

**VERBATIM NOTES OF THE SIXTH MEETING OF THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE APPOINTED TO INQUIRE INTO AND REPORT ON SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, HELD (IN PUBLIC) IN THE J. HAMILTON MAURICE ROOM, MEZZANINE FLOOR OFFICE OF THE PARLIAMENT TOWER D, THE PORT OF SPAIN INTERNATIONAL WATERFRONT CENTER, #1A WRIGHTSON ROAD, PORT OF SPAIN, ON FRIDAY, APRIL 29, 2016.**

**PRESENT**

Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir	Chairman
Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine	Member
Mr. Esmond Forde	Member
Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein	Member
Mr. Hafeez Ali	Member
Miss Nadine Stewart	Member
Miss Khadijah Ameen	Member
Mr. Julien Ogilvie	Secretary
Miss Kimberly Mitchell	Assistant Secretary
Miss Katharina Gokool	Graduate Research Assistant

**ABSENT**

Miss Shamfa Cudjoe	Member
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**OFFICIALS OF DENOMINATIONAL EDUCATION BOARDS**

Mr. Howard N. Nicholson	Methodist Board of Management
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Mr. Lennox Sirjuesingh	Presbyterian Board of Education
Mr. Satnarayan Maharaj	Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha Education Board of Management
Ms. Jessica Cunningham	Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) Board of Management
Mr. Yacoob Ali	Anjuman Sunnat-ul-Jamaat Association (ASJA)
Dr. Roland Baptiste	Catholic Education Board of Management
Archbishop Barbara Gray Burke	St. Barbara's Spiritual Shouter Baptist Board of Management
Ms. Ann Thornhill	Anglican Education Board of Management

**10.10 a.m.:** *Meeting resumed in the J. Hamilton Maurice Room.*

**Mr. Chairman:** A very pleasant good morning to all members assembled for this, our fourth public hearing on school violence. This is the fourth public hearing of the Joint Select Committee on Social Service and Public Administration. The very first subject of enquiry of this Joint Select Committee, made up of members of all benches in the Parliament—there are five benches. In the House of Representatives we have the Opposition and the Government Benches; in the Senate we have three benches, the Independent, the Opposition, and the Government. The Joint Select Committee is made up of representatives of all of these five benches, and the Committee in its deliberations determined that the first order of business is this worrying phenomenon of violence amongst our school children, our school age population.

We have had in the previous hearings, representatives of other interest groups, the Ministry of Education, the PTA, we have had the school principals. Last week

we were able to interview school children themselves, so I want to welcome all of you to this public hearing. I want to welcome all of our viewers on the Parliament channel, and on the Parliament radio, 105.5 FM, who are tuning in for this particular subject of enquiry, and the members of the public can also follow us on Twitter, and on other various electronic media.

Before I start I would like to remind all members who are here today to give us their own evidence on the subject, the major purpose of the enquiry is to determine the extent to which violence, in all forms, is pervasive among students in the primary and secondary school system in Trinidad and Tobago. We want to really get to the root of the problem, and this Committee has, as its primary objective, first, an understanding of the problem, and second, solutions, which as a Parliament we can propose to the line Minister, and to the various decision-makers, with timelines, on how we can solve this problem. I think there is consensus in the national community that our education institutions must be a place of learning. Our education system, our education institutions, primary and secondary school systems, are places where students must feel comfortable and free of fear so that they can attend to the problem that they have, which is to understand algebra, physics, chemistry and history, and there must be an elimination of fear in the school system.

This morning we do have the representatives first of the denominational school boards. The reason for inviting the representatives of these school boards is that we would like to hear from them what their own experience has been in the school system that they administer, with respect to the problem which seems to be pervasive. Is it that they have found mechanisms to deal with this problem? Is it that the way they run their schools, as resulted in an absence of this problem, or is it that they face the problems as anyone else in the Government school, other school systems in the country? So I will ask, first, members of the Committee to introduce themselves, and then I will ask members of the denominational school boards to also

introduce themselves before I open the floor for questioning. So may I, starting with my left.

*[Members of the Committee introduce themselves]*

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much, Committee Members, and I will now invite members of the school boards, starting with my right, who would be Ms. Thornhill—starting from Ms. Thornhill on the way left.

**Ms. Thornhill:** I am Ann Thornhill. I represent the Bishop of the Anglican Church in the Diocese of Trinidad and Tobago, member of the Anglican Education Board of Management for primary schools.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. And how many schools is your board responsible for?

**Ms. Thornhill:** Sixty-three plus.

**Mr. Chairman:** Very well. Thank you.

**Mr. Sirjuesingh:** Good morning, I am Lennox Sirjuesingh, representing the Presbyterian Primary School Board of Education. I need to explain that in the Presbyterian setup we have two boards, I am in the primary school board and, therefore, I am going to be addressing you on what has happened in the primary schools. If there is need for the secondary schools, I can always make the arrangement. Pleasure to be here.

**Mr. Chairman:** Sure. Thank you. And how many schools, Mr. Sirjuesingh, do you represent?

**Mr. Sirjuesingh:** We have got 72 primary schools.

**Ms. Gray-Burke:** My name is Archbishop Barbara Gray-Burke, representing the Spiritual Shouter Baptist School Board.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Right.

**Dr. Baptiste:** I am Dr. Roland Baptiste. I am Chairman of the Catholic Education Board of Management. I should say that we are one of eight Catholic boards. However, we are the largest, we are responsible for 119 primary schools, six

secondary schools. There are a number of other secondary schools represented by other smaller boards in the Catholic system.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you.

**Ms. Cunningham:** Jessica Cunningham, Secretary of the Seventh Day Adventist Board of Management. The Seventh Day Adventist Board operates 20 schools across Trinidad and Tobago, 16 primary and four secondary schools.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you.

**Mr. Maharaj:** Name is Sat Maharaj, I am Secretary of the SDMS Education Board of Management. We have 43 primary schools, 5 colleges, and 20 preschool centres.

**Mr. Nicholson:** The name is Howard Nicholson, retired principal and former Secretary of the Methodist Teachers' Association. I am just sitting in for our Chairman, Mr. Singh, who is out of the country.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much, and I would ask the colleague who has just joined us to introduce herself before I open the floor for questioning.

**Miss Ameen:** Good morning, my name is Kadajah Ameen, I am an Opposition Senator. Welcome to all.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much. The prerogative of the Chair I will exercise, and the first question I want to pose to any member representing any school board is this: in your school board how have you addressed the problem of violence amongst the students, bullying amongst students, and students misbehaviour in general? Press of your button you can indicate if you wish to respond.

**Mr. Maharaj:** Mr. Chairman, first of all I want to inform the Committee that 75 per cent of all primary schools are owned by these boards. Thirty-three per cent of all secondary schools are owned by these boards, and most of the preschool centres are owned by these boards. So we are grateful that at last the Committee has seen it fit to invite us here to give our views.

