



HRCSL INTERVENES IN ISSUE SURROUNDING SOME WASSCE PUPILS AT ANNIE WALSH SCHOOL...ENGAGES BASIC EDUCATION MINISTRY AND WAEC

The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) engaged the Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, Conrad Sackey and the Head of the West African Examination Council National Office, Mustapha G. Koroma together with members of their staff on 21st March and 8th April, 2024 respectively. This was in respect of complaints received from some aggrieved parents of the Annie Walsh Memorial School on 14th March, 2024.



According to the parents, their children who have been attending the school from SSS1 to SSS3 and have done entries for the 2024 WASSCE examination were eliminated from the list of qualified candidates for this year's exams.

The team from the Commission included Commissioners Hassan Samba Yarjah and Simitie Laval, Mr. Joseph Kamara the Executive Secretary, Doris Fillie-Faboe Esq. the Director of Complaints, Investigations and Legal Services, and her Deputy Abdul Deen Sesay Esq. and the Complaints Manager Mr. Winston Shaka Sesay, among others.

During the engagements, Director of Complaints, Investigations and Legal Services, Doris Fillie-Faboe Esq. intimated the gathering about the rationale of the meeting which has to do with complaints received from some aggrieved parents on behalf Sixty – Eight (68) of their children all of them senior secondary school pupils of the Annie Walsh Memorial School (AWMS). Their complaint was in relation to the omission of their children's names from the list of candidates to take the 2024 West Africa Senior School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE).

Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, Conrad Sackey thanked the Commission for the visit. He stated that out of the three external examinations conducted by WAEC, which



are the National Primary School Examination, Basic Education Certificate Examination and the West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination, his Ministry only has control over two (NPSE AND BECE). According to him, the Ministry and by extension the country do not have any influence on the work of WAEC when it comes to WASSCE as it is a sub-regional exam including five countries (Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Gambia). He intimated the Commission about the numerous efforts the Ministry and government have been making behind the scenes to cajole the Council members from all the other countries to give a final concession to Sierra Leone and reopen the portal. He elaborated on the difficulty they had faced as a Ministry during discussions with the Council and admitted that up to the time of the meeting with the Commission, the Council had not made any efforts but however stated that discussions were still ongoing as they do not want the innocent pupils to suffer as a result of the lapses of the schools' administration. The Minister of Basic Education noted that he had to break protocol to write to the registrar of WAEC to reconsider their position and reopen the portal. According to him, the portal always opens and closes at the same time for all countries and in this particular circumstance, requesting WAEC to reopen has additional financial implications for the Ministry.





Deputy Chief Education Officer, Adama Momoh explained that after they were informed that 421 schools did not upload their Continuous Assessment Scores for Schools (CASS) into the West African Examination Council (WAEC) portal, a meeting comprising of key players including Conference of Principals for Secondary School (CPSS), WAEC and the Ministry was hosted at Government Rokel Secondary School to find a way of resolving the problem. She stated that during the meeting, there were claims and counter claims regarding accessibility and the technological competence of the school administrators but they learned that WAEC had provided training to schools regarding the use of the system. She stated that they were able to convince WAEC to reopen the portal and that purpose and during that period 229 schools out of 421 schools entered their CASS. She emphasized that the submission of the Continuous Assessment Scores (CASS) is critical as it constitute 30% of the total score of each candidate.

WAEC Head of National Office, Mustapha Koroma thanked the Commission for providing them the opportunity to hear the Council's version on the matter. He stated that five countries are members of the Council and that the portal is opened and closed at the same time for all the member countries. According to him, in many instances, the other countries enter and submit their CASS on time except for Sierra Leone. He explained that the CASS system was introduced in 2016 and operationalized in 2021 after series of trainings of school authorities at various levels.

He furthered that when they started using the CASS system, they had desk officers at district levels to help schools should there be any difficulty in the use of the system during the period the portal was opened for use. According to him, it took the national office series of engagement to have the portal reopened on three occasions after the expiration of the original deadline.

Mr. Koroma revealed that a letter was written by the Ministry to WAEC asking for an extension but they were refused based on the fact that printings were ongoing and that any attempt to reopen the portal would disrupt the entire process.

Test Admin Specialist, Maurice John Langba specifically addressed the issue with the Annie Walsh Memorial School. He stated that the school entered CASS for 328 pupils and the same for the Batch Registration System entries and further confirmed that the exact number of pupils whose assessment had been entered for CASS were the exact number of pupils also entered for BRS.

He stated that before now CASS and BRS of pupils were entered at SSS 3 level which allowed some school administrations to enter fictitious figures. According to him, the school authorities are angry about this because they no longer have the opportunity to manipulate these assessments.



Commissioner Hassan Samba Yarjah and Commissioner Simitie Lavalay thanked the Minister and the Head of WAEC National Office and teams for the detailed explanation on the issue and encouraged them to have the Commission incorporated into their activities especially during examinations.

In a detailed report, the Directorate of Complaints, Investigations and Legal Services recommended that the Commission engage heads of all secondary schools and encourage them to comply with WACE deadlines in the future, and also engage WAEC to have them conduct another training for school principals and senior teachers on the use of CASS and the BRS systems.