

NEWS

# Queen's College old girls, ex-principal disagree on pupils' death

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***Leke Baiyewu, Abuja***

The Queen's College Old Girls' Association on Monday insisted that a former principal of the college in Yaba, Lagos State, Mrs. Labi Amodu, should be held responsible for allegedly failing to prevent the death of three pupils in the school.

Amodu, however, denied culpability in the death of the pupils which was caused by an epidemic that occurred in the school in 2017.

President of the QCOGA, Prof. Funmi Ajose and Amodu were among the stakeholders who made presentations on the incident at a public hearing organised by the Senate's Joint Committees on Education (Basic and Secondary); and Health in Abuja on Monday.

spaghetti and drinking water said to have been contaminated.

Health records from the school's sickbay had also indicated that a total of 1,222 pupils presented themselves at the school's clinic on account of abdominal pain, fever, vomiting and diarrhoea.

Ajose, in her power-point presentation, showed the dilapidated state of infrastructure in the college as well as the unhygienic state of the kitchen, toilets and dining room.

She added that the water treatment plant had broken down and was not repaired but "there were salvaged boreholes."

She alleged that efforts by her to communicate with Amodu at a point on the crisis failed as the ex-principal allegedly failed to pick her calls or reply her enquiry through a text message.

Ajose said, "I was invited to the school on the 21st of January, 2017 by Amodu to meet with the inspectorate team of their normal annual quality assurance exercise. Because that was the first time I would be visiting the school since 1987 when I was a visiting doctor, I requested to inspect the school to update myself about the current status of the school as I had just taken over the presidency of the association."

She said Amodu obliged and asked a vice-principal and the maintenance officer to accompany her on the inspection.

Ajose added, "The first thing that struck me while approaching the boarding house was a crowd outside the sickbay. I thought that the children were commiserating with someone who was ill only to find out that the entire crowd was ill. The school nurse approached me and said, 'I don't know what is going on. I have attended to almost 100 students today and more are still coming'. We looked at it and it was not difficult for me to see that these children were suffering from gastroenteritis. And it was not difficult for me to pinpoint the cause, which is contaminated water."

Ajose added, "Unfortunately, Amodu was no longer on the premises of the school by the time I left (the sick pupils). She told me that she was on her way to the hospital.

Amodu, however, alleged that some persons were behind the propaganda against her to make the crisis in the school appear worse to members of the public.

She said, “Rather than come together to fashion out ways of avoiding a recurrence of this ugly incident that happened in Queen’s College, unfortunately, soon after I left, it is saddening that some people found it very convenient to politicise the unfortunate death of these innocent children by suggesting through various sponsored publications that I am responsible for the deaths of the children.

“This is not only cruel and malicious but it shows the extent of the organised conspiracy and gang-ups.”

The ex-principal stated that there was no doubt that it was all about “a vendetta agenda.”

Amodu narrated her efforts to salvage the situation when the epidemic broke out. She also recalled how she formally informed the Federal Ministry of Education on the level of decay of the facilities in the college shortly after her deployment to the school.

In his submission, the Chairman of the Parent-Teacher Association of the college, Mr. John Ofobike, blamed the Federal Government for the crisis, saying that the government had left the care of the facility in the hands of the PTA and the old students.

He also asked why the government barred collection of levies by the PTAs under its Universal Basic Education programme, saying that unity schools across the country now lacked adequate maintenance.

Ofobike said, “I have spent about N7m to N8m of my personal money on the school. I believe that government cannot do it alone. The PTA built two big three-storey buildings in that college. The PTA has been supportive. If not for the PTA, that school would have been closed a long time ago; and the old girls too.

“The governments have refused to take up their responsibilities as the owners of the college. It is like the PTA is the owner of the college. I am not going to blame any person. Because of the crisis and the letter and petitions we have written, and the new principal,

The current principal of the college, Mrs. Betty Are, also lamented the bad state of facilities in the school when she took over from Amodu. She however noted that the condition predated the tenure of her predecessor.

She also thanked the Senate for raising the budgetary provision for the school from N130m to N350m in 2017.

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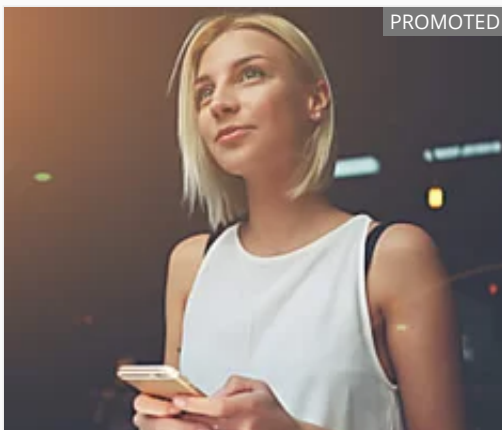
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