

Vice mayors, education directors and head-teachers are among 81 people arrested in Rwanda over their alleged roles in widespread cheating that disrupted this year's Primary Leaving Examinations, in a scandal that has reached well beyond the classroom. Thirty-nine of the suspects were paraded before media on September 5, with the investigation continuing into the rest.

Those detained span the education system from top to bottom: two vice mayors overseeing social affairs in Kirehe and Nyamasheke districts, four district education directors, a sector education director, 13 head-teachers, 17 teachers, a school accountant and a librarian. RIB says all are suspected of facilitating exam malpractice and face potential charges of abuse of office, breach of professional secrecy, and forgery.

The arrests span five districts, Rubavu, Kirehe, Nyamasheke, Ngoma and Kayonza, with Rubavu accounting for the largest share at 35 suspects, followed by Kirehe with 21.

RIB spokesperson Thierry Murangira said the 42 suspects who weren't paraded publicly remain in custody while investigators work to pin down exactly what each person did. "The evidence is being put together until the role of every person is established," he said, adding that the inquiry is still widening and could reach more districts and suspects before it's done.

According to Murangira, the scheme wasn't confined to exam day itself — preliminary findings suggest some of the cheating was planned and coordinated in the run-up to the tests as well.

The scandal first surfaced publicly on August 30, when the Ministry of Education ordered 7,188 primary school pupils to sit their exams again after uncovering cheating across 254 exam rooms nationwide. Officials said adults responsible for administering the tests were behind at least part of the malpractice, and rather than simply cancelling the affected pupils' results — the usual penalty — the ministry opted to give them a second chance. Those retakes ran September 2-4, with results due September 11 and the new school term starting September 18 for the pupils involved.

Education Minister Joseph Nsengimana has called it the largest exam malpractice case in Rwanda's history. In total, 286,579 pupils from 3,895 schools sat this year's Primary Leaving Examinations, and the national exams authority recorded an

overall pass rate of 82.2%.