Experts share tips on how to secure schools

Education and security experts say every schools must have strong fences and gates, functioning CCTV systems offering round the clock surveillance, a school security committee, and cordial ties with surrounding communities.

BY BUSEIN SAMILU

The gruesome killing of four children at Ggaba Early Childhood Development Programme School in Makindye Division, Kampala City, by a man who reportedly pretended to be seeking a place for his child's education, has laid bare glaring security loopholes in schools and underscored the urgent need for reforms.

The Kampala Metropolitan Police spokesperson, Ms Racheal Kawala, identified the suspect as Christopher Okello. He is accused of brutally killing one boy and three girls. The suspect is detained at Kabalagala Police Station.

"As police, we encourage schools to always have security guards and check every person who enters the school because this man disguised as a parent who wanted admission and ended up killing pupils instead," she said.

The dangers schools face are many; armed individuals and groups who kill, kidnap, or harm learners and staff; fires and violence from within and without; and natural disasters such as floods, lightning, or collapsing buildings. These threats hang over schools like a sword of Damocles.

Hire security guards

Education and security experts, drawing lessons from the Ggaba tragedy, proposed a raft of measures to safeguard learners both during the day and in boarding sections. At the bare minimum, they argued, schools should hire security guards, build perimeter fences, and install firefighting and lightning-protection systems.

"There are some incidents that are beyond your control as a school, but at least there are some measures aimed at ensuring the safety of children at the school that should be put in place before you start to run a school," Mr Hasadu Kirabira, the chairperson of the National Private Education Institutions Association (NPEIA), said yesterday.

He stressed that schools must have strong fences and gates, functioning CCTV systems offering round the clock surveillance, a school security committee, and cordial ties with surrounding communities.

"Most of the time, the people who harm the school do not come from far but rather within the community, so the relationship is key. The security guard should be well-trained because we plan, but even the attackers plan; no one just wakes up and goes to do an attack without planning," he said.

Mr Kawala emphasised the need to check visitors and ensure they do not access learning institutions with harmful objects. "If the school is big, hire enough guards, intensify checks before entry to safeguard from intruders."



Joint security personnel at the scene of crime in Ggaba, Kampala, yesterday. PHOTO/IBRAHIM KAVUMA

2023 security guidelines

The Ministry of Education and Sports, in its 2023 security guidelines, laid out several measures schools must implement to keep learners safe. These include raising perimeter walls, installing smoke detectors, CCTV cameras, intruder alarms, and deploying trained armed guards. Schools must also establish safety committees, enforce policies, install lightning arrestors, stock firefighting equipment such as extinguishers and hydrants, display emergency contacts, and conduct fire drills at least once a term.

Ms Kawala reiterated: "We encourage the schools to follow these guidelines to ensure the safety of the learners, but the access control should be prioritised so that schools know and check the category of people who come there and access the learners."

Experts further advised developers to avoid building schools near busy roads, warning that accidents from runaway vehicles could spell disaster. Unlike rural schools often tucked away from trading centres, many urban schools sit cheek by jowl with bustling streets, heightening risks.

Mr Kirabira concluded that regardless of location, the golden rule remains: strong security measures coupled with good community relations are the bedrock of learner safety.

4 CHILDREN KILLED

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