

# Opinion

## Education: Galloping into the future

**G**ROWING up in Tarkwa and Prestea, both in the Western Region, I attended the Tarkwa Goldfields Preparatory School and the Prestea Goldfields International School, respectively.

Both were very decent schools in the public sector, mainly populated by the children of senior staff of the mines and with some of the best teachers one could find.

There were also children from junior staff and children from the main townships outside the mines. So I sat in class with children from quite diverse social backgrounds.

Most of us did very well and competed for spaces in elite schools across the country, regardless of our parents' background.

### State

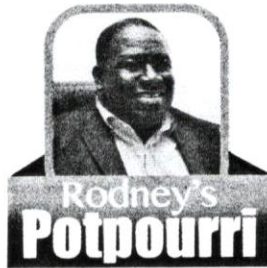
In times past, the concept of private primary schools was almost unheard of. When I entered Form One in October 1980, many of my classmates were from public schools, what we call 'cyto' schools, some from far-flung places I had never heard of in my life.

It had been the norm for many years. Private sector students were relatively few. The quality of the public schools back then enabled some children to shine and make their way from rural Ghana straight into top schools in this country and go on to achieve big dreams.

Today, it is a sad reality that a 'cyto' boy in my hometown, Ankaase, is less likely to qualify to enter my beloved Opoku Ware School or any other top school in the country, when this was not the case a



• President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo



Rodney's  
Potpourri

generation or two ago.

What it means is that many children are missing out on the opportunity of upward mobility, not because they are not smart, but because the state school system has failed them. This is a damning indictment on us as a country.

### Assessment

Consistently, as a nation, we have performed poorly in assessments.

Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE) performance in many public schools is poor, with only about 30 per cent qualifying to enter senior high school (SHS).

In others, especially the deprived parts of the country, they have been scoring zero per cent at the BECE for a number of years. That is, not one child has qualified to enter SHS in years.

The National Education Assessment Unit (NEAU) of the Ghana Education Service (GES) conducted a national Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA) in July 2015.

This was the second administration of EGRA and EGMA in Ghana; the first took place in 2013, and both were conducted as part of the USAID Partnership for Education: The report on the 2015 findings had this to say:

"Like the 2013 EGRA, the 2015 EGRA showed that by the end of Primary Two, the majority of public school pupils struggled even with foundational reading skills and could not yet read with comprehension—either in a Ghanaian Language of Instruction (LOI) or in English.

"In every language, at least half, and often more, of the pupils assessed could not read a single word correctly.

"Some pupils had the ability to recognise a few words, but this was not sufficient to be able to comprehend what they read.

"Of the pupils assessed in each language, in general two per cent or less were able to read with fluency and comprehension."

We did not arrive at this sorry situation overnight — the decline has been steady over the years. Education is not just about putting children in the classroom — it is about having in place a multi-faceted system that supports, encourages and motivates them to deliver

quality learning outcomes.

As the Education Minister, Dr Matthew Opoku Prempeh, states, a hospital will not continue to exist if 70 per cent of patients who went there died. It will be an empty building as patients will decide to seek treatment elsewhere, and as such, regulatory bodies will make every effort to close it down. Why then will a school, a district, a region and a country continue to tolerate poor learning outcomes without asking the right questions when our school system consistently fails close to 70 per cent of our students?

Does nobody care? Over the years, those who can make things happen or can influence change have simply found private solutions to a public problem. They have shipped their children off to expensive, dollar-indexed private schools.

Indeed, very few public sector teachers or Directors of Education have their children in 'cyto' schools they run or teach in — they sacrifice to pay through the nose for private education. There seems to be a lack of what US civil rights activist Dr Martin Luther King Jr called 'the fierce urgency of now' in his famous 'I have a Dream Speech' in 1963.

And yet these desperate, dispossessed, unskilled and unemployable youths, who leave JHS hardly read or write, could be our collective nemesis one day through a social implosion if we do not arrest the situation.

### Turning around

The Free SHS programme remains the government's most visible intervention in the past three years, without doubt. This has led many to complain that nothing is happening in the basic sector.

The evidence, however, suggests otherwise.

On many fronts, such as curriculum reform, teacher training and professionalisation, school inspections, school management and leadership, capitation grant increase by 122 per cent, infrastructure and early childhood education, several initiatives have been implemented with a view to improving basic school performance.

With education reform, there is no magic pill that produces results overnight. The reforms you implement today to improve performance will certainly not mature and make a difference within one electoral cycle.

You must plan for a generation. A ship does not turn around with the speed of a helicopter, but slowly and surely it turns around.

### Enter GALOP

In order to help turn around performance in our public basic school and provide equitable access to quality basic education to all children, the Ministry of Education (MoE) developed an Education Strategic Plan (ESP 2018-2030) with quality, access, equity, sustainability

and relevance, as its key priority areas.

The World Bank has decided to step in to support this plan, and in collaboration with Ghana, is to implement a five-year long project called the Ghana Accountability Learning Outcomes Project (GALOP).

GALOP's objective is to 'improve the quality of education in low performing basic education schools and strengthen education sector equity and accountability in Ghana.'

It is targeted at the 10,000 low least performing basic schools (kindergarten, primary and junior high schools), and all special schools with direct interventions.

The total project amount is \$218.7m. It is jointly funded by the World Bank, Department for International Development (DfID) and Global Partnerships for Education (GPE).

What I find exciting about GALOP is that it is a results-based financing project, that is, disbursement of project funds to the MoE is contingent on the achievement of pre-determined results. Ghana, therefore, has to find the money to put into the project and subsequently, if a set of agreed benchmarks are achieved, then the funds will be released.

I think this is a good incentive for government to ensure that indeed, the project targets real outcomes that make a difference by lifting those schools that have been languishing at the bottom of the pit.

The President, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, will formally launch GALOP at the Jubilee House on Tuesday, June 16, 2020.

### Benefits

To achieve the project's objective, the school system will benefit from the enhanced capacity of teachers to effectively discharge their duties through continuous professional development, as well as an enhanced capacity of heads of schools to effectively manage schools for improved outcomes.

Other benefits include an enhanced capacity of Circuit Supervisors to strengthen school inspections and supervision. District Education Directorates will also benefit through training in education management and provision of district grants.

The project will also promote equitable deployment of trained teachers, incentivize teachers' deployment to rural areas, strengthen school management committees to promote school-community engagement and provide Learning Grants as additional resources to the capitation grant.

Finally, the development and distribution of Teaching and Learning Materials on the national curriculum and the supply of quality TLMs to special schools will be a key benefit of the GALOP project.

Rodney Nkrumah-Boateng  
([rodboat@yahoo.com](mailto:rodboat@yahoo.com)).