

**THE RESPONSE OF THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION ON THE FINDINGS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS CONTAINED IN THE
1ST REPORT OF THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON
SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
ON AN
INQUIRY INTO THE CURRENT LEVEL OF VIOLENCE
AMONG STUDENTS IN SCHOOLS WITH PARTICULAR FOCUS ON
PHYSICAL AND CYBER BULLYING**

Response of the Ministry of Education on the findings and recommendations contained in the 1st Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration on an Inquiry into the Current Level of Violence among Students in Schools with Particular Focus on Physical and Cyber Bullying as outlined on pages fourteen (14) to forty seven (47) of the Report

Inquiry Objective Topic 1

The extent to which violence is pervasive among students in primary and secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago

Information on Repeat offenders

We recommend that the MoE institute the practice of recording information on repeat offenders so that these students can be easily identified for continuous follow-up and remedial action

A template for recording information on repeat offenders was created and piloted in the St. George East Education District. As of January 2017, this template is being used at all Education Districts. Students so identified are referred to the Learning Enhancement Centre (LEC) which is managed by the Student Support Services Division (SSSD), these students are assessed and subject to targeted interventions.

Disciplinary Procedures – Student Suspensions

- A. The Committee is of the view that a reduction in school violence should be treated as a major priority of the Ministry. As such the Committee recommends that the Ministry establish and document its intervention strategies for addressing violence in both primary and secondary schools. Specific interventions must be developed to curb violence in primary schools. Such a procedural manual would also provide all stakeholders within the education system with clear responsibilities when dealing with the issue.**

The MOE agrees with this recommendation. The MOE has developed a school based, data driven National Strategy for Promoting Discipline at both the primary and secondary school levels supported at the inter-ministerial level by members of the Student Support Services Division (SSSD), School Supervision and Management Division (SSMD) and the Curriculum Planning and Development Division (CPDD). Discipline Committees formed at the levels of the Education District and school include members from all three (3) Divisions. Heads of Departments, Deans, Security Officers, Safety Officers (Government Secondary Schools) and students are also members of the School Discipline Committee. Each school is required to use

guidelines provided in the National strategy as a guide to develop a data driven School Discipline Plan. Plans developed are based on the following:

1. Collection and analysis of relevant data on infractions to guide decisions on interventions eg. nature, type, locale of infraction and age and sex of those involved, teacher and student absenteeism;
2. Each school is required to develop a School Discipline Plan. The issues identified are prioritized with specific interventions to be implemented;
3. Develop Key Performance Indicators so that successes are measurable, e.g., reductions in specific types of infractions within a certain time frame;
4. Develop an action plan which includes time lines, responsibilities and resources;
5. Incorporate strategies at the individual, school, inter-ministerial and intra-ministerial levels;
6. Incorporate strategies from those recommended, including:

Individual Student Level

- Among strategies incorporated in school plans are programmes implemented by the Student Support Services Division such as
 - Conflict resolution and Peer Mediation
 - Career, Academic and Personal Social counselling
 - Conduct of Anti-bullying sessions
 - Who Am I - my likes, dislikes
 - My feelings, my family, my country
 - Universal Human Values of love, empathy, forgiveness, respect
 - Identifying anger triggers
 - Making an anger scale and learning to bring anger down the scale
 - Practice in communicating feelings, including identifying feelings of stress.
 - Identifying sources of help

School Level

- Enhanced supervision of students. Greater emphasis is placed on the concept of Duty of Care as enshrined in the Education Act. Thus in addition to students being supervised during classroom sessions, increased emphasis is placed on the supervision of students during non-teaching time.
- Have appropriate strategies associated with supervision of students, school entry protocol, home-room sessions, Student Council and Prefect System, specific interventions by the SSSD, reward and recognition system

- Provide a range of teaching strategies to cater for the varied learning styles and interest of students. System for Clinical Supervision. Collectively these look at curricular modification, curriculum delivery and teacher training. Use of clinical supervision to support and develop teachers.
- Meaningful whole school assemblies and teacher regularity and punctuality are also being addressed.
- Co- and Extra–Curricular Activities. Many schools already have established sporting, dance/drama clubs, chess, cadets etc. Schools where it is a challenge to schedule after school activities were advised to include these activities in a restructured time-table so as to increase the participation by both students and teachers.
- Parent/Stakeholder Involvement. Schools are encouraged to establish relationships with communities so that they can feel a sense of ownership towards the school. Relationships can include roles as sponsors, mentors and providers of service oriented programmes. Schools have established relationships with the Regional Cooperation which offer assistance in maintenance of the school plant. The PTA and Local School Board assist by establishing contacts mainly with the business community in the form of sponsorship for various events. In recent times many schools have engaged in Walkathons which serve to increase public awareness of schools and their interests.
- Increased Student Involvement. The MOE accepts that the global thrust in education is student centred thus students must be given a voice and opportunities to lead. Thus all schools have Student Councils and/or Prefect Systems. Students must also accept their responsibility in creating the desired school culture. Students must play a role in the establishment of their School Code of Conduct.
- Committees e.g. Discipline Committee, Crisis Management Committee, Rewards and Recognition Committee, allow for staff, student and parent participation which increases their sense of ownership towards the school.
- Modified Curriculum. Attention is placed on the Overt and Hidden Curriculum so that all students can be meaningfully engaged in activities that foster their holistic development both in and out of the classroom.

