensure safety and accessibility, and we are calling for investigations into the inflated school enrolment figures to hold those responsible accountable," she said.

However, Mr Johnson Gimuyi, Assistant Engineer and project supervisor, shifted blame to the contractor, explaining that only 1.3km of the road had been completed so far. He further claimed that the city had received just

Shs1.9b out of the money allocated.

Mr Musa Okwi, a boda boda rider, said the narrow road has created traffic jams and dangerous driving conditions.

"Parents fear for the safety of school-going children, who are forced to walk along the congested road with no pedestrian pathways," said Mr Okwi.

He said unless decisive action is taken, the problems will persist, leaving citizens to bear the consequences of poor planning and corruption.

Appeal

Mr Okwi urged the central government to step in, ensure proper funding and monitoring of projects, and enforce strict penalties for officials found guilty of malpractice.

Ms Jolly Hasoho, the Deputy Town Clerk of Mbale City, declined to comment further on the road project, citing the ongoing investigation.

"I cannot lie to you that I can give a comment on that road. As you saw, the IGG officials interrogated the engineer but did not reach a conclusion. We are waiting for the IGG report," Ms Hasoho said.

Mbale City Town Clerk Assy Abirebe distanced himself from the road project, explaining that he was not present when the road was constructed or inspected.

"I was in Kampala when the IGG visited the road for inspection," he said, adding that he was told the funds meant for the road were not fully released.

According to him, financing was supposed to be disbursed in phases, but only a small portion was provided, leaving the project underfunded and incomplete.

Mbale RDC Stanley Bayole urged the Inspectorate to pay closer attention to Mbale District, citing numerous corruption scandals.

KEY IGG FINDINGS

- Fewer than 30 pupils found at Umar and Yumbe Primary School.
- Official records showed 243 to over 300 pupils.
- Only one teacher found on duty.
- Over 100 PLE candidates registered despite only 10 pupils in P7.
- Nakaloke-Namagumba Road built with one layer instead of three.
- Road lacks access routes, lighting and proper drainage.