My own experience is that this violence is not pervasive in the schools that

are run by the denominational boards. It is more pervasive in the schools that are run by the Government board, that is, the government primary schools. And I would, if I had to apportion blame, I would say that for every violent and delinquent child there are two delinquent parents, and the problem is really with the parents, not with the administration of the school, not with the teachers, not with the denominational boards, but this is a problem that is really a problem arising out of the home.

**Mr. Chairman:** You can just hold there. We have recognized that in the Committee and we are looking into that issue, but the objective is now to focus on the violent incidences which must have occurred in your school. It cannot be that even in the denominational schools you are devoid of this problem. When such instances occur, few and far between, what mechanisms do you have in place to address it so that the problem does not escalate?

**Mr. Maharaj:** First of all, there is communication at all times between the school and the parents. All the reports that I have read from overseas studies on this subject have indicated that it is coming from homes where parents are not interacting with the school, and if I had to apportion blame I will say the Parent Teachers' Association is failing its job. As a matter of fact, in my own opinion, there is really no PTA organization in Trinidad and Tobago, it is just a sham body. So I believe that this has to deal with the parents' involvement in the administration of the school, in the violence. Whatever happens in the school, if the parents are there and the parents are interacting with the teachers and the principal, and the administration, there will be a lack of this kind of problems.

**Mr. Chairman:** One final question, when a problem occurs in any of your schools is it that the administrator in the school, inevitably the school principal, will call in the parent, have a discussion with the parent, and the parent, the teacher, the principal and the child will resolve the problem in a speedy manner?

**Mr. Maharaj:** That is precisely what happens in our schools, and I believe in all

denominational schools.

**Mr. Chairman:** Very well. I would ask Brig. Gen. Ancil Antoine to come in at this point.

**Brig. Gen. Antoine:** We invited students before this Committee in our last hearing, and they are the people on the ground. They are the ones who are suffering from the violence and the bullying, and one youngster, an 11-year-old, Mishael Henry, from Laventille said that the measures that you all are using—you adults, meaning all of us—in the schools, they are not working. As a matter of fact, he told us it is time we think out of the box, so my question to you, are there any new methods that you all intend to use to ensure that these students can say that the adults are thinking progressively to deal with the incidence of bullying and violence in the schools? What new methods do you have to deal with this?

**Mr. Maharaj:** I would answer that by saying that the methods that we are using in the schools are working, not according—you are identifying a school and a person from Laventille. There are areas in the Trinidad and Tobago where we have problems in the schools, and do not use what happens in one isolated area to find a solution for all, the whole country. So I would say our methods are working.

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes, right, but the question posed by Brig. Ancil Antoine was a direct one, which is, have you been doing anything over the last few years differently from that which you did prior? Or is it that in your school system you have a true and tried method that you have implemented which seems to be working to minimize the problem at hand? I see a representative of the Catholic School Board.

**Dr. Baptiste:** Yes, I would like to intervene here, and I agree with Mr. Sat Maharaj on this particular issue about generalizing, but I want to go a little further to answer your question directly. First of all, in our schools, all of us here, the principles of our various religions are taught and we feel that that goes a long way to mitigate that kind of behaviour. We are not saying that there is no bullying altogether, or that

there is no violence at all, but there is a limited. From the little survey that we have done it is very limited. That is one of the things, so that—

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, and I would like to intervene here to get directly to the objective of the enquiry, is it that you have a system similar to what Mr. Maharaj of the Maha Sabha indicated, that whatever an instance occurs you have a method where you call in the principal, teachers, pupil—

**Dr. Baptiste:** That is common.

**Mr. Chairman:**—and you resolve the problem post haste.

**Dr. Baptiste:** That is common, but I wanted to give you the real—I am answering the question that member Antoine had asked. So I am saying you are talking about thinking outside the box. I do not particularly like that phrase, but, in any event, we have implemented in our schools something we call the quality assurance programme, and that in itself supports principals, it supports teachers, et cetera, and it involves integrating our activities with the parents, and so on, and we started that about three years ago, and it is having an effect. We have seen the effect already, but it will take some time, we agree, and there are a number of things that you can do that are not necessarily new.

In most of our schools there is a broad curriculum in addition to the Ministry of Education's curriculum. There is a lot of sport and cultural activities, and so on, that the students get involved in, and I think that all of that, it is a combination of things that contribute to the low level of violence and bullying, and so on, in our schools.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much. Sen. Nadine Stewart. I will ask Sen. Nadine Stewart to pose a question and then you can come in Mr. Sirjuesingh.

**10.30 a.m.**

**Miss Stewart:** I think my question would have been a run-off from what Mr. Baptiste just explained. Are you saying in your opinion that a denominational run school is less violent than government schools?

**Dr. Baptiste:** It appears that the statistics might support that position. I do not have all the exact statistics. I am basically saying that in our schools we do not have a huge problem with respect to violence and bullying. Whatever there is, is treated.

**Miss Stewart:** Can I hear from Mr. Sirjusingh?

**Mr. Sirjusingh:** If I may just go back to the very first question. I think the question as I heard it would have been the board's activities at that level. As a board, the Presbyterian Primary School Board, we have had a conference with principals on the topic. We have had very little reports of violence among our schools or in our schools. We continue to monitor the cases. Our last principals' conference was basically to look at the national test; however, relevant at the time was that we should have invited the Children's Authority to apprise our teachers and principals of what is expected of them in that.

From the reports coming to us, our board intends to have very importantly follow-up workshops as well as monitoring what is happening in the schools by ensuring that our principals do report all acts of violence.

There are many things happening in our schools in a proactive manner, because we do not seem to have much of a problem; however, it is quite a long list, I will not go into it. As we go maybe we will get an opportunity.

I want to say that we have made available to our principals legal advice if necessary, because you know it could be a very complicated matter implicating the Ministry as well as the schools, so we are in a proactive manner in this. There are

many things being done in our schools which much later on we will get a chance to talk about.

**Mr. Chairman:** Mrs. Barbara Burke, would you like to come in at this point? I see your mike is on.

**Mrs. Burke:** He was speaking at the time.

**Mr. Chairman:** We have the SDA representatives, Seventh-Day Adventists wanting to come in.

**Ms. Cunningham:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Seventh-Day Adventist school system, of course as every other school system there are incidents of bullying and violence, aggression, but we have found that the prevalence is quite low and declining. It is declining not because we are just waiting for things to happen, but because of intentionality.

We have found that when our school administration and local school boards—because in each of our schools there is a local school board—when they are directly involved in the lives of the students, encouraging the teachers to be directly involved in the lives of the students, and they show that extra care and concern for the students, that contributes to a decline in acts of aggression and general indiscipline. We have also found that our parent/teachers associations where they are collaborating with the schools, with the particular school, there is a decline at those schools, quite significantly as a matter of fact.

Just recently at one of our schools there was a father/son—it is part of a whole intentional programme, but fathers and sons bonding. Actually they attended an excursion, and about 60 fathers and sons, so 120 in all, attended that excursion, and the principal reported how happy the fathers were and the sons were. So it is just an indication of when the parental factor comes into play as it should how the students are impacted positively.