Inter-ministerial level:

- In collaboration with the Ministry of National Security, the Resistance and Prevention Programme (RAPP) has been implemented in high risks schools.
- The involvement of Community Police in the formation and operation of Police Youth Clubs is also used as a strategy to curb violence and indiscipline
- Other Agencies and Ministries also provide training and support for co- and extra-curricular activities which allows for the active participation of students.

The implementation of the National Strategy for Promoting Discipline is currently being rolled out in the twenty (20) primary and five (5) secondary schools involved in the Laventille School Improvement Project. Successful strategies specific to primary schools will be identified. Documentation of this process will inform the procedural manual to be developed and adopted by all schools.

B. The Committee endorses the concept of LECs as it is clearly a more effective alternative to in-school and “stay home” suspension arrangements. The Committee recommends the following as it relates to the development of LECs:

i. That at least one LEC be established in each Education District

To date, LECs have been established in four (4) Education Districts: Caroni, St. George East, South Eastern and Victoria. Limited services are being provided at the SSSD office to meet the needs of student in the Port of Spain District. This is a temporary arrangement until a permanent venue is identified. In the North Eastern Education District the LEC functioned during the period October to November 2016. However, the services were suspended because of challenges with the location. In St. Patrick, an appropriate venue is currently being sourced.

ii. That specific accommodation and resources be provided to assist primary school students referred to these centres

At the primary school level, a clearly defined referral process is utilised which incorporates classroom strategies employed by teachers, in the first instance and teachers in School Based Teams in the second instance. External support and referral are provided by Guidance Officers, Social Workers and Special Education Officers in-school under the Multi-Disciplinary Team. Specialised targeted interventions for students by SSSD personnel are executed within school, home and LECs.

The Ministry is currently working towards proper accommodation and resources for LECs catering for secondary school students from which the vast majority of referrals are made. The needs of the primary school students are met at the school level at this time.

iii. That a robust and holistic assessment procedure be utilized to ensure that students referred to LECs are properly evaluated to determine their developmental, academic and psychological position/needs

A robust approach is currently being used for students referred to LECs. The staffing at each LEC comprises Guidance Officers, Social Workers, Special Education Teachers, a Behavioural Specialist and a Psychologist. Each student together with his/her parent is engaged in the screening process, followed by an assessment. Based on the findings, the student is then referred to the Behavioural Specialist or Psychologist for further intervention if necessary. A Special Education Teacher can also refer the student for a psycho-educational assessment/evaluation to be conducted.

iv. That a proper system for tracking the progress of students who attended an LEC be developed in order to gauge whether students require further interventions

The Ministry of Education agrees with this recommendation. The current system for tracking the progress of students is as follows:

- A case conference and exit interview involving the SSSD staff, the School supervisor, the parent and the student occur before returning to the school. At this interview relevant information is shared in an effort to map out the process for reintegration into the school system
- The file for the student is sent to the SSSD staff at the school on reintegration. SSSD staff is required to follow up and provide relevant support and reinforcement. The Guidance Officer will provide support in areas of motivation, scheduling time table and life skills. The School Social Worker will provide psychosocial support and home and family intervention.
- The parent and student are then invited to attend a six (6) week programme. This 'Thinking for Change Programme' is a cognitive behavioural therapy programme to support transition.

This process is currently under review.

- v. **That the Ministry of Education collaborate with the police service to assist with encouraging students referred to an LEC to attend classes. This may be achieved by asking the Community Police to visit the LECs on a weekly basis to determine which students are not in compliance with the attendance requirement.**

The Engagement of the Community Police is part of the MoE standard operating procedure. The Community Police have been involved where necessary.

- C. **It should be compulsory for the parent(s) of a child to visit the school the child is to be served a Suspension Notice or in other circumstances where it is imperative that the child's parents meet with the management of the school. As such, the MoE must explore possible legislative amendments required for enforcing this proposal. The legislative amendment should also make it unlawful for an employer to hinder an employee for complying with a school's request for an audience without justifiable cause.**

The parent must be informed in order for a suspension to be effected. In the case where extended suspension has been granted by the Minister of Education, it is mandatory for the parent to be present at the Case Conference. The Case Conference is scheduled within twenty-one (21) days of the approval of the extended suspension. At this conference at which the parent, student, Principal, Dean/teacher, senior School Social Worker are present, a decision is made as to the way forward for the student. The School Social Worker visits homes and makes contact with parents and also arranges and conducts parenting sessions. Sometimes schools also seek the assistance of the police in contacting parents.

