

EBOLA: MIXED COMPLIANCE AS SCHOOLS OPEN

PHOTO BY ALFRED OCHWO.

By Vision Team

At about 11:00am, the New Vision team arrived at the gate of St Peter's Primary School, Nsambya in Kampala to find out if any learner had reported for the second term, which officially started yesterday across the country.

Outside the gate were two nurses and about three security guards, who were all enforcing the Ebola standard operating procedures that were issued by the education ministry recently.

Before being let into the school, one had to wash their hands with soap, sanitise their hands and have their temperature taken by one of the two nurses at the gate.

"We are not taking any chances. Whoever enters this school must go through all these checks," one of the nurses said as she checked the team. According to the management, about 400 pupils out of the 1,200 reported on day one. Inside the school, water washing points had been set up at different points.

The school headteacher, Josephine Namusoke, said whoever is found with a high temperature is referred to a health worker stationed at the school.

"In case we find a case, we can easily isolate it and then call the Ministry of Health," she said.

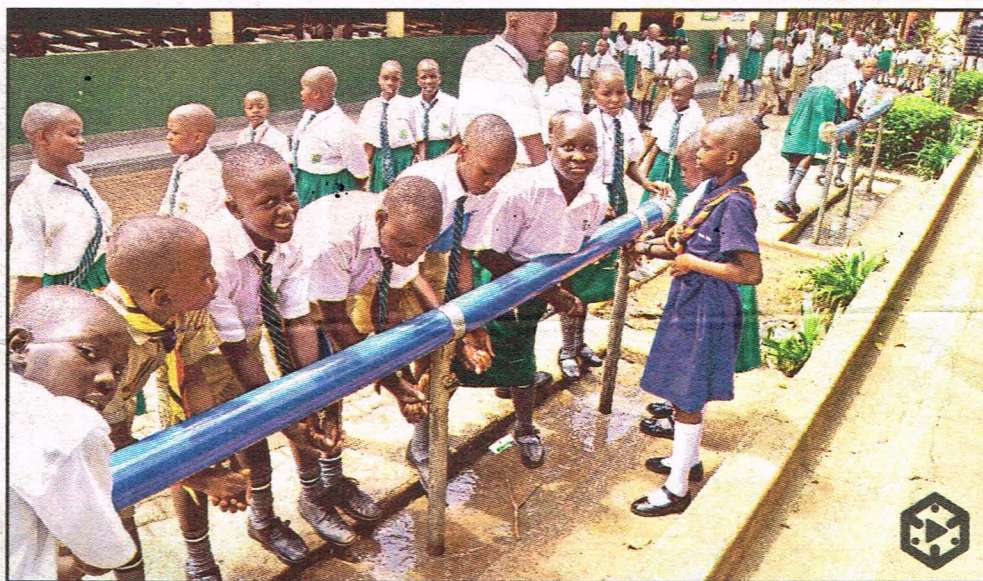
Learners have also been advised to avoid handshakes and hugging.

The situation was almost similar across other schools visited by the New Vision in Kampala.

At Railway Children Primary School in Nsambya, the headteacher, Charles Mukisa, spent part of the morning addressing Primary Seven learners about Ebola prevention measures.

"Avoid crowds; share these tips with your friends," he advised.

At Kiswa Primary School in Nakawa division, the management installed hand-washing facilities in the



Pupils of St Peter Primary School Nsambya wash their hands as part of the standard operating procedures for Ebola prevention during the second-term school reopening yesterday. (Scan the picture using the Vision Digital Experience to watch video)

compound. "Every teacher must also have sanitiser because they handle exercise books and interact with many learners," the headteacher, Aisha Ntege Namaganda, said.

At Uphill College Mbuya in Nakawa division, administrators emphasised social distancing during group discussions and meal times.

"The new curriculum requires group work, but we are emphasising social distancing," the deputy headteacher, Romulus Katusiime, said.

At Kyambogo College School, Ebola prevention notices are posted around the compound. At Kakungulu Memorial Secondary School, the headteacher, Jamil Buwembo, said: "We have sanitisers for everyone in the school."

STRUGGLE TO ENFORCE SOPS

While schools in Kampala complied with Ebola prevention guidelines, several upcountry districts struggled

FINANCIAL BURDEN

Several parents decried increased transport costs and hard economic times as the term opens.

"The biggest challenge is the high transport fares and school fees. Some schools insist on clearance receipts before students are allowed in," Christine Oyite, a parent from Gulu city, said.

Molly Kajumba, a resident of Makerere Kavule, urged schools to go slow in pressing parents to clear all fees.

Parents also complained about additional charges levied by schools.

and registered a low turnout.

At Kagadi Secondary School in Kagadi district, about 2,000 learners out of the expected 4,000 reported on the first day.

The headteacher, Ramadhan Barongo, said the school had put in place preventive measures because of its proximity to the Democratic Republic of Congo where a large-scale outbreak has been reported.

Low turnout was also recorded at Kagadi Model Primary School, Kagadi Junior Primary School, St Adolf Tibeyalirwa Secondary School and Bunyoro College Secondary School.

At Kyenzige Parents Secondary School the director, Peter Alinda, said only 300 students out of the expected 1,000 had reported on the first day.

HOIMA, KIKUUBE

In Hoima and Kikuube districts, some schools reopened without adequate Ebola screening measures despite

being located near the DR Congo.

At Kasonga Primary School in Kyangwali Refugee Settlement, where many learners are Congolese nationals, teachers admitted that the school lacked resources to implement proper preventive measures.

"We are not prepared at all, even when most of our parents come from across Congo," teacher Evelyn Katusiime said.

At Maratatu Primary School in Kikuube, overcrowding remained a major concern.

"You will find about 500 learners in one classroom. In case of any outbreak, many learners will get infected," the headteacher, Geoffrey Ayesiga, said.

Thomas Kato, the chairperson of the school management committee, said refugees have not been sensitised about Ebola. "Many know nothing about Ebola in our camp, yet they frequently cross into the DR Congo to dig and look for food," he said.

IGANGA

In Iganga district, schools also registered low turnout. At Al Jama Primary School in Nakigo sub-county, only 244 pupils out of the expected 2,100 reported.

Teacher Abasa Ziraba attributed the low attendance to parents believing little learning takes place during the first week of term. Kasokoso Primary School in Iganga Municipality also recorded poor attendance, with only 422 out of 1,788 pupils reporting.

Headteacher Stephen Buloba said some parents keep children at home to earn a living through odd jobs.

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