**Mr. Chairman:** I would like to intervene with respect to now a solution. As a

possible solution to the problem, from what I am hearing from representatives of the school boards, do you think that in all schools of Trinidad and Tobago there would be considerable benefit in solving this problem if, from the date of registration of the child in Infant 1, first year, and the date of registration in Form 1 in high school, that parents are invited to a particular meeting and they are educated and exposed on what it takes to prepare at home a child to really function efficiently in school. So I am looking at a programme of parental education starting at Infant 1, where parents are required to attend as a condition for registration and parental involvement in Form 1, where parents are invited to attend and participate in this class on effective parenting, so that at that stage parents would know what their requirements are. As a solution, I am putting out to school boards as to whether that particular programme can, in your opinion, generate the kind of solutions we would like to see in the problem.

**Ms. Cunningham:** As a matter of fact, Mr. Chairman, that is one of the recommendations that the Seventh-Day Adventist Board would like to propose and to agree with you. We have seen from our system that collaboration with parents actually works.

**Mr. Chairman:** Excellent, thank you very much. Before I ask Miss Ameen to come in, I see a number of mikes on. Is there any other member? We have a member, Ms. Thornhill, who would like to come in. She has not yet spoken.

**Ms. Thornhill:** I will like to come in here. You did indicate the importance of having meetings with parents from first year infants. I am saying from the Anglican Education Board of Management, we also manage early childhood centres, and what is happening now is a sort of transfer of the programmes at the early childhood centre into the primary school. For example, when a child is enrolled at an early childhood centre we do not enrol that child, we enrol the family. So when a child has to be enrolled, both parents or representatives of missing parents need to come in for that

interview to get an understanding of the programme. Their orientation programme involves their having to document their own enrolment as members of that parent body, and that they are part of the team working with the child and the parent.

It moves into the primary school. Some of them serve as feeder for the primary school. Yes, the Anglican schools do have issues of violence and bullying, even though in the minority as I have shared with my colleagues. The board is divided into regions. The whole Anglican education body is divided into regions: north-west, north-east, south and Tobago. The board also has various committees and these committees visit schools on a regular basis.

We have had a series of programmes that have been instituted in schools. Like in Tobago we note that there was a whole programme referred to as “child-friendly school” where counsellors were brought in and teachers agreed for the standards of the schools. In the north-east, for example, at Holy Saviour Anglican Primary School the activity in relation to bullying and violence took a research-oriented form.

**Mr. Chairman:** I need to intervene, and we could elaborate on some of these points. I would like to recognize Mr. Yacoob Ali, a representative of the ASJA Trinidad and Tobago, who I will ask to come in at some time. Before I go back to a follow-up question of Miss Nadine Stewart, am I hearing a consensus among the denominational school boards that we need a system of educating parents, so that schools are involved, not only in educating children, but from the date of registration now we are hearing from the preschool that parents need to be educated? Do you think as one follow-up from the Chair that in educating the parents you would need the assistance of school guidance counsellors, psychologists, professionals who are trained in parent/child/teacher relationships to provide the necessary training to parents and teachers and principals, so that there will be a cohesive body assisting to deal with this programme. The second question is the need for professional assistance in training parents.

**Ms. Thornhill:** I would like to continue here because in the Anglican schools we have a body referred to as the Mothers Union group, and the Mothers Union has been involved in parent education throughout our schools.

**Mr. Chairman:** Very well, thank you very much. Miss Nadine Stewart your follow-up is a follow-up, and then Miss Ameen original.

**Miss Stewart:** I have listened to the representatives from the school boards, and maybe you all are indicating that the whole issue of violence and bullying is in the minority at your schools. So my question is: do you think that we have incidents of under-reporting?

**Dr. Baptiste:** I do not think that is the case. I think that we are reporting exactly what obtains. If I may proceed to something that you said; in addition to the involvement of the parents from the very beginning, which I agree with and which we do, each of our schools would tend to have an action plan that the principal follows and the staff follows with principals. We submitted a document; I am not going to read that whole document. In the appendix we have an example of what one of our schools does. It is the action plan at the Sacred Heart Girls' RC School. There is a proactive plan and a reactive plan to deal with discipline, to deal with violence and to deal with bullying. You would see in that proactive plan a number of programmes that parents have to buy into when they bring their children to that school. Most of the schools would have something similar.

**Mr. Chairman:** I need to follow up on Miss Nadine Stewart's question, which is the instance of under-reporting. Do you have mechanisms where students who feel that they have been bullied are able to report anonymously, or do they report to some individual in the school in whom they have some confidence and comfort, or is it that you rely solely on the teacher of the student to report the instance of one child bullying another child? I am looking at the mechanism because we really would like to get to the point of whether there is under-reporting or whether the instances that

you are seeing really and truly reflect the instances of bullying in your school. Do you think the mechanisms are adequate in the school so that a child who feels he or she has been bullied would be comfortable in making the report?

**Dr. Baptiste:** There might be some level of under-reporting where you do not have enough supervision in the schools. There are incidents where you do not have a complete staff; you have vacancies, et cetera, and teachers have to make up and so on. In those situations it is likely that there would be, one, more incidents of bullying and so on and more under-reporting.

**Mr. Chairman:** Miss Ameen, and subsequent to Mr. Hosein and then Mr. Forde. So we are coming this way. And, Mr. Hafeez Ali would be last.

**Miss Ameen:** Chairman, I have no doubt that the religious principles of the various denominational schools represented here play a significant role in the discipline within your school, but you mentioned the involvement of the board, apart from the involvement of the parents. Only recently, a couple of years ago, school boards were put into all public schools. I am wondering if the presence of a board as a supportive body to the teachers and to the students by extension, as well as the parents, and a group who will play a role in the administration of the school, if you believe that that type of support makes a difference in your school, because in a school without a board, if there is an incident, whether it is with a teacher or student, they go through the principal and thereafter they go to the school supervisor, who are individuals. But previously there was no board specifically assigned to each school to act as a support.

The results of these boards that were recently put in may not be very evident as yet. But I am asking, from your experience in education whether you feel the very presence of a board plays a significant role in the support of your school to uphold the standards that you adhere to?

**Ms. Cunningham:** Hon. member, the Seventh-Day Adventist Board always works

with each school, whether it be an assisted or private school having a local school board. These boards operate based on the policies of the Ministry of Education and the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. We have found that when these boards are fully functional that the administration of the school, the teachers, all the stakeholders receive quite a bit of support.

As a matter of fact in terms of student discipline, gross discipline matters will be taken for discussion at these school board meetings. While they cannot execute discipline and so on, they are able to make recommendations, both for the punishment or consequences and also for improving the entire discipline of the school. As a matter of fact, one of the policies that they are supposed to discuss as a body is the discipline policy of the school. The discipline policy will not only treat with consequences for wrongdoing, but strategies for intervention and for improving student discipline in general.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much. I would like to hear from Ms. Barbara Burke, she was a senatorial colleague with me, with the experience, and then Mr. Yacoob Ali. The experience of your school board, I think that is a valuable point raised by Miss Ameen. How effective is the presence of a board itself in ensuring discipline in a school?