The recommendation will strengthen the above process and is being considered in the review of the Education Act.

Measures taken by denominational schools to curb violence

- A. We recommend that the leadership of Denominational and Government Schools engage each other with a view to exchanging ideas and experiences in relation to effectively addressing violence and indiscipline. The Committee recommends an annual Principals Conference hosted by the MoE aimed at the sharing of best practices among schools.**

Principals' conferences are held termly at each Education District in which both primary and secondary school administrators attend. The conferences include public (denominational and government) and private schools. The theme of the conference is determined by a needs assessment done at the level of the Education District and involves members from the CPDD, SSSD SSMD and school security. Included in the agenda of these conferences is the sharing of best practices among principals. Additionally, at each District, fraternity meetings are held on a monthly basis. At these meetings, best practices at schools and challenges experienced by school administrators are discussed in greater detail.

- B. We recommend that School Supervisors in each district be mandated to conduct a review and evaluation of the mechanism used by each school under his/her purview for recording and reporting incidents of violence and infractions.**

A standardised template for recording the incidents of violence and indiscipline in all schools was issued by the Chief Education Officer. Principals are required to complete and submit this template to their respective School Supervisors on a monthly basis. School Supervisors review, evaluate and recommend corrective strategies to Principals as needed. At the District level, Infraction and Suspension data are collated and analysed on a monthly, termly and annual basis and a report submitted to the Director of School Supervision (DSS). School Supervisors are also mandated to promptly provide detailed reports to the DSS and CEO on any critical incident at schools.

- C. We recommend that “the ability to effectively promote discipline in the school” be included as a criterion for assessing the performance of a Principal.**

The Ministry agrees with this recommendation. It is the responsibility of the Principal to ensure the safety and security of students and that discipline is maintained in the school (*Education Act Chapter 39.01, Section 27 (a)*). Additionally, Principals have a legal duty of care to ensure that measures are put in place to prevent any injury to students.

A School Based Management System has been introduced in all schools and is the medium through which school operations are viewed in order to achieve Children Value Outcomes. The Leadership and Management framework of SBM focuses on building the administrative competencies necessary for successful leadership. Principals are required to set up, at schools, structures and systems to implement, monitor and assess school operations. Each school has been mandated to establish a School Discipline Committee of which the Principal is the Head.

A School Discipline Plan, aligned to the National Discipline Policy, is one of the components of the School Development Planning process. The performance indicators are clearly outlined and can be used for to assess the Principal and school personnel.

There is the need of the Ministry of Education to review the instrument for assessment of the Principal and staff to include this area.

Inquiry Objective Topic 2

MOE plans and Strategies for addressing school violence in particular bullying

Established targets to address school violence

The Committee recommends that the Ministry of Education in its response to this report inform the Parliament of the following:

i. The status of the implementation of each programme named above

Programme	Activities	Status
Personal/Social Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-awareness • Emotional Intelligence • Conflict Resolution • Career Development 	Completed in all high-risk schools
Parenting in Education	>400 workshops completed involving 15,000 participants.	On-going
Inter-agency approach to violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed needs assessment, mock trials, youth dialogues, “Thinking for Change”: • Training for all stakeholders, understanding the causes of crime, gang violence, communication and leadership and domestic violence 	On-going On-going
Life Skills Training	MTEST training of MOE staff	Completed and implemented
Suicide Prevention	Sensitisation (social marketing strategy workshops); training of teachers, parents, students; development of toolkit	On-going
National Plan for Literacy and Numeracy, the Form 1 Initiative	Training completed with teachers	Implementation initiated
School Based Management	Training for all stakeholders	Completed

ii. The number of students/parents/teachers who have participated and or benefitted from these programmes

Programme	Activities	Beneficiaries
Personal/Social Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self awareness • Emotional Intelligence • Conflict Resolution • Career Development 	50,000 students
Parenting in Education	>400 workshops completed involving	15,000 parents/guardians
Inter-agency approach to violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed needs assessment, mock trials, youth dialogues, “Thinking for Change”: 	7,500 students
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training for all stakeholders, understanding the causes of crime, gang violence, communication and leadership and domestic violence. 	75 students
		250 stakeholders(MoE staff, community stakeholders)
Life Skills Training (Training for trainers)	MTEST training of MOE staff	75 MoE Staff
Suicide Prevention	Sensitisation (social marketing strategy workshops); training of teachers, parents, students; development of toolkit.	75 students, 5 teachers, 17,000 views on social media
National Plan for Literacy and Numeracy, the Form 1 Initiative	Training completed with teachers.	1,871 students (students targeted on the basis of SEA performance)
School Based Management	Training for all stakeholders	All school personnel

iii. Whether the 5 most at-risk schools in each district have been identified and the status of the implementation of programmes aimed at assisting these schools¹

