

Why govt-aided schools performed poorly in PLE



The district report recommends remedial classes and splitting large cohorts to improve the teacher-to-pupil ratio. PHOTO/MULYANGHA KODANGHA.

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BY MUDANGHA KOLYANGHA

The release of the 2025 Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) results has laid bare deep-rooted challenges in Budaka District education system, after 41 government-aided primary schools failed to register a single Division One candidate.

The revelation has triggered unease among parents, teachers, education officials and local leaders, all asking the same question: what went wrong?

An assessment by the district education office shows that while the affected schools did present candidates for the national examinations, a web of challenges denied learners the top grade.

Poor teaching conditions, weak supervision and low learner preparedness dominate the list of concerns.

Parents point to chronic teacher absenteeism and incomplete syllabus coverage. In several schools, it is alleged that teachers miss lessons for days, leaving pupils unattended.

"This disrupts syllabus coverage and undermines learners' confidence ahead of national examinations. Inadequate staffing only worsens the situation," said Mr James Nankere, a concerned parent.

Late and incomplete syllabus coverage emerged as a recurring problem. Some head teachers from the affected schools admitted that revision started too late, with candidates entering examinations without adequate exposure to past papers or exam techniques.

Learning materials are also in short supply. Many schools lack sufficient textbooks, forcing pupils to share in large groups. Access to past examination papers, mock exams and teaching aids remains limited, especially in rural areas.

Feeding programmes

Mr Eriya Poli, head teacher of Budaka Family Helper Project Primary School, said the absence of feeding programmes fuels absenteeism.

"Many pupils leave school early to look for food. Others miss lessons to help their families with farming or household chores, especially during peak agricultural seasons," he said.

He added that parental involvement remains minimal.

"Failure by parents to provide basic school requirements, including lunch, has negatively affected performance," Mr Poli noted.

District officials say many parents rarely attend school meetings or follow up on their children's academic progress. Although inspections are conducted, limited funding and transport challenges mean some schools go for months without proper follow-up, allowing poor teaching practices to persist.

Systemic failure

Local leaders insist the poor performance reflects systemic failures rather than lack of learner ability.

"These children are capable, but the system around them is failing," said Mr Isaac Mudangha, chairperson of a school man-

agement committee.

Budaka Senior Inspector of Schools, Mr Robert Wandera, said the district has begun implementing measures to reverse the trend.

These include stricter monitoring of teacher attendance, intensified inspections, and increased engagement with parents and school management committees (SMCs).

"As Budaka reflects on these disappointing results, it is clear that improvement will require collective effort. Without urgent strategies, more schools risk remaining trapped in a cycle of poor performance, leaving learners disadvantaged in an increasingly competitive education system," Mr Wandera said.

He singled out the persistent failure by parents to provide meals at school as a major contributor to poor outcomes.

"Learners studying on empty stomachs from morning to evening struggle to grasp lessons, especially in the afternoon," he explained.

Mr Wandera also criticised the automatic promotion policy, describing it as a contributor to declining quality.

"This policy is another disaster. Government should review it if we are to improve quality and performance," he said.

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REPORT SAYS

The 2025 PLE results in Budaka

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It also recommends remedial classes and splitting large cohorts to improve the teacher-to-pupil ratio.

The figures

The report emphasises that education is a shared responsibility, acknowledging the roles of the district local government, the education department, teachers, parents and learners.

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A total of 4,601 candidates (85.4 percent) attained Divisions One to Four, while 742 candidates (13.8 percent) were ungraded (Division U). Forty-six candidates (0.9 percent) were absent.

Division distribution stood as follows: Division One – 245 (4.5 percent), Division Two – 1,713 (31.8 percent), Division Three – 1,507 (28.0 percent), Division Four – 1,136 (21.1 percent), Division U – 742 (13.8 percent), and Division X – 46 (0.9 percent).

Mr Wandera blamed poor communication of results and limited parental support.

"Parents have totally failed to contribute meals for learners while at school. This has negatively affected performance," he said.

The report ranked Cornerstone Primary School (Budaka Town Council) as the best-performing school.

Out of 39 candidates, 36 scored Division One and three Division Two.

At the bottom was Wairagala Primary School (Tadameri Sub-county), which presented 29 candidates but registered no Division One, with 19 candidates ending in Division U.

Comparisons

The analysis, based on UNEB data, covered 72 schools, government-aided and private.

Subject performance comparisons between 2024 and 2025 showed mixed trends. In 2025, English recorded a 92 percent pass rate, Science 86.3 percent, Mathematics 82.6 percent, and Social Studies 74.6 percent.

In 2024, Science posted an 87.6 percent pass rate, Social Studies 80.4 percent, Mathematics 80.2 percent, and English 78.9 percent.

Hunger. Learners studying on empty stomachs from morning to evening struggle to grasp lessons, especially in the afternoon," Budaka Senior Inspector of Schools, Robert Wandera

The report also revealed a gender gap, with boys outperforming girls. In Division One, males accounted for 148 (5.6 percent) compared to 97 females (3.6 percent).

High failure alerts were raised for 22 out of 72 schools, including Wairagala, Idudi, Kaperi, Kaderuna, Nyanza, Gadumire, Butove, Mivule, Nabiketo and Kodiri.

A "hidden quality crisis" was identified in 42 schools with high pass rates but few top grades, including Kakule, Budaka Universal, Langhole, Jami, Namusita, Praise, Bwibere, Kavule Parents and Kotinyanga.

Budaka Sub-county recorded the highest failure burden at 96 candidates (12.9 percent), followed by Kamonkoli (11.7 percent), Kaderuna (10.0 percent) and Iki-Iki Town Council (9.6 percent).

Schools with the highest absenteeism included Iki-Iki Primary School and Lupada Primary School, further underscoring the challenges undermining learner performance.