



Global development

Uganda's truant teachers targeted by pupil text-messaging scheme

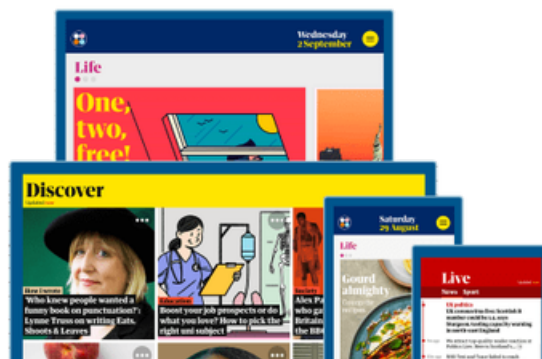
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in Luwero district, about 37 miles (60km) from Kampala, has 614 students and 12 teachers this school year, which began in February. The headteacher, Moses Kyambadde, hopes 2014 will be productive now that the school has taken on one of its biggest challenges, [teacher absenteeism](#).

"There are some teachers who could not go a full week without missing at least a day," he said, sitting in his office with a 2014 calendar behind him. "Teachers would come up with flimsy excuses. Some students would even be absent on the assumption that 'my teachers are not even there, why should I waste time going there when teacher X did not attend yesterday?'"

According to figures in Transparency International's [global corruption report on education](#), published last year, teachers in Uganda were absent from their classes 27% of the time, the second-highest rate among 21 countries. The study describes the problem as one of the most serious forms of corruption in education.

According to a separate report for the NGO Build [Africa](#), the rate at one school in Kumi district in eastern Uganda was a staggering 62.5%.

The report attributed teacher absenteeism to factors such as illness, attendance of funerals, poor school infrastructure, transport problems, environmental conditions, lack of lunch available at school and even drunkenness.

Low pay was also cited. Kyambadde said teachers in Uganda only make an estimated 320,000 Ugandan shillings (about \$129) a month and are often not paid on time, forcing many to undertake farming and other part-time work.

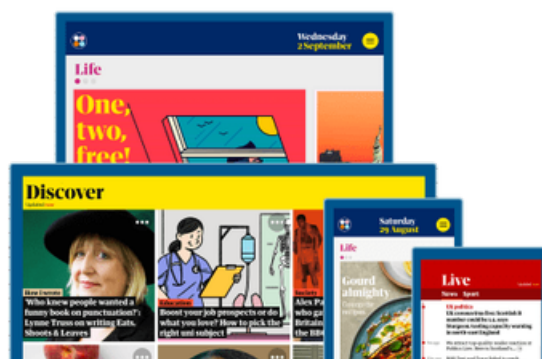
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our teachers like policewomen and policemen. It has given us a voice. It has helped us improved our performance."

Teacher absence is discussed along with other school issues at monthly student council meetings, which Nabwire co-chairs.

Kyambadde says most teachers now miss class only when there is a serious problem. "At the end of the day they realised they have to attend school regularly so that those messages do not show that they're habitual absentees," he said. "The pupils are monitoring the teachers and the teachers are monitoring the pupils, at the end of the day we have both of them attending school regularly."

Kyambadde also sends weekly texts about important school matters direct to parents, who can also use the system to find out if their child has attended school. The scheme is also in place at Kiziba Church Of Uganda primary school.

"This system is linking the parent, teacher, student, the local leaders," said Paul Wasswa, a sub-county official and a member of the school's management committee. "It wasn't easy at the beginning but we've tried to train some parents to write messages."

Plan is also introducing the system in Tororo, eastern Uganda, and the organisation said its research suggested that while traditional meetings prevail elsewhere, in Uganda "ICT for governance has a future because many people are already knowledgeable and able to use it".

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