District	“At Risk” Schools	Status
Caroni	Chaguanas South Barataria Secondary Cunupia Secondary Carapichaima West Chaguanas North	Completed the risk assessment and needs assessment at all schools identified. Collating and analysing data
St. George East	Malick Secondary El Dorado West Secondary Five Rivers Secondary St. Joseph Secondary Bon Air High	Data Collation and Analysis in progress
South Eastern	Princes Town East Secondary Moruga Secondary Williamsville Secondary Mayaro Secondary Princes Town West Secondary	Data Collation and analysis in progress Data Collation and analysis, completed needs assessment, stakeholders engagement meeting (approx. 4), Training of stakeholders completed Mock trials and youth dialogues ongoing
North Eastern	Arima North Secondary Sangre Grande Secondary Valencia Secondary Guaico Secondary Manzanilla Secondary	Data Collation and analysis in progress
Port of Spain & Environs	Mucurapo West Secondary Belmont Secondary East Mucurapo Secondary Russell Latapy Secondary Success Laventille Secondary	Data Collation and analysis in progress Data Collation and analysis, completed needs assessment, stakeholders engagement meeting (approx. 4), Training of stakeholders completed Mock trials and youth dialogues ongoing
Victoria	Pleasantville Secondary San Fernando West Secondary La Romaine Secondary Union Claxton Bay Secondary Marabella North Secondary	Data Collation and analysis in progress, completed needs assessment, stakeholders engagement meeting (approx. 4), Training of stakeholders completed Mock trials and youth dialogues ongoing
St. Patrick	Point Fortin East Secondary Vessigny Secondary Penal Secondary Siparia West Secondary Siparia East Secondary	Data Collation and analysis in progress

¹ See Appendix 1

The five (5) most at-risk schools were identified in each Education District. A more detailed Risk Profile was completed by SSSD for the Districts of Caroni, North Eastern and Victoria. The MOE has, while providing additional support to the at-risk schools, now expanded its programme beyond the identified at-risk schools to have all schools develop plans for addressing indiscipline.

National School Code of Conduct

We recommend that the MoE engage in a series of stakeholder consultations to revise the National School Code of Conduct within one (1) year of the laying of this report.

At the National Consultation hosted by the MoE in February 2016, initial feedback was obtained on the National School Code of Conduct. The MoE proposes to engage in focus group sessions various stakeholders to complete the review exercise.

Training for teachers and principals

- A. We recommend that a comprehensive training regime for Principals and Deans at the Primary and Secondary levels be implemented. This training regime should be informed by a needs assessment of the skills gaps and developmental needs of those involved in managing schools.**

The Ministry of Education has embarked on the implementation of the School Based Management initiative at both the primary and secondary level. This strategy addresses a number of dimensions which contributes to school effectiveness and was developed based on gaps identified in schools, research and best practice including leadership, governance and integrated management. Supervisors, Principals, Vice Principals, Deans and Heads of Departments/Senior teachers in all primary and secondary schools have already been sensitised to the model and the implementation is currently being rolled out in all schools.

Additional training based on Needs Assessments has been conducted by the Teacher and Teacher Training and Development Unit of the MoE and on-going training sessions are scheduled not only for Deans and Principals, but for Heads of Department, Vice principals and teachers. The Table below provides details of training already provided.

January – December 2016 Workshops Conducted	No. of Persons Trained
Leadership & Management Training for Principals Regulation 90: Disciplinary Process, Investigative Interviewing and Report Writing	56
Legislation for Deans & Ag. Deans	599
Dealing with Indiscipline for Secondary Beginning Teachers	118
Dealing with Indiscipline for Primary School Teachers	85
Leadership & Management Towards more Relevant Leadership for a Changing Society (Principals of Secondary Schools)	116
Leadership & Management: All Secondary Schools Vice Principals	119
Psycho-Educational Evaluation for Special Educators-Training in the Administration for Standardized Assessment	20
Multidisciplinary Approach to Psycho-Education Assessment	18

B. We recommend that the MoE continue to work closely with tertiary level instructions that offer Degree and Certificate programmes for teachers and School Administrators to ensure that the curriculum of these programmes are relevant to the needs of the education system

This process is ongoing. The Curriculum Planning and Development Division of the MOE has met with all the tertiary education providers (UWI, UTT, USC, COSTATT) on standardizing their curriculum and ensuring that it meets the requirements of the education system. In this regard, a number of bridging programmes have been conducted where gaps were identified.