**Mrs. Burke:** Pleasant morning to the Chairman and members. The board plays an important role; you have a family relationship. In our school we only have two boys that give trouble, two boys, and they are in fourth standard, so it is minimum—two boys alone. You could call their names on your fingers. The others—you have the PTA, and the parents come in and you have like a family relationship.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, thank you. Mr. Yacoob Ali, would you like to give us the experience of your board in relation to disciplining errant students?

**Mr. Ali:** Generally speaking we do not have a problem within the school system at all. We may have an errant child here and there, but the way we tackle it,

immediately we get the parents to come in; mother and father must come. If mother alone comes, we ask for the father to come, we send back the mother. We say mother and father must come. If the father is there in the home he must come to represent and tell us what is wrong. So we do that, and we have a hearing with the child sitting there and the parents and one or two teachers come, just as you would have a normal thing, as quickly as possible, not to intimidate the child but to let them know that they will be hearing the evidence from the teacher and their principal, if the principal knows the details on it. This is the way we handle it, and we have had minimal problems, but that is the way we handle it.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, thank you very much. To then emphasize one question before MP Hosein comes in, and that is, the Education Act is very clear with respect to the role of the principal in ensuring the safety and the security of all in his or her school. In a school, the principal rules and the principal controls. What I would like to find out from the school board is this: What kind of assistance do you give your school principals so that they are in a position to ensure the safety and security of all students in that school?

**Dr. Baptiste:** We give a lot of support. The country from our point of view is divided into what we call vicariates, and we have what we call vicariate managers. They are almost like school supervisors, but they come from our board and they work with our principals all the time. They visit all the schools. I said earlier we have this quality assurance programme which they monitor. They ensure that things operate as we feel they should operate. Any other kind of support that they need they bring that through these vicariate managers to the board. Of course, you do not want to sound as if the Ministry of Education does not have a part to play. The Ministry of Education also has its school supervisors and their whole system that would support the principals in the job that they have to do.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much. I will now ask MP Hosein to come in, who

has wanted to come in for quite a while.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** From the time we started, thank you, Chair.

I just want to go back a little bit to a statement that was made by the board. I just want to kind of see if it ties in at all. You had indicated that in light of the fact there might be incidents which may be as a result of teacher absenteeism, I would like to ask: what is the rate of absenteeism in your schools?—one. Two, it has come to our attention that denominational schools tend to suppress the statistics in regard to incidents of violence. You are here as the board, is it possible that the principals may not articulate these incidents to the board in order to project the image of the schools?

**Dr. Baptiste:** I am not aware that anybody suppresses information in our schools, so I will not support that allegation at all.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** It is not an allegation. It is a question.

**Dr. Baptiste:** What I said was that, for example in our schools we have a number of vacancies and we find that where there are vacancies and teachers have to make up for the vacancies and so on, there is a tendency to have less supervision over children. The result is that the incidents of misbehaviour might rise and that is where we tend to see more misbehaviour than in cases where the school is fully staffed. That is the point I was making.

I am not aware that incidents are suppressed. Perhaps a better word might be that we do not know about it, but to say that it is suppressed I think is a harsh statement to make.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Just to ask, what is the relationship between the schools that operate under you and the Ministry? What type of relationship do you enjoy and what aspects of the relationship you hope would be improved or changed? Are they responsible, for instance, for providing teachers or approving teachers before they actually come to your schools?

**Dr. Baptiste:** The appointment and all the other things that go with staffing schools is the responsibility of the Teaching Service Commission, but the Ministry does have a role to play. There is yes a pretty long process that may take time to get things done, but that is the relationship. Our relationship with respect to the appointment of teachers is that we can object as a body to the appointment of a teacher on spiritual and moral grounds. Other than that the commission does the rest.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much. I will ask MP Forde.

**Mr. Forde:** Again, a general question from each denominational institution. In terms of where the Ministry of Education is unable to supply the needs for guidance counsellors and so on, are you all in a position as an individual body in order to institute these positions on your own as a result? Do you all have that authority? Let us say, for instance, you all do not have enough guidance counsellors and you all would like to institute, are you in a position as denominational boards to institute those positions at the various schools in order to assist with the development, and to ensure that violence is minimized and discipline is maintained?

**Ms. Thornhill:** For the Anglican Board we do not institute guidance counsellors, but in each school there is a manager and the manager is the priest of that parish. The priests of the Anglican faith are trained in guidance and counselling and they assist in that area. Each Anglican school has a priest assigned, based on the parish that that school is located in, and the priests serve in that capacity as far as they can when situation arise where there is need for counselling.

**Mr. Chairman:** Are there any other contributions?

**Ms. Thornhill:** With the Seventh-Day Adventist Board, the Chairman of the local school board is in all cases a minister of the church so he would be trained in counselling, both general and pastoral counselling. We also have at some of our schools chaplains who would, of course, treat with the spiritual and religious life of the school which impacts on discipline. We have also appointed school counsellors,

we call them, who are trained in guidance and actual counselling at that level.

**Mr. Forde:** One other question. Again, from my school days to presently, I could recall in my school days the regularity of sessions like religious instructions. You would have at lunchtime these sessions—at the Presbyterian school I attended, Rev. Sieunarine used to be on the compound every day after Hillview College ensuring that his presence is there, having sessions and so on. Presently do these things take place still in terms of the regularity like with the Catholics, the ASJA, the Hindu faith and so on? When I say, we have individuals on the compound ensuring that discipline is maintained?

**Mrs. Burke:** Yes, yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** Could I ask Mr. Sat Maharaj, who has been quiet for quite a while, to come in here. I would really like to hear what happens in the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha schools.

**Mr. Maharaj:** We meet regularly with our principals. On Monday I had a meeting with all our principals, once per term. I am meeting with them again tomorrow this time at a beach, it is a beach lime, so that there is complete interaction between the board and our principals. They will tell you that.

The point that Mr. Forde has raised is that during your school days and my school days there was always pushing and shoving. We did not call it bullying; it always existed, every one of you. Now you call it bullying; cyberbullying and physical bullying, but it is not that prevalent in the school system.

Mr. Chairman I want to turn your mind a little to another issue, especially at secondary schools. There are children who cannot cope academically with a secondary school. Previously we had woodworking centres, we had where you went and trained to be a mason and so on. So if you eliminated these children who cannot succeed academically, they become violent in the school. If you could have a separate mechanism where you send them for skills training, because we had that at

one time, skills training. So that the child who cannot cope with the academics of the school would go to a school where you have skills training, rather than remain there and be a destructive force in the school itself.

**Mr. Chairman:** Excellent recommendation, and we will be giving that consideration because it has arisen in previous evidence that was advanced to the Committee. Mrs. Newallo-Hosein and then Mr. Hafeez Ali. Mr. Ali you can ask about four questions, one after the other. But first, let us listen to the member of the Methodist faith.

**Mr. Nicholson:** I am not championing the cause of all denominational boards, but if you were to go back a few years, permit me, as 50, the pattern was such that there was the church building and the school building, and there was an intermixing. The children went to a church service once per week and the principal of the school was a local presbyter in the church. Nearly all the teachers were Methodist and they carried on what Methodism stood for.

