



## TECHNOLOGY

### At Bridge schools, learning using laptops is not new

BY SAMWEL BORN MAINA

When President Uhuru Kenyatta and his deputy, William Ruto, declared in January that they will offer laptops to pupils joining Class One next year, many Kenyans saw an uphill task since some public schools don't even have classrooms in the first place. But laptops are not new to some pupils who use the technology in learning. If you walk into any of 134 Bridge International Academies spread across the country, you will see the teachers using laptops to teach.

Each of these classes will be covering the exact same content regardless of which part of the country their academy is located. You also notice that all the baby class children holding a chalk book.

Co-founder Shannon May prides that the Bridge schools, with more than 50,000 pupils countrywide, offer education equivalent to what is obtained at Makini Academy, Aga Khan Academy or any other expensive academy in the country.

And for some parents, they consider the Bridge system as the "elite schools for the poor."

Francis Ngige is a parent in the one of the Bridge International Academies chain. His son attends school in Uthuru Academy in Nairobi County. He says his son's performance has improved as the school has a dedicated team. Ngige, a kiosk operator, adds that the cost of educating a pupil at Bridge Academy is low as compared to other schools. "I used to pay more than Sh1,000 in a different school, but here, I only pay Sh380 a month," he adds.

Nicholas Nyakundi, another parent at Bridge Academy located in Kisii County, says he is confident that his daughter can compete fairly well with other pupils across the country. "My daughter is able to compete with children in Nairobi, Kisumu and Nakuru. I am able to monitor her performance on a larger scale," he says. The institution, which is to open 80 more academies in September, is funded by billionaires' philanthropist — including Ebay co-founder Matt Bannick.

Shannon says her organization, which also hopes to accommodate at least 100,000 pupils by the end of the year, saw it prudent to equip teachers with digital skills as opposed to the free laptops to pupils. "A computer tablet is just a conduit. It's the content on the computer tablet that makes the difference," she says.

Teachers in the 134 schools are equipped with internet enabled tablets whose data is synchronised with the chain's headquarters for monitoring purposes.

According to Shannon, the tablet is designed with softwares that convey feedback to the main office concerning children's performance. The tablet is fed with more than 4,500 different lessons for each term.

"At Bridge, we normally evaluate the school's performance using the data sent via tablets weekly," Shannon says. She suggests that the free laptop programme should have started with teachers before going to pupils. "At the end of the day it is content that matter. Education officials at county level should have been equipped with gadgets that make it easier for them to track and monitor what is taking place in schools," she adds.

Bridge network of schools was founded and is headquartered in Kenya. It launched its first academy in Nairobi in 2009 with 80 schools after Bannick through Omidyar network invested \$1.8 million (about Sh140 million) to the project. By 2023, Bridge plans to be operating in at least a dozen countries and host 10,000,000 children.



PHOTO | ANN KAMONI  
Teacher Winnie Wangui drives a point using a laptop at Bridge International School in Uthuru recently.

## photo album



PHOTO | ANTHONY OMUYA  
Students of Serare School in Ngong play during the school's sports day. The event is held annually.



PHOTO | ANTHONY OMUYA  
Kindergarteners of Serare School having their fun at the event.

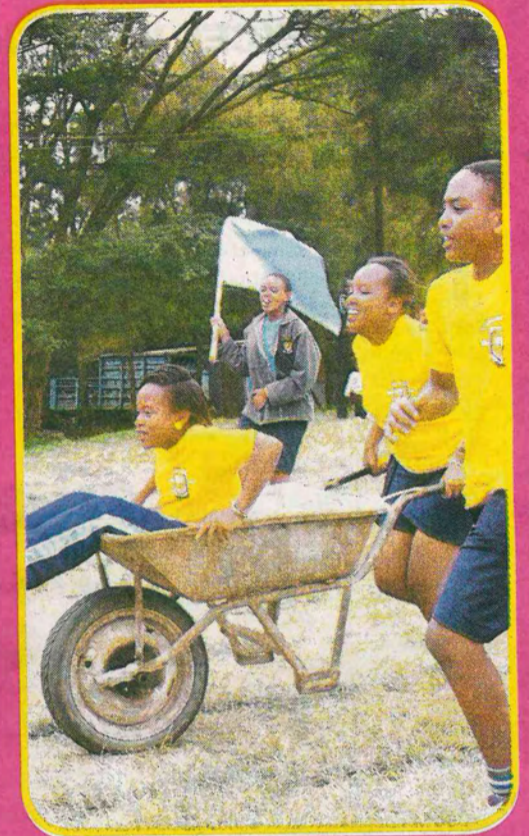


PHOTO | ANTHONY OMUYA  
Some others had time to play wheelbarrow games.



#### LINET GATHONI MAINA

As you turn six, we wish you a happy and prosperous life, good health and God's favour to be upon you always. Best wishes from dad and mum, aunties, uncles cousins and grandparents.



#### RICKY NJENGA

Happy birthday Ricky. You are now five years old. May God guide you and protect you always to blow many more birthdays. Best wishes from mum Salome, dad Dube, brother Thomas and Bay, Wambo, Billy, aunties, uncles and all friends from Lomar Academy.



#### OLINGO JUNIOR

As you turn one, we wish you a happy birthday and a bright future full of blessings and prosperity. Best wishes from mum Angela Ondiebo and dad Peter Olingo, auntie Joan and uncle Brian.



#### SHANTEL WAIRIMU

Happy birthday Shantel as you turn two today. You have brought a lot of joy into our lives. Best birthday wishes from mum Njeri, dad Sam, the Tonje family, and shosh Minne.



#### GOLDBRIGHT OTIENO

Happy birthday boy as you turn one. May God bless, guide and give you many more years. Best wishes from dad Peter, mum Evelyn, sister Sheryl, brother Gravin and neighbour Balozi.



#### IAN MUNYAO MWENDWA

Happy birthday Baby Ian. You are now one-year-old. May you grow up into a fine young man, who will be the pride of his parents. Best wishes from mom Winnie, dad Ken, sister Gloria, cousins, uncles, aunties and grandparents.

#### BRAVIN NYONGESA

Happy 10th birthday Bravin. Best birthday wishes from dad Ben, mum Lyn, sister Lauren, uncles, aunts, classmates and friends. May you grow to be a God-fearing young man and live to see your great-great grandchildren.

Send your birthday messages and photos to Birthday Wishes, Young Nation, P.O. Box 49010, 00100 Nairobi, or email to [yn@ke.nationmedia.com](mailto:yn@ke.nationmedia.com)