

Sacrament. 75 refugee children baptised



Baptism. Papal Nuncio to Uganda, Archbishop Michael August Blume, baptises South Sudan refugee children at Palorinya Sub-parish in Moyo District last Sunday. A total of 75 children were baptised and officially declared Catholics. PHOTO BY SCOVIN ICETA

Resignations rock GEMS school amid pay dispute

Issues. Nine out of the school's 45 teachers complained, among other grievances, of poor working conditions, mismanagement and reduced pay.

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KAMPALA. Twenty per cent of teachers at GEMS Cambridge International School in Butabika, outside Kampala, have resigned two weeks to the re-opening of the school for a new term.

Nine out of the school's 45 teachers complained, among other grievances, of poor working conditions, mismanagement and reduced pay.

They have bolted out, packed up and returned to their home countries ahead of the beginning of the new term on September 4. The mass resignations, which the management confirmed, has prompted parents to demand an explanation about what went wrong and guarantees that the teaching and learning by their children will not be disrupted.

Mr Neville Sherman, the school principal and chief executive, said yesterday that the affected teachers left for different reasons, among them, a de-

sire to marry and start families in their home countries.

None, he said, quit over poor working conditions or remuneration dispute.

"You cannot talk of poor working conditions when we are offering our teachers with better medical facilitation and accommodation, which are favourable," he said, adding: "I am hearing about this (poor working conditions) for the first time. At our school, we first review salaries of our teachers in East Africa after comparing with our competitors and I can assure you that teachers in Kampala are paid very well."

Some of the Ugandans teaching at the institution had separately complained that they were being underpaid compared to their foreign counterparts, some of whom left, in spite of shouldering similar workload.

The Ugandan problem with the school draws parallels in the region. In November last year, *The Star* newspaper of Kenya reported that local employees at a branch of GEMS Cambridge International School in Nairobi had asked their government to stem "rampant racial discrimination" at the institution.

Africans, the complainants claimed, were targeted and of-

fered peanuts compared to the hefty take-home salary and other work benefits extended to foreign nationals.

In Uganda, the chief executive said GEMS International School

KEY ISSUES

School fees. The school, according to fee structure as from September 1, 2016, charges from \$6,800 (Shs24m) to \$18,912 (Shs68m) per student per year, depending on the grade.

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Different reasons. Mr Neville Sherman, the school principal and chief executive, said yesterday that the affected teachers left for different reasons, among them, a desire to marry and start families in their home countries.

is even-handed and the departure of 20 per cent of the teachers at once will not adversely affect education delivery.

"It is true that some foreign teachers left the school but they left at their own convenience and personal concerns. We have appointed the new staff, including teachers from overseas and nationals; therefore, everything is set for the upcoming term," he said.

The parents, who talked to this newspaper but requested not to be named for fear of victimisation, complained that their children were not getting value-for-money and are demanding that the principal explains the staff exits they fear signal a bigger problem.

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Mr Ben Green, the head of secondary section at the school, told this newspaper on the sidelines of orientation of new staff, that he has noticed nothing unusual during his first three weeks of employment there.

He said he relocated with his family to Uganda last month, and the school has so far taken all the bills.