



Students from Kololo SSS in Kampala City lineup to access a meal of posho and beans in 2024. PHOTO/STEPHEN OTAGE

EDITOR'S PICK

How schools use biometric machines to fight absenteeism

Institutions are turning to technology to restore order and accountability. In a growing trend, schools have embraced a biometric attendance management system to monitor students' movements and strengthen engagement with parents.

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Senior colleagues tip Form One students on High school life

Recently, several schools around the country welcomed their Senior One class. As they settle into the secondary school rhythm, we sought the advice of their elders, on what they would advise those joining Senior One. / P25

Who monitors food children eat at school?

Rights to nutritious food. Nutritionists argue that offering a nutritious meal is not as expensive as it is perceived by some people. They say a school could choose to mix beans with vegetables and serve it with posho or sweet potatoes, in addition to serving a fruit at least twice a week.

BY JANE NAFULA

A social media clip, showing children, probably from an average Kindergarten, being served posho with diluted soup, containing a few beans scattered in a huge purple plastic basin that appears to be half-cooked, went viral on social media early last week. It raised questions about the quality and quantity of food served to learners in some educational institutions.

According to a senior officer at Kampala Capital Authority (KCCA) who had seen a similar video, this reminded her of her school days, when they were reportedly fed on a similar quality of food. "This is not so different from the kind of food we used to eat during our school days," she recalled.

Mr Benard Bwambale, a nutritionist and National Coordinator of Food Safety Coalition in Uganda, says children have a right to adequate, safe, and nutritious food and that it is important for the school administrators to consult nutritionists on how to provide nutritious meals that are within their school budgets.

"When you look at that video, you find that children were being served posho with some coloured water. Their right to adequate, safe, and nutritious food was compromised. There are lots of implications that can come with that kind of food. School children are growing, and what makes them grow is safe food served in the right quality and quantity," he

said, adding "It is important for schools to be guided by nutritionists."

He also suggested that cooks should be sensitised about food safety concerns and how to properly prepare food, and that guidelines for school feeding should be readily available in schools to ensure they are adhered to.

According to him, offering a nutritious meal is not as expensive as it is perceived by some people. He explained that a school could choose to mix beans with vegetables and serve it with posho or sweet potatoes, in addition to serving a fruit at least twice a week.

He also noted that a school that serves a slice of bread could substitute it with an egg, arguing that the price difference between the cost of a loaf of bread and a tray of eggs is not so big. He also expressed concern over the quality of posho supplied to some schools, noting that it is over processed, an act that he said affects its nutritional content.

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Pupils of Nakasero Primary School being served lunch last Friday. The school grows vegetables at the school compound that they mix with beans to feed pupils. PHOTO/JÁNE NAFULA



Why nutritious food matters for learners

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Mr Charles Maginot, the Director of Education and Social Services at KCCA, says the authority always deploys school inspectors as well as public health inspectors to monitor and ensure that schools adhere to the guidelines as stipulated in the Public Health Act.

"They [inspectors] go to schools to see whether schools have put in place required facilities, have cooks who are trained and wear the right gears, learners' food is prepared in a facility with the right standards and whether the utensils used are hygienic and how the food is stored or cooked," Mr Maginot said. "We have not yet registered any cases of food poisoning because we ensure that schools comply with food safety and hygiene standards to prevent food-borne diseases."

He said the schools must ensure that the food is hygienically prepared, cooked well, and that pupils eat in a clean environment.

Mr Maginot also noted that the Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS), a national standards body, works closely with the Ministry of Education and Sports to ensure the standard of food served in schools is of good quality.

Available records indicate that the Ministry of Education and Sports, supported by UNICEF, also guides school feeding to ensure learners receive nutritious, safe, and balanced meals, through a parent-led approach.

According to UNICEF, nutritious diets are critical for better student health, attendance, and cognitive performance.

Nutritionists say meals served to learners should be diverse, incorporating local foods such as cassa-



When it comes to the healthiest foods for school-age children, it is important to focus on providing a balanced and nutritious diet that supports their growth and development. PHOTO/FILE

va, potatoes, beans, and vegetables, rather than relying solely on a single, monotonous diet of posho and beans.

The deputy headteacher of Nakasero Primary School, Ms Angella Kisolo, says the school strives to ensure learners are fed on nutritious meals.

"We grow our own vegetables on the school compound. These are mixed with beans and served to learners and teachers. The food is well prepared, and in a fortnight, they are fed on beef and rice," she said.

Ms Kisolo said parents contribute towards school meals. Under the 2008 Education Act, parents are responsible for ensuring their children receive meals while at school.

Last Friday, State Minister for Primary Education Dr Joyce Kaducu urged parents to contribute to the school feeding programmes, ac-

Enforcing policies.

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trained and wear the right gears..." - Mr Charles Maginot, the Director of Education and Social Services at KCCA

knowledge that learners can't effect my study on empty stomachs. She said the government was yet to agree on the amount that schools will charge.

Mr Pius Ebinu, Kaberamaido District Inspector of Schools, who doubles as the acting District Education Officer, said whereas schools are abiding by other guidelines, such as preparing food from hygienic plac-

es, the issue of quality and quantity in some schools is compromised by the failure by parents to effectively contribute to the school feeding programme.

"You can't expect a school to give quality when the contribution they receive from parents is so little or doesn't exist. If parents want their children to achieve in class, they have to be responsible. They don't need to wait for the government to remind them that children need food," he said.

However, he says both school inspectors and health inspectors are playing their role to ensure that schools adhere to the set standards.

He explains that Kaberamaido District, for example, has 12 secondary schools and 75 primary schools. Each inspector is expected to inspect 45 schools, according to the Ministry of Education and Sports, but this is only the ideal situation.