

RE: NaSIA struggling due to square peg in round hole

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As an education policy analyst, I keenly follow the ongoing policy reforms at the Ministry of Education, especially those relating to curriculum implementation, teacher education and professional learning and school standards and regulations. Just last week, I read an article which essentially asserted some grievances regarding the leadership and operations of the National Schools Inspectorate Authority (NaSIA). The said article contained a litany of accusations and concerns by an association referred to as the Private Education Coalition (PEC). It had been published (and for that matter shared) in a number of online platforms. It is important to address these concerns in order to carry all stakeholders along the path of building an accountable education policy reform space. While the decision of an official response lies at NaSIA's discretion, I am duty-bound as a citizen to speak to the issue based on my accumulated knowledge and experience in the industry. It is instructive to say that the emergence of NaSIA, formerly the National Inspectorate Board (NIB) as a statutory body created by the Education Regulatory Bodies Act 2020 (Act 1023) has redefined the supervision and inspection architecture of public and private pre-tertiary schools in Ghana. NaSIA has unambiguously espoused mandate, part of which is to set and enforce standards to be observed at the public and private pre-tertiary education level in Ghana. NaSIA has in recent times, in a Covid-19 era, evolved the use of innovative and data-driven measures despite the odds to implement its mandate. Before I proceed further, let me indicate government's commitment, since 2017, to completely overhaul the pre-tertiary education system with the view to improving learning outcomes in schools across all grade levels. Right from the National Teaching Council (NTC) which targets teacher professional development and quality through rigorous processes of teacher registration and licensing, to NaCCA which focuses on standardizing the school curriculum and then to NaSIA which aims at enforcing quality education standards and architecture, our educational system has been put on the right pedestal for improved learning and teaching standards.

Agitations

As often the case, the implementation of these reforms has been met with marginal strains of difficulties and more importantly confrontations from other parties. It is thus not surprising that the Private Education Coalition (PEC), has amplified their challenges with these reforms. However, it is appropriate and fair for such concerns to be evaluated through the lenses of objectivism in order to ascertain their weight of veracity. The main concern of the PEC group is the allegation of "exorbitant and unapproved fees under the pretext of licensing and registering [schools] in order to be able to operate". Having read the ACT that established NaSIA, I have been constrained to say that the allegation by PEC is far from the truth. The reasons behind my position are espoused as follows. The functions of NaSIA as captured in clause 89 (2) of the Act 1023 states that;

The Authority shall, in the performance of functions under subsection (1),

- a. publish the school effectiveness standards and guidelines developed for pre-tertiary education institutions under paragraph (a) and periodically review the standards and guidelines;
- b. prescribe disciplinary measures for a pre-tertiary education institution that fails to comply with the standards and guidelines issued by the Authority;
- c. publish reports and findings on the performance of pre-tertiary education institutions;

- d. temporarily or permanently in consultation with the Minister and the Regional Education Directorate or District Assembly concerned close down a pre-tertiary institution that fails to meet the standards set by the Authority;
- e. close down a school in emergency situations after consultations with the Minister and the Regional Education Directorate or District Assembly concerned;
- f. recommend that pre-tertiary institutions be managed through Public Private Partnerships; and
- g. register private pre-tertiary institutions.

From the above, one may question which of the clauses may have been violated by NaSIA as alleged by PEC. If NaSIA's functions include the registration through licensing of private pre-tertiary institutions as well as reprimanding pre-tertiary institutions that fail to meet the requisite standards, then it is quite retrogressive and unfair for NaSIA to be castigated for carrying out its mandate. Licensing by regulatory bodies demand some form of financial commitment in order to be efficient in their delivery. Thus, it appears fuzzy for anyone to claim that NaSIA is charging unapproved fees. In any case, NaSIA's board has representation from the Teacher Unions and the Ghana National Association of Private schools (GNAPS) and such decisions are sanctioned by the Board for implementation. Again, what charges as licensing fees would be reckoned appropriate for private schools? I believe the private schools and Teacher Unions that have a representation on the Board are in position to argue fairly on what best is reasonable. We did not include them for nothing when we crafted the Act governing NaSIA's operations.

Another concern of the group is the unfortunate remark of a "square peg in a round hole". I would ordinarily have ignored this claim because it appears to have been borne out of mischief and an attempt directed at smearing certain respected individuals at the institution. NaSIA's board is chaired by Professor Eugene K. Marfo Darteh of the University of Cape Coast, an accomplished academic with extensive background in driving change. Membership of the Board which was recently appointed by President Akufo-Addo and inaugurated by the Hon Minister, Dr Yaw Aduwum in accordance with the expectation of Act 1023 also includes Dr. Christian Addai-Poku (Registrar, NTC), Dr. Damasus Tuurosong, President of the Ghana National Association of Private Schools, Mr. Anthony Boateng, Deputy Director-General of the Ghana Education Service (GES), Mr. Victor de Graft-Etsien, representative from the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT). There are also representatives from the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and Technical, Vocational Education and Training Service (TVETS). Additionally, Dr. Haggard Hilda Ampadu, the Inspector-General of Schools who is also a member of the Board, is an accomplished individual with in-depth knowledge on project management, data management, monitoring and evaluation, policy and regulation, etc. Her expertise was put to good use in her previous employment in the U.S pharmaceutical sector as a Data Scientist for 13 years working with the likes of Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson. She also worked as a Regulatory Policy Advisor to 34 countries in Africa in her seven (7) years of working with the World Health Organisation (WHO). This is just to validate her credentials. It cannot be said that these eminent personalities at NaSIA are square pegs in round holes.

In a nutshell, the points raised in the release by the Private Education Coalition (PEC) are littered with inaccuracies. Rather than being combative and accusatory, it is best they reconsider the merit of the reforms spearheaded by NaSIA and open up to progressive policies. NaSIA is a budding institution and would need the encouragement and support from its actors. The sanitization of the school system is

a load of work and it's important for all stakeholders to accommodate change and be constructive in their criticisms. NaSIA's success would ensure learners in pre-tertiary schools in the country meet learning outcomes in safe and serene learning environment and all progress-minded Ghanaians should welcome that.

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