Apart from that there was a behavioural pattern among the children. I support Mr. Maharaj and the other speaker that there is less violence in our denominational schools as compared to others. I am out the teaching system a few years now, but even Miss Phyllis Mitchell and lots of other school supervisors will tell you and make it abundantly clear that the denominational schools present a little less problems. I said little as to minimize it.

**11.00 a.m.**

**Mr. Chairman:** All right. Very well. Thank you very much. Mrs. Newallo-Hosein and then afterwards Sen. Hafeez Ali will get his opportunity.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Mr. Nicholson, for that. I mean, at the end of the day the Committee here will obviously want to glean from the boards that are successful in having less violence in the schools to share with us so that we can put it as a part of our recommendations. But just coming back to Mr. Maharaj.

**Mr. Nicholson:** I am sorry. One last point. There is—what input can the board make in the running of the school? I—

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. We will come to that in summing up. In summing up you will get an opportunity to sum up. But we do need to give the MPs an opportunity to pose their questions.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Mr. Maharaj had spoken about there being an issue where children may not fare well and therefore return to violence. Have you recognized at all that disorders such as ADD and ADHA can, in fact, contribute to a child's inability to function in their work and also that it may contribute to violence? And if yes, what steps are taken to test children who are under your care?—and that goes for anyone to answer.

**Mr. Maharaj:** First of all, I want to record that when you look at the timetable of my denominational board, every school you will find that between 8.00 to 8.30 is devotion. So that even before you begin the academic day there is half an hour of devotions so you set the tone for the child. As my friend was saying, and I believe most of you have had that experience in a denominational school. The devotions in

the morning and you set the tone of the school.

**Mr. Chairman:** Very well. Thank you very much. And now I will ask Mr. Hafeez Ali to come in. Yes. No. You will get an opportunity to—

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** No. I do not want to ask a question. My question was not answered.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. But we will come back to that. But Sen. Hafeez must be given his opportunity. Sen. Hafeez, it is your turn.

**Sen. Ali:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Maharaj, in your opening remarks you made reference that you believe and I would want to believe the rest of boards have the same opinion that the main issues really creating the problem of bullying and violence in schools will be the parent neglect to the children. And the Anti-Bullying Association has given a list of causes to us as an organization and many of them point directly to the parents. What I want to know, first of all, from as many of you as possible, what—and then you said the Parent-Teacher Association or the PTA in the schools—if I want to quote what you have said—is a sham. How then do we get the parents involved or how do you get the parents involved in your denominational schools to be involved with the children themselves?

**Mr. Maharaj:** Well I would like to refer you to a study that was done in England and published in the *Sunday Observer* of the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the 4<sup>th</sup> of this month, where they have the same sort of problems. And one of the experts there, I would like to read what that article said:

“Education experts said...”

This is where the white children were failing. That is, the Indian children in England were at the top at the age of six and the Chinese children were at the top at the age of 14. And they did a survey on the study and this what it said:

“Education experts said white British children were being ‘let down’ by schools and also by parents who did not fully support their education. In

contrast, immigrant children were ‘keen to make use of the educational opportunities’ on offer and received huge support from their”—aspiring—“families.”

And then another expert in that same article:

Joe Hutchinson, associated director of education data and statistics at Centre Forum said previous research has shown that higher educational aspirations were associated with certain ethnic minority groups.

This is in England where the study was taking place.

**Mr. Chairman:** Mr. Maharaj, the question posed by Sen. Hafeez Ali was: what are you doing in your schools to ensure—

**Mr. Maharaj:** We are doing precisely what these experts are finding. That is why I am reading what the experts said.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. No. No. But I want to know what practically are you doing in your school on a weekly basis to get the parental involvement that perhaps government schools may not be doing? We understand what you are saying, but how do you translate that into action?

**Mr. Maharaj:** By the parental involvement. If the parents are not involved in the education as they have found there, and in Trinidad if the parents are not involved in the education of the child, then there is no progress for that child.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. We would really want to find out the mechanisms that your board is involved with?

**Mr. Maharaj:** Parental involvement is the mechanism.

**Mr. Chairman:** Right. Do you call them in once a week? Do you have a regular meeting?

**Mr. Maharaj:** Regular PTA meetings and if there is any problem with any particular child—I have one of my principals here right in the audience. He will tell you that immediately they have the number, the telephone number, the cell number

of the parent and call them in immediately. So you solve the problem.

**Mr. Chairman:** Excellent. Thank you very much. We have some ideas as to what we can do. For example, we can get the email addresses of parents so the teachers can have that. We can get the cell phone numbers so that in the event of any problem, a teacher can simply call the parent immediately or send one of those electronic messages and you are in communication. Do you think that is a solution?

**Mr. Maharaj:** Yes. But more that, Mr. Chairman, every one of our principals will tell you that we have instructed them to have a register of resource personnel. The Ministry of Education cannot cope with the school system. So that you have not only the parent's number, but you have the number of an electrician who is a parent. You have the number of a plumber who is a parent. You have the number of a—whatever you may have problems in the school. So you do not shut down the school or do anything like that, but you call in for help, additional help from—the community outside there is prepared to help any school where the teachers and the principals are working right. They put their own money in.

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes. And I need to intervene. Before I ask Mr. Yacoob Ali to come in or other board members to come in. Basically you are saying, the function of a PTA is not to raise funds for the school.

**Mr. Maharaj:** That is part of the function.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. But the principal function of the PTA is to ensure that there is continuous communication and dialogue so that the process of education can proceed efficiently. Will you agree with that statement?

**Mr. Maharaj:** Yes. Generally I will agree with that statement.

**Mr. Chairman:** I was a member of a PTA, tried to raise funds, you know.

**Mr. Maharaj:** Mr. Chairman, we have different regions in this country. Schools are located at different locations, violent locations, peaceful locations, by the seaside. You would not take an ordinary principal from Port of Spain to make him

principal of Toco Composite. You need somebody there who understands fishing, catching fish, things like that.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. That is understandable. The board will get the personnel appropriate for the functions. But I think Mr. Sirjuesingh would like to come in briefly on that point raised by Senator, and also I think Mr. Yacoob Ali would like to come in to address briefly the concerns raised by Sen. Hafeez Ali.

**Mr. Sirjuesingh:** There were three, four questions in the air. So let me refer first of all to the question of denominational schools. Mr. Maharaj explained we begin the day with worship, and in addition in our schools, Presbyterian schools, there is another half hour period per day for religious instructions.

**Mr. Chairman:** All right. Granted. We get that, but the question raised by Sen. Hafeez Ali was really, how do you, given that parental involvement seems to be the crux of the problem, what is the mechanism do you employ to ensure parents are involved in a continuous basis in the education of the child?

**Mr. Sirjuesingh:** My own experience as a principal is that I got away from the term parent/teacher because that was too restrictive. It is important that we recognize the students as being a part of that organization. It is important to recognize the community as being a part of that organization and therefore, I had no PTA. I had a PSO, parent school organization, and although we were a primary school, our student council president was a member of the executive and came to meetings and so on.

