



Public Interest and Accountability Committee

PRESS STATEMENT

DATE: 11th February, 2020

FREE SHS HAS IMPROVED ACCESS BUT SUBSTANTIAL CHALLENGES REMAIN:

FINDINGS FROM PIAC'S 2018/19 FREE SHS MONITORING

The Public Interest and Accountability Committee is pleased to share with the public, findings and observations from the report of a monitoring exercise undertaken in 2018 and 2019 on the implementation of the Free Senior High School programme.

The exercise was in line with the Committee's mandate of monitoring and evaluating compliance with the Petroleum Revenue Management Act, 2015 (Act 815) as amended in the management of petroleum revenues, and conducting independent assessments of the management and use of these revenues.

In line with its mandate to undertake independent assessment of the management and use of petroleum revenues, the Committee in 2018 and 2019 undertook the monitoring of Senior High Schools under the Free SHS Programme. The exercise covered 51 schools across eight (8) regions, comprising, Ashanti, Brong Ahafo, Central, Greater Accra, Northern, Upper East, Upper West and Western regions.

The Committee's decision was informed by the fact that the Programme benefited substantially from the Annual Budget Funding Amount (ABFA) through the selection of *Physical Infrastructure and Service Delivery in Education* as a priority area for petroleum revenue spending. In 2017, 59 percent (Approx. GH¢196 million) of utilised ABFA was spent on the Programme, with 50 percent (Approx. GH¢415 million) of utilised ABFA going to support the programme in 2018. For 2019, approximately GH¢680 million representing about 32 percent of the projected ABFA, was allocated for the programme.

The exercise was aimed at obtaining first-hand information on the progress of implementation of the policy, the challenges and opportunities, and identifying areas for improvement.

General Observations

1. **Early reporting at schools:** The programme has resulted in a more timely reporting of students to school at the beginning of each term, compared to the period preceding the Free SHS. Students no longer have to wait for school fees to be provided them before reporting to school.



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2. **Supply of Core Textbooks:** Core textbooks had been adequately provided in all schools visited, albeit late in some instances. Generally, the books were supplied in sufficient quantities.
3. **Supply of Uniforms and Jerseys:** Most schools received uniforms and jerseys on time, however, there were few reported cases of schools not receiving theirs consistent with the school colours.
4. **Impact on Enrolment:** The Programme has led to an increase in enrolment in 41 percent of the schools visited. Girls' enrolment in particular has increased across most of the schools visited.
5. **Improved Feeding Menu:** According to school authorities and some of the students interviewed, food variety and quality have generally improved under the Programme.

Concerns:

1. **Quality and Timeliness of Supplies**

Poor quality and un-wholesomeness of some supplies, delays in supply of food and other items, and under or over supply of some food items and provisions were pretty wide spread.
2. **Corruption Risks Associated with Food Supply:** The lack of advice to recipient schools on the value of goods supplied portends a corruption risk as the lack of transparency provides cover for cost manipulation. The lack of cost information also makes it difficult to complete the school accounts. The schools indicated that their request for advice has so far been ignored. There is no transparency in the selection of suppliers.
3. **Performance**

The abolition of cut-off grades in the admission of students has led to a situation of dumping of poor-grade students in schools, particularly deprived schools.
4. **Elective Text Books and Equipment**

Elective textbooks are not covered under the policy. However, this has not been clearly communicated to parents by government, leading to a situation where some parents are refusing to take responsibility for the purchase of these textbooks for their wards. This situation is negatively impacting on the quality of teaching and learning in the schools. The absence of a textbook replacement scheme is also adding to the challenge to effective teaching and learning.



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Furthermore, equipment and materials for the study of Technical and Vocational courses are not provided.

5. Funding / Budgetary Allocations

Some schools experience delays in receipt of funds, sometimes transferred in tranches within or across terms. About 85 percent of the schools visited had to rely on the funds of the non-free SHS students to cater for all streams of students until funds are disbursed from the Free SHS Secretariat. If this is not addressed, it will impact negatively on the running of the schools when the programme runs full stream.

6. Infrastructure and Equipment

Majority of the schools visited had insufficient classrooms, beds, labs and equipment, poor or inadequate staff quarters, prevalence of bed bugs, lack of infirmaries and where they exist, there are no qualified nurses to man these facilities. A case in point was when the PIAC team arrived just in time, to save a student who had just had an asthma attack in one of the schools, with no infirmary and no vehicle to convey the student to a health facility.

7. Operations of PTAs

While the Ghana Education Service's (GES) moratorium on the operations of Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) may have been well-intended, this has deprived schools of the additional infrastructure that the PTAs traditionally provide. Most of the developmental projects that the PTAs initiated have been abandoned.

8. Staffing

The critical teaching staff running the double-track system have no holidays or breaks, as they need to be present during each track to teach. Supporting staff such as kitchen staff, security, and cleaners are inadequate, exerting additional stress on these staff.

Key Recommendations

1. The Committee encourages vigilance on the part of school authorities in monitoring the quality of supplies, such as inspecting the expiry dates among others. This will prevent the suppliers from using the schools as dumping grounds.
2. In order to avoid the recurrence of over and under supply of food items, supply of food items by the Buffer Stock Company should be based on orders from the schools.



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3. Supply contracts for uniforms and house vests should be given out early enough to forestall delays.
4. The Committee strongly recommends full transparency in the delivery of supplies to the schools and in particular the Buffer Stock Company must ensure that all goods supplied are accompanied by advice on the value and quantity of the goods.
5. Cut-off grades (thresholds) for admitting students should be restored, as students with poor grades struggle with subjects during the course of the term. The Ghana Education Service should pay more attention to the basic schools to improve the quality of students for the second cycle schools.
6. Government must ensure that disbursements to the schools are done expeditiously as the non-free SHS students phase out, to avoid closure of the schools and disruptions to the academic calendar.
7. Technical and Vocational Schools should be adequately resourced with the necessary equipment and teaching materials.
8. Government must expedite action on the provision of infrastructure facilities to end the double track system, extend contact hours, and relieve staff of the attendant extra pressures.
9. The Committee welcomes the streamlining of the guidelines on the operations of the PTAs where Parents Associations are now allowed to operate as voluntary associations outside the control of the school authorities.

The Committee is grateful to the Ministry of Education, the Ghana Education Service, the Free SHS Secretariat and, Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) in the regions and districts visited for their support and co-operation during the monitoring exercise.

Do visit the Committee's website, www.piacghana.org for the detailed report.

Signed

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