Teacher absenteeism

Accordingly, in an attempt to encourage a higher standard of professional conduct by teachers as it concerns tardiness, we recommend that the Ministry of Education consult with the representative body for teachers with a view to negotiating a revised condition of employment that would allow the Ministry at the end of the year to deduct the monetary value of the cumulated time a Teacher arrives late. Alternatively, at Teacher's punctuality record should be taken into consideration when he/she is being considered for a promotion

The Chief Personnel Officer and TTUTA are responsible for negotiating terms and conditions of employment. The Ministry of Education is working with the Teaching Service Commission on delegated authority through the One Man Tribunal to deal with regularity and punctuality of teachers whereby the process of discipline can be expedited. The Ministry has also instituted the progressive discipline process for all members of the teaching service. Part of the Teaching Service Commission interview process includes teachers' punctuality and regularity record for the interviews for promotion.

Extracurricular Activities

The Committee recommends that the Ministry facilitate a registry of NGOs, CBO, other organizations and individuals who are involved in extracurricular activities such as Girl Guides, the Cadet Force St. John's Ambulance, retired sportsmen, coaches martial artists, musicians and others willing to do volunteer work. Once the Registry is properly vetted, schools can then draw upon this diverse pool of professional experience and talent when developing an extracurricular programme.

The following table identifies some key stakeholders that work in collaboration with schools in coordinating extra-curricular activities. Each Education District has such a registry which is lodged at the District Office. Every school is involved in one or more of the activities listed. All external stakeholders have the prior approval of the Chief Education Officer.

Table 1 Registry of External Agencies Affiliated with the Ministry of Education

Type of Agencies	Organizations	Activities
Business Organization	First Citizen Bank	Scrabble
	Republic Bank	Don La Foucade/Leading for Literacy and others
	Scotia Bank	Cricket
	RBC Caribbean Limited	Young Leaders/WE
	National Gas Company	Boca Lit/Sports/Culture
	Atlantic LNG	Sports/4H/SEA Awards
	Petrotrin	Agricultural Science Competitions
	Powergen	Literacy programmes
Ministries	Health	Education programmes
	National Security	RAPP programmes, Police Youth Clubs, Cadet Force
	Rural Development and Local Government	Provide service
	Agriculture, Land and Fisheries	4-H programme, agricultural support
	Works and Transport	Provide service
	Social Development and Family Services	Liaises with Student Support Services Division
	Attorney General and Legal Affairs (Integrity Commission)	Competitions, workshops
	Sports and Youth Affairs	Sports Training
Agencies	Nestle	Competitions
	United Way	Workshops
	Sagicor	Competitions
	British Council	Career fairs
	United Nations	Competitions
	Unit Trust	Incentives programme
	UNESCO	Workshops, Literacy programmes
	Red Cross	First Aid courses, Light of Life project
	Scouts/Guides	Life skills

	TT Post	Letter writing competition
Type of Agencies	Organizations	Activities
Clubs	Rotary	In many districts there are clubs that associate with schools for different activities eg. Dragon Boat
	Kiwanis	
	4H	Training for teachers and students in projects
	Girl Guide	Life skills
	Chess	Extra-curricular
	Scrabble	Literacy skills
NPTA	PTA	Parenting programmes

Curriculum Reform

- A. In the event that such an assessment has not been conducted, we recommend that the Ministry conduct an assessment of the primary and secondary school curriculum with a view to determining how conducive they are to the ‘multiple intelligence’ of the student body. The findings of this review exercise should inform further reforms in the existing curricula.**

Primary:

The primary curriculum was reviewed in 2013 following extensive data collection (formal assessment of the curriculum; stakeholder consultations, survey data from schools) on requirements for education in the 21st century. Within the new curriculum, emphasis was placed on teaching, learning and assessment that responded to the individual needs of students and deliberately took into account strategies for meeting the range of learner needs. This broad approach is titled Differentiated Instruction. Among the teaching strategies used to cater to the individual differences in students’ learning needs are multiple intelligences, constructivism, experiential learning, etc. Together with differentiated instruction, the new primary curriculum also focuses on strategies for promoting literacy, numeracy, formative assessment and infusion of ICT, all of which attempt to meet the learner where he is and move him forward. For the first time, strong support for desirable teaching, learning strategies is robustly supported in the provision of Instructional Toolkits for each year level. These include a plethora of modeled lessons that teachers use to then adapt to the specific particularities of the students in their class.

Secondary:

Curriculum review takes place every 3-5 years since the educational landscape and the national needs for which education attempts to prepare its future citizens also evolves. As a standard practice preceding curriculum review, analysis of current curricula, extensive research on best practices and data collection are engaged. In accordance with this, the National Certificate of Secondary Education Curriculum in ten subject areas was reviewed in 2015 and includes in each subject curriculum document, a series of recommended student strategies and activities with a deliberate mixture catering to different learning styles / intelligences. The Multiple Intelligences Theory of Howard Gardner, while still very pertinent today, has been the focus of educators for the past two decades or more, and is but one of the theories that focus on an individualized approach by teachers to specific needs, interests and learning styles of students.

