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What to Look for When Buying School Management Software: A Kenyan School's Checklist

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A practical 10-point checklist for choosing school management software in Kenya: CBE assessment reports, verified fee ledgers, backups and data export, honest pricing, real trials, and the questions to ask every vendor.

The right school management system is the one that fits how your school actually runs — its fee structure, its curriculum reporting, its staff's comfort with technology and its budget. A glossy demo proves almost nothing. What matters is a short list of verifiable checks: does it handle your fees and receipts properly, does it produce the reports Kenya's curriculum requires, what does it really cost over three years, and what happens to your data if you leave? Use this checklist to evaluate any system before you sign.

Who this guide is for

School owners, directors, principals and board members comparing school management systems in Kenya — whether you're moving off paper and Excel for the first time or replacing a system that no longer fits.

The 10 checks that matter

1. It was built for Kenyan schools

This is the first filter, not a nice-to-have. Ask directly: does it produce CBE-aligned assessment reports with the performance levels Kenyan schools actually use? Does it handle streams the way your school names them? Can it record M-Pesa and bank payments, not just card payments? A system designed for another market will force you into workarounds in week one.

2. Fees and receipts are airtight

Fees are where schools lose money quietly. Check for: a single ledger per student with a running balance; payments that only count once verified against bank or M-Pesa records; waivers and credits recorded separately from payments; automatic receipts parents can keep; and an arrears report that doesn't silently net credit balances against debts.

3. Marks and assessment reports match your curriculum

Have the vendor generate an actual assessment report in the demo — not a screenshot, a live document from marks you watch them enter. Confirm it handles your grading structure, subject comments and class teacher remarks, and that it can produce reports in bulk at end of term, when 400 assessment reports are due in a week.

4. Student records go beyond a name list

You want admission records, class and stream history, promotion between grades, guardian contacts and documents in one place. Ask how the system handles promoting an entire class

at year end — a task every school does annually and many systems handle badly.

5. Timetabling and class management actually work

If the system includes timetabling, test it against your real constraints: shared specialist teachers, part-time staff availability, double periods. A timetable feature that can't check for teacher clashes is a drawing tool, not a scheduler.

6. Parents can be reached

Ask how the school communicates with guardians — SMS, a portal, notifications — and what it costs per message. Fee reminders and absence alerts only help if they actually reach a Kenyan parent's phone.

7. Your data is backed up and exportable

Two questions that must have plain answers: where is the data stored and how often is it backed up; and can you export your student, marks and finance records in a usable format if you ever leave? If the answer to the second is vague, treat it as a no.

8. The pricing model is fully visible

Get the total cost over three years in writing, not the monthly headline. Ask what happens when enrolment grows, whether maintenance, hosting and support are separate lines, and what the price is after any introductory period ends.

9. Support exists when you need it

Your worst moments are predictable: admission week, end-of-term report week, exam season. Ask how support is reached, typical response times, and whether training for your staff is included or charged separately.

10. You can verify it before buying

A credible vendor offers a real trial or a working demo on your own data — not just a video. Use the trial on a real task: enter one class's marks, record a fee payment, produce a receipt and a assessment report.

Understanding pricing models

School software in Kenya is usually priced one of three ways:

Model

How it works

Watch out for

Per-term subscription

Recurring fee each term

Three bills a year; costs scale up quietly

Per-student pricing

Fee per enrolled learner, termly, yearly or one-time

Whether it applies to returning students too

Flat annual licence

One yearly fee for the whole school

Feature tiers and add-on charges

None is automatically cheapest — the right question is total cost for *your* enrolment over several years. As one example of a hybrid model, Mwalimu Ease charges a one-time KSh 110 per newly admitted student (returning students re-admit free), with the first year's maintenance included and a flat KSh 5,000 per year for the whole school from year two. Whatever system you choose, demand that level of clarity before committing.

Questions to ask every vendor

- Can you show me a CBE assessment report generated live, from marks entered in front of me?
- What is the total three-year cost for a school of my size, in writing?
- How are M-Pesa payments recorded and verified?
- Where is our data hosted, how often is it backed up, and how do we export it?
- What happens to our data if we stop paying?
- Is staff training included? What does support cost after year one?
- Can we run a full trial with our own real data first?

Common buying mistakes

- **Buying the demo, not the product.** Demos show the best path. Insist on a trial where your own staff do the clicking.
- **Comparing headline prices.** A KSh 0 setup with heavy per-term fees can cost more than an honest one-time charge.
- **Skipping the data question.** If your records can't leave with you, switching later becomes painful and your data is leverage.
- **Ignoring the staff who'll use it.** A system the bursar and class teachers find hard will quietly go back to notebooks within a term.
- **No reference check.** Ask for two or three Kenyan schools of similar size already using it — and actually call them.

How Mwalimu Ease fits this checklist

In the interest of honesty: this article is published by Mwalimu Ease, so judge this section the same way you'd judge any vendor's claims. The system covers the areas above — a per-student fees ledger with verified payments and digital receipts, CBE and 8-4-4 assessment reports generated in bulk, student admission and promotion records, a clash-checked timetable generator, library, meals and health modules, parent notifications, and daily automated cloud backups. Pricing is public on the site rather than by negotiation, and there's a

40-day free trial with no card required so you can test it on real tasks before paying anything. See current pricing or browse the feature documentation.

FAQs

What is the most important feature in school management software?

For most Kenyan schools it's the fees ledger — the area where money is most often lost to errors and unverified payments. Close behind are CBE assessment reports and reliable data backup.

Should a small school bother with management software?

Yes, if the pricing model fits. Small schools feel errors most acutely — one lost receipt book or one mis-added balance column is a real loss. Look for pricing that scales with enrolment rather than a large flat licence.

Cloud or offline system — which is better?

Cloud systems give you automatic backups and access from anywhere, but confirm they degrade gracefully on slow internet. Whatever you choose, ask how your data is backed up and how you export it.

How do I compare two systems fairly?

Run the same task on both during a trial — enter a class's marks, post a fee payment, print a receipt and a assessment report — then compare total three-year cost in writing. Demos alone won't reveal the differences.

Can software replace the bursar or secretary?

No — it changes what those roles spend time on. Routine arithmetic, receipt writing and report compilation shrink; the judgment calls stay with people.

Sources and further reading: Kenya Ministry of Education · Kenya National Examinations Council · Mwalimu Ease pricing. Related: how to manage school fees records in Kenya. Last reviewed: 12 November 2026.

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