

School leadership

NEWSDAY

TUESDAY 10 SEPTEMBER 2019

TTUTA

THE RECENT statement by the Minister of State in the Ministry of Education regarding the system of appointment of principals is both profound and timely, as schools strive to ensure relevance. This admission holds out promise for the overall improvement of schools if the intent is followed by concrete action.

Many education researchers have opined in the past that the system of selecting school principals is antiquated and inimical to the challenge of school improvement efforts. It is a relic of a colonial public service arrangement that must be significantly overhauled.

The minister acknowledged that the task of a school principal requires skills and competencies that are unique and quite different to those of a teacher. Indeed, teachers are put through a rigorous training process in order to be able to manage a classroom and deliver curriculum.

However, when it comes to managing a school, one is now required to manage an entire plant with a diversity of human resources – teachers and non-teachers.

Human resource and facility management skills now become a given if one is to be able to become an effective principal. This is in addition to the leadership dimension of the task, whereby one is required to lead, motivate, and inspire an organisation toward the pursuit of organisational goals and objectives.

In the current public service configuration, people are promoted to the position based essentially on seniority, with a minimal requirement for the possession of certified administrative competencies. In effect, many good classroom teachers are promoted to positions of incompetence, for they are called upon to

exercise skills and competencies for which they have had no formal training.

As a result, they flounder and falter if they are unable or unwilling to make the transition to leadership and administration via a process of self-directed formal and informal training. In effect, many are forced to learn on the job with attendant negative impacts on the quality of the school.

For many the task may seem overwhelming, exacerbated further by the fact that the higher tier of leadership is no better off, having sought promotion from principalship to escape from the stresses of school leadership and management. This vicious cycle of incompetence continues to characterise school leadership, rendering many school improvement initiatives meaningless.

The realisation of this deficiency on the part of the authorities must be commended. Many participants in the recently concluded vacation training programme indicated that they appreciated the opportunity to hone in some fundamentals of school leadership.

However, while this is a step in the right direction, it is not enough. Becoming successful school leaders requires much more intensive formal postgraduate studies at a tertiary-level institution.

Younger teachers, who show a desire and aptitude for school leadership must be given the opportunity to engage in a formalised programme of postgraduate training before they are even considered for positions of school leadership. This is a standard feature in many other educational jurisdictions.

On many occasions, TTUTA would have called upon the authorities to establish a school leadership institute, bearing in mind the significance of ensuring that schools are led and managed by qualified and competent principals.

The Secondary Education Modernisation Programme initiative of a previous administration had identified institutional strengthening as one of its four targeted pillars for improvement.

Unfortunately, the training target fell woefully short of the mark by the time the initiative came to an end, with a minimal number of principals and potential principals being exposed to formalised training. This was rather unfortunate and was an outcome of the impact of politics taking precedence over good educational decisions.

Our history would have shown that with every new administration comes a new education master plan, discarding the old even if there were good elements located therein. We've all learned that what is good for the name and political image of the minister may not necessarily be good for education. A long-term 20-year-plus education plan that transcends political administrations continues to elude us.

Notwithstanding the forgoing, it is hoped that the realisation on the part of the authorities that quality schools must be led by quality principals, who can practise true school-based management, will be a goal that is vigorously pursued.

Quality school leaders will not just magically happen. It must be carefully planned for and a targeted focus of school improvement. We cannot continue to play the probability game when it comes to school leadership. Too much damage has already been done to our human capital with incompetence characterising school leaders.