There is also a Cabinet appointed committee which has been set up to develop a refereed textbook on the History of Trinidad and Tobago and to review of the primary school and ECCE curriculum. Recommendations from this committee will inform further changes to the curriculum.

- B. We recommend that the curriculum, particularly at the secondary school level, should include a “life skills” component whereby students can be taught how to cope with life’s myriad of issues and challenges.**

Life Skills is a component of the Health and Family Life Education curriculum at both the primary and secondary school. This area is also addressed by the Student Support Services Division through a series of group sessions at the school level to deal with areas such as: anger management, aggression, conflict resolution, healthy lifestyles and good touch/bad touch. Seventy-five (75) SSSD officers were trained by MTEST to intensify the delivery of the Life Skills component of the Personal Development Programme. Further, a number of persons have been trained as part of a ‘train the trainer’ model and the Ministry is currently working on providing additional training for secondary school teachers.

- C. In order to promote a more inclusive education system, we recommend the urgent development of a properly structured programme for directing persons with special learning needs out of the mainstream classroom into specially customizing learning environments.**

Since the early 1980’s Trinidad and Tobago has been following contemporary views on education for students with special needs. The vision for the future is enshrined in the convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2009) which states, “State Parties recognise the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realising this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning ...” Moreover, Trinidad and Tobago, has

responded to the call at the global conventions to engage in educational reform that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners (UNESCO 2009). One of the mandates of SSSD is to provide services for all students including students with special education needs in the mainstream school. With inclusive education, students with disabilities access education alongside peers with the necessary support and accommodation.

Inclusive education, as enshrined in the Salamanca Declaration (1994), indicates that education is provided for all within the regular education system. Focused on children and young people, the Declaration calls on States to ensure that children with “special educational” needs must have access to regular – that is mainstream – schools.

As stated in the argument for reasonable accommodations in Understanding the United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2009), “...where the general education system cannot adequately meet the support needs of persons with disabilities, State Parties shall ensure that effective alternative support measures are provided, consistent with the goal of full inclusion.”

It is also recommended that there be a gradual integration of special education services into mainstream education. In our context, inclusive education may currently be considered to be the most appropriate form of education for some students with disabilities. Both screening and assessment are conducted for students with mild to moderate special education challenges. With cases of moderate to severe diagnosis, a student aide is identified to facilitate and support student learning within the classroom environment. With students who are exhibiting extremely severe challenges or at-risk, if the school lacks the required resources for special needs students, they can be accommodated at private special schools which are partially funded by the Ministry of Education.

The Ministry of Education therefore supports the above recommendation only for students with moderate to severe diagnosis who cannot be facilitated in the mainstream classroom.

D. We recommend that the MoE expose students who are more inclined with practical learning methods to technical/vocation certification e.g. CVQs early in their secondary school career. Under proper career guidance, these students can be motivated to pursue skilled centred education at the secondary and tertiary levels

Each secondary school has been mandated to time-table at least one CVQ subject. The SEA Placement process also takes into consideration the age and academic strength of students and places them into existing places at the SERVOL and Junior Life Centres. In 2016, one hundred and sixty-nine (169) students were placed at these institutions. Programmes include Life Skills and students have the option of writing the CSEC exams. Students also have access to the MYPART and MYLAT programmes for which parental consent is needed.

E. We recommend that students displaying deviant behaviour assessed by the SSSD as early as at the pre-school age. This recommendation is subject to the Ministry acquiring the necessary parental approvals

The Ministry of Education supports the recommendation for early assessment of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) students. Presently, these assessments are limited to referrals on a case by case basis. Discussions have already commenced to further this arrangement.

Inquiry Objective Topic 3

Effectiveness of multi-sectoral efforts and rehabilitative services for students

Improving Parent Participation

- A. We recommend that the Ministry of Education hold discussions with the NPTA and a sample of schools with a view to developing new and innovate strategies that would encourage and facilitate greater parental interaction with the school's administration through the use of ICT. As a start, consideration should be given to facilitating live online viewing of meetings for the benefit of parents who cannot be physically present**

Engaging parents is supported by the niche marketing approach which recommends a greater understanding of the different parent types in our society and various approaches to engagement. Initiatives have begun in creating social media contacts in which small groups of parents (parents of similar classes) are able to receive information in a timely manner. Furtherance of the above recommendation is subject to the MoE and schools acquiring the required ICT infrastructure.