**Mr. Chairman:** I need to intervene because Sen. Hafeez Ali, you have a few more questions. Right. So Sen. Ali has a few more questions. But really to get to the solutions you are saying that each school board will organize its parent/teacher school association appropriate to the environment to which the school operates. So that the school board is then free to tailor the association based upon its specific needs. As Mr. Maharaj said, in Toco you may need, you may have special needs so

that you need to be iterative in how you have these associations. That is a solution.  
Sen. Hafeez Ali, continue.

**Sen. Ali:** Thank you again, Mr. Chair. So what I am hearing here this afternoon with all the boards is, would it be right for me to say that, for us to minimize the level of violence in schools, that one of the actions we should take is that those schools that are heavily violent should have some level of religious instructions?

**Ms. Cunningham:** The short answer for that would be—as you said some levels, so—yes. Because it can take different formats depending on the faith. Because what we have found and I am sure my colleagues would agree with me, in their experience, is that when there is religious instruction, it develops in the student a certain spiritual and social conscience. Right? Because along with the worship and so on, the Seventh Day Adventist board has the students engaged in community outreach. Right? In reach in the school for their peers who may be in some difficulty of one type or the other and in the wider community.

**Mr. Chairman:** I need to intervene. I just want to raise teaser questions. Do you think that errant students in your school will benefit from having to perform service in the school itself such as: cleaning the classrooms; doing some maintenance of school property; helping to mow or cut the grass and instead of simply being suspended out there. Do you think that a programme of school service is something that could assist in reforming students who are straying from the true and correct path?

**Ms. Cunningham:** Yes. That has been my experience as principal, but I was not speaking about that type of service. I was speaking about helping, an altruism, helping students, helping neighbours, helping persons of the community. But that type of service is also quite useful.

**Mr. Chairman:** We accept that, it is just that we have not been focusing on using the students themselves to show a little more respect for the school, the school

building, the school environment, the school washrooms, cafeteria facilities, let them understand that these things need to be treated with respect, in addition to students and so on. But Sen. Ali, again your question.

**Sen. Ali:** This will be my final question, Mr. Chair. To the boards again, I just want to know what kind of relationship you all have with the PTA association and the Anti-Bullying Association in the country. I would like a few of them to answer, please.

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes. Any response?

**Mr. Maharaj:** My first response is that, really you do not have a national PTA. It is a sham. It does not exist, well it exists in only about 15 schools.

**Mr. Chairman:** Very well. And any other responses from parents? Because we do have up to 11.15 and there is a second stage to this hearing and we would want to conclude shortly. So the experience of other school boards?

**Ms. Thornhill:** I want to ask, please, that we do not forget that position I made earlier about the parent registering along with the child.

**Mr. Chairman:** Very well. Thank you very much.

**Ms. Thornhill:** It has been very, very useful and I do not want us to miss it.

**Mr. Chairman:** We have heard that. Mr. Yacoob Ali, did you want to come in on any of the points?

**Mr. Y. Ali:** We call it the parent enhancement committee now.

**Mr. Chairman:** Very well.

**Mr. Y. Ali:** And we meet with them regularly and if a child errs, we get the parents to come in, mother and father, have them around. We will do that.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much. It is 11.30. What I plan to do, I will ask for one more question from the Committee, but I will engage in a brief summing up. So far there are solutions which have emanated from our public hearing. One, Mr. Maharaj, has indicated that there is a need for curriculum change so that students

who are not coping very well with academia may find other avenues, industrial arts, et cetera, on which to expend their energies.

Second, there seems to be some consensus on that. Second there seems to be consensus on the need for parental involvement from infants one up when the student graduates and lower. Okay. Parental involvement from the date of registration in preschool, continuous and the parental involvement should be tailored to the environment of the school and the particular idiosyncrasy or the peculiarity of the school itself.

Third, what has come out as a positive recommendation is that there is a need for religious instructions or ethical training in the school starting from the beginning of the school at 8.00 a.m. right down to the end when you terminate classes.

And fourth, what was indicated by the SDA member here is that we do need students to perform service, service to the community, as well as service to the school. These are the recommendations that have come out so far from the hearings that we can put into our report. But before I ask Mr. Baptiste to come in, I would ask any member of the Committee who would like to pose one final question. And all members will be given an opportunity to sum up a position in a minute before I close. So MP Newallo-Hosein, do you have a final question, brief final question?

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** I am going to make it easy for the board and it is going to be just a bipolar answer that is: whether or not community policing plays a role in your schools?

**Mr. Chairman:** Community policing?

**Dr. Baptiste:** Yes, it does.

**Mr. Chairman:** Are you satisfied with the response of the community police to the problems that you may encounter?

**Dr. Baptiste:** One school actually has homework being done in the police station.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. It has homework being done in the police station because

the police station has air-conditioned units or something? Why?

**Dr. Baptiste:** Well, that is because parents may not be home at the time.

**Mr. Chairman:** Very well. Thank you very much. Mr. Yacoob Ali and then I will—

**Mr. Y. Ali:** The selection of teachers is an important factor. And you have to maintain contact with your teachers and warn them about the religious practices in the institutions wherever you have a religious board. We impress that upon them. We call them in and talk to them. And I think this serves a lot to be able to bring them together and they respect the religious denomination, what we want to achieve and they bring it into the school.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Very well. Thank you. Is that your closing comment that you would like to leave with the Committee?

**Mr. Y. Ali:** Yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** Mrs. Thornhill, do you have a closing, final comment that you will like to make to the Committee?

**Ms. Thornhill:** My closing comment is that when we talk about education and children, we begin right down from the early childhood level and to understand the very important aspect of religious education within our schools and the link of the church and the school.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much. Mr. Sirjuesingh.

**Mr. Sirjuesingh:** I just want to, on the question on parenting, wherever I go and schools have problems, the first things as parents I want to point out that our teachers are made to understand that they are “in loco parentis” and therefore the teacher has a sort of parental role during the day. In addition, I would like to recommend that the Ministry of Education considers introducing in all our schools the discipline of the Cub Scouts and the Girl Guides.

**Mr. Chairman:** Excellent.

**Mr. Sirjuesingh:** It is believed that these people grow up in life to be well disciplined people. Just one more thing, I want to take this opportunity—

**Mr. Chairman:** Do you have a cadet force also in your secondary school? I know in your primary school, but do you know if there is a cadet force also in existence in the secondary school?

**Mr. Sirjuesingh:** As well, yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** Very well. Okay.

**Mr. Sirjuesingh:** I just want to say that within recent times—excuse the pun—we feel that we have bullied with respect to the Concordat.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Very well. We will come to the Concordat at some other time. Archbishop Barbara Gray-Burke.

**Arch. Gray-Burke:** I would like to say that as a board, we insist that we have when we recommend teachers of our religion and sometimes you get a lot of hiccups doing that because they want to foist other people on you. But what keeps us together when we have people from our religion in our schools, in our school as principals and teachers because sometimes if you do not have that, you may not get the cooperation of them to take the students over to the church although we take them because we get police permission and all those things. Every first Monday over to the church and then we have Ministers go into the school to give religious knowledge.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Thank you very much. Dr. Baptiste.

