



Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity

Public Hearing Summary

Friday July 05, 2019 at 10:58 a.m.

Topic:

Inquiry into the Current Provisions for the Education of Children Who Require Special Needs Education in Public Primary and Secondary Schools

Committee Members:

The following Committee Members were present for the public hearing:

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| • Mrs. Glenda Jennings-Smith | Vice-Chairman |
| • Mr. Esmond Forde | Member |
| • Mr. Kazim Hosein | Member |
| • Mrs. Hazel Thompson-Ahye | Member |

Witnesses who appeared:

Ministry of Education

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| • Mr. Kurt Meyer | Permanent Secretary |
| • Mr. Harrilal Seecharan | Chief Education Officer |
| • Ms. Lisa Henry-David | Director, Educational Planning Division |
| • Ms. Leticia Rodriguez-Cupid | Coordinator, Special Education Services |
| • Ms. Darlene Smith | Guidance Officer II |

Ministry of Social Development and Family Services

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| • Mr. Vijay Gangapersad | Deputy Permanent Secretary |
| • Ms. Jeanette Massiah | Director (Ag.), Disability Affairs Unit |
| • Mr. Troy Pollonais | Director (Ag.), Social Welfare Division |

National Parent Teachers Association

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| • Mrs. Raffiena Ali-Boodoosingh | President |
| • Ms. Olive Garcia | Education Officer |

Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association

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| • Mr. Fitzroy Daniel | General Secretary |
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- Mr. Darren Lee Him Third Vice President
- Ms. Ekka Mc Fee Vice Chairman, Port of Spain District Staff Representative Association

Consortium of Disability Organisations

- Mr. Bhawani Persad Vice President
- Ms. Tracy Hutchinson-Wallace Director

Key Issues Discussed:

1. The approximate number of 3,735 students that require special education services by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the need to provide up to date statistical data, in conjunction with the Office of the Central Statistical Office;
2. The proposed implementation of screening from the ECCE to Primary level to assess the funding arrangements and psycho-educational assessments provided by the MOE to children who require special needs education.
3. The MOE efforts to achieve the educational goals identified in the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities.
4. The education of special needs children through Private Special Schools and Public Special Schools. The former is supported by the MOE through a grant received by the Special School while that latter is funded through the MOE allocation.
5. The internal, multi-tiered process of student assessments by the Student Support Services Division of the MOE.
6. The need for MOE institutional arrangements to address the issue of delays in the processing of students applications for concessions and assessments who require special needs education.
7. The need for the MOE engagement of the Ministry of Health (MOH) to provide early screening at the ECCE level.
8. The challenges related to the transition of the Special Child Grant to the Disability Assistance Grant provided by the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (MSDFS).
9. The concerns of CODO which include:
 - the need for accurate statistics on the number of children with a disability in order to ensure proper planning of educational support services, tools and accommodations;
 - the discrepancy with MOE's average waiting period to diagnose (between diagnosis and assessment) a child with a disability;
 - the denial of applications for examination concessions for a child with a disability at a special needs school although submitted within the MOE's stipulated deadline;

- the need for para professionals (MOE), expansion of teachers training to include children with multiple disabilities (MOE) as well as increased registered occupational therapists and developmental pediatricians (Ministry of Health);
- the need for screening of developmental issues and delays from ECCE Level; and
- the need for education policies/initiatives to be done in consultation with stakeholders that represent persons with disabilities.

10. The concerns of the NPTA which include:

- the late disability screenings for children in primary school; and
- the pertinent role of parental education in the training and development of children with disabilities and the need for increased parental engagement with educational institutions.

11. The concerns of the TTUTA which include:

- the inclusion of special needs students in mainstream public education system;
- the need for the curriculum to be altered to accommodate special needs children in the mainstream public education system; and
- the need to increase the number of student aides within the public education system.

10. The policy for all MOE schools to accept students with disabilities and the assessment of refusals that are brought to the MOE's attention for intervention.

11. The preliminary discussions conducted by the MSDFS, the MOH and NGOs to ascertain the services that can be provided to children with special needs through the health centres.

12. The MOE employment of three hundred (300) Student Aides sourced from the On the Job Training Programme.

13. The full endorsement of Inclusive Education by the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association and the MOE and the advantage of this approach to children with disabilities for creating an equal platform for treatment and providing early intervention.

View the Hearing:

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

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

Contact Information:

You may contact the Committee's Secretary at jschumanrights@tparliament.org or 624-7275 Ext. 2288/2402.

*Committees Unit
July 24, 2019*