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A STATEMENT BY THE GHANA CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE ON THE ONGOING SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL PLACEMENT EXERCISE

Restoring Fairness, Openness, and Fidelity to Mission

Introduction

We, the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, have followed with deep concern the difficulties surrounding the ongoing placement of students into senior high schools. Each year, the process brings anxiety, disappointment, and allegations of unfairness to students, parents, and the wider public. As shepherds of the people of God and citizens concerned for the common good, we cannot remain silent when the integrity of education, a foundation of national development, is at stake. We hold that education is both a fundamental right and a good for the whole nation. No child should be unfairly denied access to a suitable school, manipulated, or humiliated during placement. Every parent deserves a system that is open, accountable, respectful, and free from bribery, discrimination, and undue influence. We speak not as partisans, but as pastors and citizens concerned for children, families, and quality education. We recognise efforts to improve the computerised placement system. Good intentions, however, must be matched by verifiable procedures, accountability, timely communication, and reliable means of correcting mistakes.

Present Concerns and the Need for Reform

The computerised placement system was introduced to promote fairness, efficiency, and equal access. Yet recurring difficulties point to the need for an independent review. This year, of the 604,567 candidates who qualified for placement, 527,932 had been placed when the results were released. Placement will always depend to some degree on academic performance, programme choice, boarding or day preference, and available spaces. Even so, outcomes should be understandable and demonstrably fair. We are concerned by complaints that students have been placed in schools unsuited to their sex, disability, circumstances, or location. No student should be sent to a day school so far from home that daily attendance becomes unreasonable, costly, or unsafe. Students with disabilities should be placed in schools equipped to meet their needs. Genuine errors should be corrected quickly through accessible channels.

We are especially troubled by allegations that parents are asked to pay money to secure places for their children. If placement is meant to be free, no official, agent, or intermediary should request or accept payment for it. Such allegations deserve investigation, and those found responsible should face disciplinary measures and, where warranted, criminal charges. At the same time, unproven accusations should not damage the reputations of honest public servants. The practice of so-called "protocol" admissions also requires urgent clarity. If places in sought-after schools are set aside through discretionary arrangements, the public deserves to know their legal basis, the number of places involved, the criteria applied, and who is responsible. No placement system can inspire confidence if parents believe that money, connections, or influence can secure places unavailable to more deserving but less privileged children.

Mission Schools and the Partnership Between Church and State

Catholic and other Christian schools were founded by the Churches long before the modern state assumed responsibility for universal education and have contributed enormously to Ghana's educational, moral, and social life. The government has a legitimate duty to ensure fair access to education, while the founding Churches have an equally legitimate interest in preserving their religious character, values, discipline, and educational vision.

This is not a new concern. At our National Catholic Education Forum in Koforidua in 2025, we resolved that one place in every five, or twenty per cent, of admissions to our mission schools should be reserved each year for Catholic candidates. This is therefore not a fresh proposal but a call for the implementation of a decision already taken. Many of our priests and bishops tell the same story: parents seek help in securing places in Catholic schools, but too often that help cannot be given because the places provided for under our decision are unavailable. When young Catholics are repeatedly unable to attend the schools their Church built, their attachment to the Church may gradually weaken. We do not claim to know how much this contributes to changes in the number of Catholics in Ghana, but it deserves honest examination.

This reservation is not a private privilege or patronage. It enables the founding Churches to maintain a meaningful number of students who can participate in the religious and moral formation central to these schools' purpose. Any such arrangement must be administered transparently through the proper Boards of Governors and diocesan education offices, be subject to annual audit, and strictly prohibit any exchange of money. It must never become a channel for corruption or favouritism.

We are therefore instructing the National Catholic Secretariat's education office to prepare, without delay, a clear plan for implementing this decision across our schools. We further call for the long-discussed agreement between the government and the Churches on the management of mission schools to be concluded and signed without further delay. The agreement should define responsibility for admissions, governance, appointment of head teachers, religious and moral formation, discipline, buildings, and accountability, while securing an appropriate role for the founding Churches in protecting the distinct identity of their schools.

Towards a More Trustworthy Placement System

The placement system should be examined by independent technical experts, with the main findings made public. Families should understand the principal factors determining placement: examination score, programme chosen, relevant cut-off or ranking, available places, and why a choice succeeded or failed. There should be a strong, accessible appeals process with clear steps and time limits. Cases involving sex, disability, medical needs, serious distance difficulties, or administrative error should receive priority. The government might also consider appointing an independent official to resolve complaints that cannot be settled through ordinary channels.

School categories should be reviewed periodically so that they do not become a permanent hierarchy, leaving families with little confidence in lower-scale schools. The government should invest more in buildings, teachers, laboratories, and learning materials so that quality education is distributed more evenly and pressure on the most sought-after schools is reduced.

The placement process should be accompanied by timely and accurate information. Parents deserve to understand how the system works, their rights, and how they may appeal. Before major changes are introduced, government, the placement body, Churches, schools, parents, and education experts should consult regularly. A fair placement system must not only produce fair outcomes; it must also be transparent enough for families to understand and trust.

Conclusion

We recognise the need for a national system giving every child fair and efficient access to good secondary education: one that is open, accountable, humane, and merit-based. Technology can serve justice, but it cannot replace human responsibility or determine whether an outcome is educationally sound or morally right. We therefore call on the government to review the placement system, conclude the long-awaited Missions-State agreement, protect the identity of mission schools, ensure openness in admissions, end improper protocol arrangements, and strengthen the appeals process. For our part, we commit to implementing, without delay, the decision already taken on Catholic admissions into our schools. The goal must be a system in which merit, choice, fairness, and above all the good of the child determine who is admitted where. Ghana's children deserve nothing less. May Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom, guide all who bear responsibility for the education of our children.



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MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2026