

Free SHS Secretariat forwards GH¢5m to schools for electricity bills

By Emmanuel Bonney

THE Free Senior High School (SHS) Secretariat is forwarding GH¢5 million to the Electricity

Company of Ghana (ECG) to defray part of the indebtedness of second-cycle schools.

The move is to prevent the ECG from taking further action against schools that are owing.

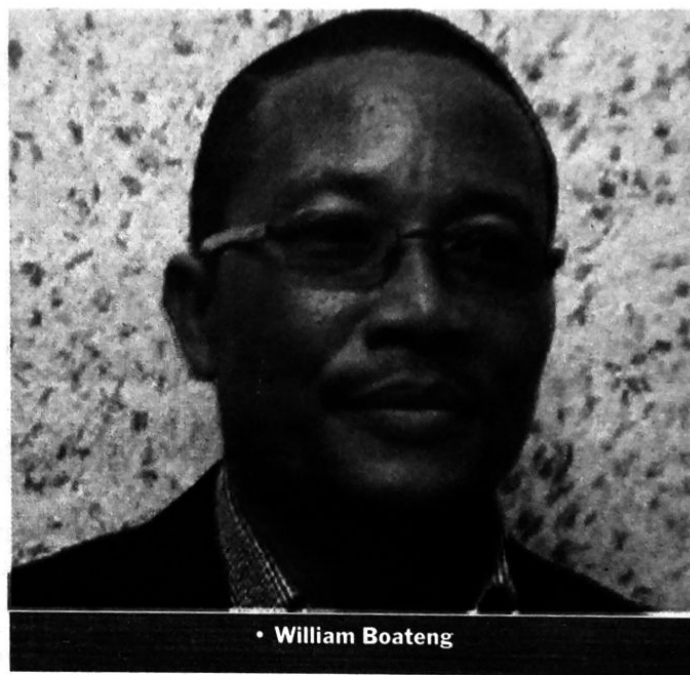
For a permanent solution, the secretariat has scheduled a meeting with the ECG to look at the total indebtedness of SHSs in areas the ECG covers.

The Director of Communication of the ECG, William Boateng, made this known to the *Daily Graphic* in Accra yesterday.

Meeting

The Free SHS Secretariat has requested a meeting with the ECG on Wednesday to furnish it with the total indebtedness of all the SHSs within the ECG's operational areas, Mr Boateng said.

He said the engagement was to prevent any further disconnection of schools by the largest power distribution company in the country.



• William Boateng

He could, however, not furnish the *Daily Graphic* with the total amount owed by the schools when asked, explaining that the cases were spread in the districts and regions, hence it would take some time to collate the figures.

The "forwarding" of the money yesterday followed the disconnection of power to Accra Academy, plunging the school into darkness last Monday night.

The school has since been

reconnected to the national grid after ECG received assurances from the Free SHS Secretariat.

ECG indicated that Accra Academy's electricity debt was over GH¢485,000 as of January this year.

Human face

However, despite the indebtedness, a section of the public thought the ECG could have put a human face to its action since it had to do with

the security of the students.

The students should not be made to bear the brunt of the government's inability to settle its indebtedness to the ECG, also a national installation.

However, Mr Boateng said Accra Academy appeared on its billing system as the client and not the Ghana Education Service (GES) and that explained why it carried out the disconnection.

"So are we saying, going forward, ECG should not disconnect any school so that the company will go into indebtedness and be tagged as inefficient?" he asked.

Mr Boateng said because of

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the unique role it played in distributing power, it was the duty of the company to collect money and pay all those in the power generation and transmission value chain.

Operations

In the meantime, the Director of Communication said ECG was mending faults and injecting the system with modern transformers which required a lot of investment.

"We need the money and so the primary consumer, whether hospital or school, should make an effort to get your authorities to pay," Mr Boateng stated.

Earlier this month, the ECG announced that it was undertaking an intensive nationwide exercise dubbed "Operation No Free Consumption" to last until last Friday.

The two-week operation was to clamp down on power theft by customers who were consuming electricity without payment.

During the exercise, ECG said its teams would be on the field to undertake various activities such as updating customer details, collecting any arrears and disconnecting for non-payment of arrears.