**Dr. Baptiste:** Yes. We are speaking from the level of the board, but let me just, my addition to this would be at the level of the school itself, we recommend an action plan for discipline for each school. In the report that we submitted, we have an example of one, the Sacred Heart Girls' RC School. So quite apart from what we do at the level of the board and what the Ministry of Education should do, you mentioned that the principal is finally the person responsible for the school, each

principal should have an action plan. And this particular school has a proactive plan and a reactive plan, and I want to recommend it to you. I believe you would have it with you, Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** Very well. Thank you very much. And Ms. Cunningham.

**Ms. Cunningham:** The SDA board would like to recommend, as a mechanism to treat directly with bullying and acts of aggression, an intentional anger and conflict management programme or curriculum be formulated and implemented in all schools to treat directly with, you know, the level of anger and conflict management issues.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Thank you much. Mr. Sat Maharaj.

**Mr. Maharaj:** Mr. Chairman, the way we construct our academic year impacts on the education of the country. Our academic year is colonial, that is we have a summer, a Christmas, an Easter and a summer period. It is constructed that way. I am suggesting that we change that construct to a calendar year. That is, it starts in January and it ends in December. It might impact generally on the education system.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. But how will that, Mr. Maharaj, affect positively the school violence problem that we have?

**Mr. Maharaj:** Well school violence, I would suggest that the focus on the government schools and ask the government schools to model themselves according to how the denominational schools have modelled ourselves.

**Mr. Chairman:** We suspected that that would have been the response. [*Laughter*]  
Mr. Nicholson.

**Mr. Nicholson:** Yes. As I wanted to say earlier. The board is separate from the principal. An abled principal should run the school. And until you are ready to make a report to the board, the board does not come in.

Next point is, at our primary school, I presume it is in black and white or not. You begin as a certain denominational school and after a time you change your

religion and the Ministry gives you the impression or used to say apply and you will come over to government. But usually when you go over to government you become senior to too many of the teachers that you meet there and there is a problem right now. Right now we have two of our schools with acting principals because they are from different religious faiths and so it is a deadlock. I think there were cases where Presbyterian and Maha Sabha were at loggerheads with people wanting to become principal of their school who did not support their religious denomination. So that if we have these issues resolved, it will have an impact on the discipline.

**Mr. Chairman:** Very well. Thank you very much, members of the denominational boards. This has been a very productive morning hearing. And what we will have to do, we have a second phase. Mr. Baptiste, you wanted to come in for something?

**Dr. Baptiste:** I just want to formally present our report.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Very well. Thank you. We have a report presented by Mr. Baptiste, and it has been accepted by the Committee.

So that we will bring this morning's session to a close, this particular part of the proceeding will have to be suspended for a few minutes. Yes. Okay. And since we do have a report from the Catholic Board, if the other boards also have similar reports that they would like to submit to the Committee, you are invited to so do. If there are any other recommendations that you would like to send to us via electronic form or in writing, please so do, this will inform, apart from what I have been able to glean so far as recommendations and solutions, this will then inform our report which will then be subject to ministerial action.

So at this time 11.24, I will suspend for a few minutes. I am going to thank all of the participants from the denominational boards for being present and for interacting with us. I suspend now and we will reconvene in about five minutes. Thank you very much.

**11.24 a.m.:** *Meeting suspended.*



**VERBATIM NOTES OF THE SIXTH MEETING OF THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE APPOINTED TO INQUIRE INTO AND REPORT ON SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, HELD (IN PUBLIC) IN THE J. HAMILTON MAURICE ROOM, MEZZANINE FLOOR, TOWER D, OFFICE OF THE PARLIAMENT, THE PORT OF SPAIN INTERNATIONAL WATERFRONT CENTER, #1A WRIGHTSON ROAD, PORT OF SPAIN, ON FRIDAY, APRIL 29, 2016.**

**PRESENT**

Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir	Chairman
Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine	Member
Mr. Esmond Forde	Member
Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein	Member
Mr. Hafeez Ali	Member
Miss Nadine Stewart	Member
Miss Khadijah Ameen	Member
Mr. Julien Ogilvie	Secretary
Miss Kimberly Mitchell	Assistant Secretary
Miss Katharina Gokool	Graduate Research Assistant

**ABSENT**

Miss Shamfa Cudjoe	Member
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**OFFICIALS OF THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION  
GUIDANCE OFFICERS AND SOCIAL WORKERS**

Ms. Jasmine Mohammed	Guidance Counsellor (Iere Government)
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**UNREVISED**

Ms. Judy Monica Thomas	Guidance Counsellor (Mayaro Secondary School)
Ms. Tenille Quamina	Guidance Counsellor (Longdenville Government Primary School)
Mr. Andy Matamora	Guidance Counsellor (St. Paul A.C. Primary School)
Ms. Marcelin Alicia Melville	Guidance Officer I (Barataria North Secondary)
Ms. Nadira Hakim	Guidance Counsellor (Couva West Secondary)
Ms. Ancilla Nicholas	School Social Worker (Carapichaima A.C. Primary School)
Ms. Allison Paul	School Social Worker (Princes Town Methodist Primary School)
Ms. Akisha Flavinney	School Social Worker (Barrackpore West Secondary)
Mr. Frankie Driggs	School Social Worker (Five Rivers Secondary)
Mrs. Alana Bruce-Webster	School Social Worker (Chaguanas North Secondary)
Mr. Sule Dyer	School Social Worker (San Fernando Boys' Government)

### **PSYCHOLOGISTS**

Dr. Maraika Gooding (Psychologist)	Educational and Child Psychologist
Mrs. Margaret Nakhid-Chatoor MA, BA	Psychologist, Senior Lecturer
Mr. Dale Joseph	Sergeant (Ag) – Cyber Crime Unit

**UNREVISED**

Dr. Hakim Williams Ed.D.

Assistant Professor, Africana  
Studies and Education,  
Gettysburg College

**11.32 a.m.:** *Meeting resumed in the J. Hamilton Maurice Room.*

**Mr. Chairman:** Good afternoon. I would like to call the second portion of our meeting to order, so all participants in the second portion, please, are invited to take your seats. Thank you very much.

Good morning once again. Good morning to our audience for re-joining us both on television and on radio. Welcome to the second portion of our public hearing of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services on school violence and bullying. Those who have been listening or would have heard the objectives of the enquiry, so need to repeat the objectives except suffice to emphasize that we are focusing on the prevalence of violence and bullying amongst school-age children and we are conducting the public hearing so that we can craft solutions which hopefully will eliminate this problem in the not too distant future.

We consider this particular problem to be one of the most pressing social problems now. It is current, it is highlighted in social media as well as regular media. And this morning as part of the second segment, we have with us guidance officers and counsellors in the school system, social workers, psychologists and academics from the field of education. We also have a representative from the Cyber Crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago since bullying has now taken on the slant of cyberbullying, bullying through the social media.

I, at this point, would ask all members addressing us today to introduce themselves briefly and then we will open the floor to questioning. So may I start with my right who is Ms. Quamina. Yes. Thank you.

