



## Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity

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### Public Hearing Summary

Friday March 5, 2021 at 10:37 a.m.

#### Topic:

An inquiry into the right to equal access to education with specific focus on the underachievement of schools in the Port-of Spain and Environs District with respect to performance in terminal examination (Primary Schools).

#### Committee Members:

The following Committee Members were present for the public hearing:

- Mrs. Hazel Thompson-Ahye – Member (Chairman for the Day)
- Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly, MP – Chairman
- Mrs. Lisa Morris-Julien, MP - Vice Chairman
- Mr. Esmond Forde, MP – Member
- Ms. Donna Cox - Member
- Mr. Kazim Hosein -Member
- Ms. Jearlean John - Member

#### Witnesses who appeared:

##### Ministry of Education

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|--------------------------------|--|
| • Ms. Ann M. Singh             | Director, Curriculum Development                     |
| • Ms. Kamini Bhagaloo          | Deputy Director, Educational Research and Evaluation |
| • Mrs. Natalie Robinson-Arnold | Coordinator, Social Worker Specialist                |
| • Mr. Sheldon Jodhar           | School Supervisor III                                |
| • Mrs. Simone Haynes-Noel      | Schools Supervisor III                               |
| • Mrs. Vashti Ramdeen-Steele   | Schools Supervisor III                               |

##### Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association (TTUTA)

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|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| • Antonia Tekah- De Freitas | President                      |
| • Lisa Ibrahim-Joseph       | Education and Research Officer |

### **National Council of Parent Teacher Association (NCPTA)**

- Mr. Clarence Mendoza                      President (Ag.) TTNCPTA
- Mr. Francis Sampson                      Compliance Officer

### **Catholic Education Board of Management**

- Ms. Sharon Mangroo                      Chief Executive Officer
- Ms. Aurea Honoré                      Vicariate Manager

### **Anglican Education Board of Management**

- Mrs. Cherryl Jackson                      Secretary of the Board
- Mrs. Ann Thornhill                      Asst. Secretary of the Board

### **Private Primary School Principal Association**

- Mrs. Alicia Marquez                      President

### **Association of Administrators of Public Special Schools**

- Mr. Derrick Mundy                      President
- Mr. Gerard Frederick                      Treasurer

### **Private Special Schools Association of Trinidad & Tobago**

- Ms. Phillis Griffith                      President
- Ms. Kahaya Sooklalsingh                      Ordinary Member

### **National Primary Schools Principals' Association (NAPSPA)**

- Ms. Carlene Hayes                      President
- Dr. Charlene Ross-Quamina                      Public Relations Officer

### **Key Issues Discussed:**

#### **Monitoring of Schools**

1. The Ministry of Education (MOE) does not categorize schools as 'underachieving' but instead would analyze the data provided by schools to determine whether the student/s are in need of an intervention.
2. The School Based Management System is the framework used by the MOE to monitor schools.

3. Terminal examinations cannot be used to assess underachievement as it focuses only on academics and disregards the holistic development of the child.
4. The position of Head Teacher or Dean does not exist in primary schools as such the responsibility of patrolling the schools fall to Committees within the schools.
5. Schools supervisors must visit schools each school assigned to them once per month however depending on the intervention needs of the schools, supervisors may visit more frequently.
6. The average ratio of school supervisors to schools monitored are as follows:
  - i. Secondary schools – 1:12 or 1:14 (depending on the District); and
  - ii. Primary schools – 1:15.
7. The need for additional schools supervisors to monitor schools within the Port-of-Spain and Environs District.
8. The need for a Continuous Assessment Test like the National Test to better assess the level of performance of students and schools.
9. Some schools reported increased interactions with the parents of students since the COVID-19 measures as the meetings are online and more convenient for parents.

### **Causes of the Underachievement of Students/Schools**

10. The differences between private schools and public schools can be found in the following areas:
  - i. Access to adequate funding and resources;
  - ii. Entry requirements;
  - iii. Assessment levels and capabilities of the teachers;
  - iv. Disparity in Parental support;
  - v. Access to ICTs during COVID-19; and
11. The Catholic Education Board of Management (CEBM) highlighted two factors as the root causes for the underachievement within the Port-of-Spain (POS) and Environs District:
  - i. Schools are located in designated ‘hot spot’ areas; and
  - ii. The level of poverty of students.
12. The safety needs of the students attending schools in ‘hot spot’ areas needs to be addressed in order for the students and teachers to operate in an environment that fosters learning and development.
13. The need to relocate certain schools out of the ‘hot spot’ areas.

## **The Role of Teachers**

14. Students in schools in ‘hot spot’ areas at times, view the teachers and the school as a safe haven from their family life.
15. Restorative justice is utilized by the MOE however additional training for teachers in this is needed.
16. Training is required for teachers who are assigned to schools located in ‘hot spot’ areas to remove any form of stereotypes that teachers may have against students and parents within the area.

## **Psychosocial/Psychoeducational Screening**

17. The students who may be experiencing trauma can receive psychosocial or psychoeducational screening through referrals.
18. The average time period for the screening is two weeks depending on the number of received by the MOE. After screening, intervention occurs within a day or two.
19. Intervention services of the MOE include:
  - i. counselling services;
  - ii. family intervention;
  - iii. psychoeducational assessments;
  - iv. home visits;
  - v. social functioning assessments;
  - vi. advocacy;
  - vii. parenting in education programmes and workshops; and
  - viii. networking and external referrals to other agencies.
20. Due to the COVID-19, the MOE conducted interventions and screening within the Port-of-Spain and Environs District virtually; home visits or face-to-face interventions are conducted on an as-needed basis.

## **Special Needs Schools**

21. Specialist training needs to be provided for special school educators in different disciplines to assist in teaching and rehabilitating students with diverse special needs.
22. Currently the Special School teachers do not have the skill set to implement the individualized teaching program of special needs students.
23. Additional professionals and semi-professional specialists in the following fields of special needs are required in schools:

- i. occupational therapist;
- ii. physiotherapist;
- iii. orientation and mobility specialist; and
- iv. adaptive physical education specialist.

**View the Hearing:**

The hearing can be viewed on our YouTube page via the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U3a4qRJumTk>

**Contact Information:**

You may contact the Committee's Secretary at [jschumanrights@tparliament.org](mailto:jschumanrights@tparliament.org) or 624-7275 Ext. 2627/2284.

*Committees Unit*  
*March 16, 2021*