- B. We recommend that the MoE develop the necessary policy and guidelines to allow schools to utilize the various forms of communication including social media to communicate with parents, teachers and school administrators.**

The MoE has completed a draft policy for ICT use which will inform the usage of various forms of communication including social media to communicate with parents, teachers and school administrators.

- C. We recommend that the Ministry of Education require each student to provide the schools with the contact information for two other relatives or references (in addition to the contact information for parents/guardians) who can be called upon to engage with school administrators and/or account for a student as the need arises**

At registration of all students at all public ECCE Centres, primary and secondary schools, parents are currently required to provide contact information for at least two other relatives for the completion of the Student Cumulative Record Card. MOE agrees that unless otherwise stated by the court, the parent/guardian remains the legal guardian of the child. The parent should provide additional numbers for persons to contact in case of emergency. Additionally, the parent is informed that in cases of care and protection/ self-harm, student will also be required to provide the school with the contact information for two relatives or references in the "No Self Harm Contract."

- D. We recommend that the Ministry of Labour develop a policy of time-off for employees to attend PTA meetings**

The MoE supports this recommendation.

TTPS, Community Policing Department

- A. We recommend that the MoE consider the merits of implementing a programme that will allow students that are indiscipline or display violent tendencies to interface with role models from the various backgrounds. These role models can be recruited from the military and protective services, the medical, legal and other professional cohorts. We believe that such an initiative may encourage students to channel their energies into aspiring to do something meaningful and positive with their lives as opposed to being delinquent.**

The MOE agrees with this recommendation and further recommends a police certificate of character, references and a psychometric evaluation for these students. As outlined previously, key stakeholders are involved in extracurricular activities at all schools.

- B. We recommend that the MoE launch a Roster of Volunteers who may be willing to mentor students or to be a “Big brother” to students who display indiscipline and delinquent tendencies. Person must be properly vetted before they are entered on the Roster. A stipend for these volunteers should also be considered.**

The MOE agrees with this recommendation. Through the Student Council/ Prefect System, schools have implemented ‘Peer Buddy’, ‘Big Sister Little Sister’ and ‘Big Brother’ programmes.

A Roster of Volunteers is not yet an established practice at the District level.

Alternative Strategies for dealing with youth violence or violence among students

- A. The Committee strongly supports the view that community service can make a major difference for ascribing discipline to students with deviant behavioural tendencies. Such service can include service to the school itself as well as the wider community**

The MOE agrees with this recommendation which facilitates a multi-disciplinary/ inter-agency approach to practice thereby increasing a high level of accountability and monitoring and evaluation. This strategy was introduced in five (5) secondary schools in September 2016. It is the practice of some schools to engage students in service oriented programmes, however, this is done on a voluntary basis as students cannot be compelled to participate.

- B. The National School Code of Conduct (2009) outlines the objectives of all stakeholders in the education system as it relates to forging a peaceful and productive school environment. As such, we recommend that the relevant aspects of the Code of Conduct be properly communicated to parents and students at the time of enrolment into primary and secondary schools. Workshops should be arranged to provide verbal explanations of the meaning and implications of the various Codes of Conduct**

This is the common practice at the registration process. Parents are also given a copy of the School's Code of Conduct. At parent-student-school conferences based on student misconduct and at other parent meetings, the school's discipline policy is discussed.

- C. We recommend that a Peer counselling and mediation programme be established in all secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. In this regard, consideration should be given to targeting candidates for Prefects and Head Girls/Boys who will act as exemplars to the wider school community**

The MoE has developed a manual for the establishment of a Student Council at all schools which can also be used for the establishment of a Prefect System. The criteria for the selection of holders of office are clearly identified. Training for students in the areas of mediation and peer counselling is encouraged. The promotion of student councils/prefect system in schools is one of the measures identified for inclusion as part of school discipline plans. For schools that are involved in the Resistance and Prevention Programme (RAPP), students are involved in such training.

Treating with bullying

- A. The Ministry should undertake a feasibility assessment to determine which anti-bullying initiatives have the highest potential for success and implement those initiatives after consultation**

The Ministry of Education agrees with this recommendation. In 2014, a feasibility assessment was conducted with Student Support Services Division and Citizen Security programme. No new feasibility study was done in 2016, but the anti-bullying initiatives with the highest potential for success included whole-school sensitization to prevention and targeted programmes to at-risk students in areas of emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, programmes involving reward and positive reinforcement and treatment groups (therapeutic).

- B. We recommend that the MoE make representation to the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs regarding the need to ensure that Cyber Offences/Crime Legislation include provisions regarding the various forms of cyberbullying involving minors/children**

On February 07, 2017 the Ministry of Education met with the Ministry of National Security to discuss the issue of online pornography and other cyber offences that impact negatively on students at schools. It should be noted that all electronic devices that the MOE supplies to schools have been outfitted with firewalls and other protective mechanisms that prevent student access to certain sites. Currently, data involving the engagement of minors in online sexual activity is being collected by the Ministry of National Security.

The presence of school gangs

- A. We recommend that the MoE continue to liaise closely with the TTPS to assist Teachers, Deans and Schools Administrators in detecting gang activity and to sensitise them on the Anti-gang Act and the school environment**

This engagement already exists with the Ministry of National Security in collaboration MoE, The TTPS, through PADF has trained more than two hundred and fifty (250) MoE staff in Social Crime Prevention (Resistance and Prevention Programme).

Principals have been mandated to inform the police of infractions committed by students that are criminal in nature e.g. possession of drugs, weapons and engaging in sexual activity. The TTPS continues to maintain a close working relationship with schools.

B. We also recommend that each school be mandated to develop a whistle-blower mechanism through which students with information on gang activities and other delinquent activities within their school can make anonymous reports to their teachers. This mechanism should impose a timeframe on the school's management to act on reports.

At primary and secondary schools, students report such matters to the class teacher and Dean respectively. However, students are encouraged to report incidents of this nature to any member of staff, inclusive of members of the Student Support Services Division, with whom they are comfortable. The staff member to whom the incident was reported then reports to the principal. Where the 'whistle blower' is a victim, a police report is made and the Children's Authority contacted. The police are also informed as to reports of criminal activity. If necessary, the principal issues Suspension / Request for Extended Suspension. The parent must be informed in order for a Suspension to be effected. The physical presence of a parent is not necessary if it can be verified that the parent was informed.

The MOE seeks to develop safe and supportive schools through the School Development Model- which seeks to address school climate and enhance school academic success. In this model students feel physically and emotionally safe, are treated fairly and equitably and avoid risky behaviours. As a result, the school is safe and orderly.

Students also feel supported. They build meaningful, trusting relationships and they are comfortable to share, they have a strong bond to their school² and will try everything to protect it. They seek positive peer relationships and provide effective and available support to each other.

Rehabilitative services

Special-needs students should be identified and offered the necessary remedial assistance

Special-needs students are currently referred to the Student Support Services Division where officers make the necessary assessment and interventions and if required, the cases are referred to external agencies.

Support provided by Guidance counsellors and social workers

- A. Additional GO and SW must be recruited to boost the amount of student support services available. The Ministry submitted that its vision was to also achieve the international standard which is defined by officers to the number of students. An ideal ratio in this regard is one officer to two hundred and fifty students (1:250) and one to five hundred and seventy-one (1:571) for schools with moderate challenges. The Committee recommends a student ratio of one Social Worker to two hundred and fifty (1:250). This was the ideal size as indicated by experienced field workers**

SSSD had requested one hundred and ninety (190) new Guidance Officers and to provide three (3) officers for Learning Enhancement Centres (LEC), as well as to ensure that there is a resident guidance person in each of the five (5) high-risk secondary and primary schools. We have also requested one hundred and ninety (190) Social Workers to aid in dealing with the growing numbers of violence and indiscipline in the schools. In order for all the technical staff within SSSD to function optimally, we recommend a bolstering of administrative support through the recruitment of six (6) clerks per Education District and one (1) clerk per LEC, totaling forty-nine (49) clerks. SSSD also recommends one hundred and ninety (190) Special Education instructors to provide the interventions for special need students. The Ministry of Education is working towards increasing the number of officers at the Student Support Services Division.

- B. Adopt programmes such as a fathers' programme called from Foundation to Finish which provides the opportunity for SWs to engage fathers as adopted in the Caroni District**

The MOE agrees with this recommendation. This programme which began in June 2015 in the Caroni Education District has also been rolled out in all seven (7) Education Districts.

- C. As far as possible, the parent(s) of students who has been suspended or is the subject of correctional action, should be equally exposed to appropriate counselling. Allowing parents to benefit from counselling and other psycho-social interventions may assist in improving the environment in which the child exists, particularly as it concerns the home in which the child resides**

MOE agrees with this recommendation. Each of the two hundred and four (204) parents of the Caroni, Victoria, North Eastern and St. George East Education Districts who had a child attending one of the Learning Enhancement Centre has been exposed to the Parenting In Education workshops, home visits and counselling sessions.

D. We recommend that the MoE undertake the necessary recruitment procedures with a view to filling existing vacancies in the positions of Guidance Officer and Social Worker. In future, the selection process for these positions should include psychometric testing and or a suitable methodology for assessing whether the candidate's has a suitable personality.

The MOE agrees with the recommendation and dialogue has already begun with the Human Resource Department of the MoE for filling the existing vacancies in the positions of Guidance Officer and Social Worker. Additionally, the MoE will dialogue with the Human Resource Department to consider the feasibility and budgeting for additional staff to meet the intended outcomes of students.