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*[Officials of the Ministry of Education introduce themselves]*

*[Committee members introduce themselves]*

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much for the introduction. Let me start the process by asking of the primary school and of the secondary school, and the responses are open to all of the invited participants.

First is, in relation to the primary school—a primary school system in which you are involved—.what is the most pressing type of bullying; the most pervasive type of bullying which occurs in the primary school system? And second, with respect to the secondary school system with which you have experience, what is the most pressing or the most pervasive type of bullying that you have had to deal with in your experience? Anyone can start off the process.

**Ms. Quamina:** From the primary school perspective I would say physical and verbal would be the two most prevalent forms of bullying.

**Mr. Chairman:** Physical and verbal. What about a social worker or a guidance counsellor in a secondary school, what, in your experience has been the most prevalent form? Ms. Hakim, yes.

**Ms. Hakim:** Ms. Hakim, Guidance Officer, secondary. I would say physical, especially in terms of taxing, extortion of money.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. We have heard about taxing before from the students, could you give us some examples? Because in taxation there is direct taxation, there are customs duties, there are various types of taxing, so I need to be apprised of what kind of taxation occurs in the secondary school system?

**Ms. Hakim:** It operates in a similar manner, I guess. *[Laughter]* Because most

of the secondary schools that you would attend, you will see what is happening out there in terms of taxing. There is a little committee, you will have the head of that committee, and they will be telling the other students, this is what we want for the day, and because they are afraid of the head of the committee—

**Mr. Chairman:** Is that committee a euphemism, a big word for a gang? Is that another name for a gang?

**Ms. Hakim:** I would not say so. I would not classify it as a gang.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. What is the distinction between a committee there? A committee, you see, gives respectability to a process which is highly, highly unacceptable. They call themselves a committee, but I think they really are organized criminals, are they not?

**Ms. Hakim:** In some instances. However, in most instances I would not agree with that.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, why?

**Ms. Hakim:** Unfortunately, well, at my school I would say negative behaviours are looked up on positively, and you view a gang as something negative.

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes, what I am trying to get at is this, there are activities which should not be occurring in a school environment at all. When students interact, it should be on the sport field, it should be in the classroom, it should be in a chess club, it should be in scouts. But, here we have what you call a committee engaging in the rates of taxation on students for a number of activities, and you are saying that you have seen this, and clearly the students who are being taxed are not happy because there is no representation, and those who are levying the tax seem to be quite happy with it because they are benefiting. Something is

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seriously amiss there. What goes on in the minds of those who are being taxed? They are the ones taken advantage of. Do they like this? They do not like it? What kind of complaints? How could we put an end to it?

**Ms. Hakim:** Unfortunately, nobody would like it. They do not like it. They do not appreciate it. It results in some becoming bullies themselves, because that way they can fit into that particular group of students. And in any school you would see it is just a core group, it is a minor group who would be engaging in activities like that. We have target groups, focus groups that we would work with, and liaise with community police, safety officers. It is a collaborative effort we have at school.

**Miss Ameen:** Okay. Sen. Hafeez Ali would like to come in at this point.

**Mr. Ali:** Just a follow-up question, when you do find out about these ministers of—how you call them?—

**Mr. Chairman:** Finance, yes, because they are taxing

**Mr. Ali:**—how does the school handle those guys?

**Brig. Gen. Antoine:** Or girls.

**Ms. Hakim:** Immediate response will be suspension for seven days. It is in the national code of conduct.

**Mr. Chairman:** Right, and suspended where? To go home?

**Ms. Hakim:** If it is not an extended suspension, yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** Right, and in your mind as a social worker, is that an effective punishment for someone who is engaging in an illegal activity?

**Ms. Hakim:** Sometimes, sometimes not, because some students look forward to suspensions.

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**Mr. Chairman:** Yes, okay. That has come before us in another hearing. And do you think that we need, in order to solve this problem—and I open the floor to all participants—that we need to find a mechanism which, upon suspension will assist in rehabilitating the errant student more than simply sending him home for a holiday? Are there any other responses?

**Ms. Melville:** Yes. And I do believe that Student Support Services, as a part of the Ministry of Education, we now have what was formally the Out of School Suspension Programme, and we have now brought on, or changed, or moved to the learning enhancement centres. The purpose of the learning enhancement centres is to provide the rehabilitation that is necessary for these students who are on suspension, particularly those that would be on extended suspension. And most times the students that would be on extended suspension include those who would be bully—the students who are bullies would fall into that category.

At the learning enhancement centres, we provide—a comprehensive work we do with them, so we do what we are known for, which is the group guidance sessions, and the group guidance sessions would focus on issues of conflict management, on issues of anger management, on decision-making, on problem-solving. So, the learning enhancement centres are run both by the guidance officers as well as with the social workers. When we have the learning enhancement centres, we also include in it individual work with the children as well as with their parents, we allow for a collaborative effort in terms of looking to see what may be some of the other issues. Because, what you find is that the child that bullies, there are other things happening with them.

**Mr. Chairman:** Could you elaborate on that? What really goes into the mind of

the bully? I would like to get—because I was told by Ms. Hakim that it is a minority, but they create much damage.

**Ms. Melville:** Yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** What I would like to know is, what is his/her psychological make-up that makes him want to exploit those who are perceived to be weaker? Because, once we understand that maybe we can find a solution for rehabilitation.

**Ms. Melville:** Yes. So, what we find—like Ms. Hakim said, it is in the minority, but you find that these students are students with the bringing on of the universal education for all, you find that a lot of them, the curriculum does not meet their needs and so they are not able to cope and they are frustrated.

**Mr. Chairman:** Frustration; they have low self-esteem because they are not very good in physics—

**Ms. Melville:** Low self-esteem, their grades—

**Mr. Chairman:**—they are finding it difficult in math and so on, so that therefore what arose before is that maybe a different type of school programme for them, or a sporting programme, or some other area for them to star might be the better rehabilitation technique. Could I ask our psychologist Dr. Gooding to come in here?

**Dr. Gooding:** Thank you. Mr. Chairman, I am looking at a broader picture in terms of what is our hope for education. If we consider what our goals are and we recognize that really school is a microcosm of the society in terms of looking at whatever is happening out there, we would expect it to happen in the school. Now, if we understand that and we think of education as contributing, the main vehicle to ensure that our children are ready for citizenship in the way that we

perceive it to be, then we will need to put things in place that would assist all to reach that goal.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, that is long-term—I need to interject.

**Dr. Gooding:** No, no,

**Mr. Chairman:** But I want to get short-term solutions, because I am concerned about the victims.

**Dr. Gooding:** You see, that is part of the problem, we want the short-term solutions.

**Mr. Chairman:** And I will tell you why—just hold a minute—I want the short term, I want the medium term and I want the long term.

**Dr. Gooding:** Okay.

**Mr. Chairman:** The short term are things we can do now to ensure, because the victim is experiencing the pain, the humiliation now, and if there are any things that we can do now that we should be doing differently, that will be of interest to the Committee. We have heard the submissions with respect to education change, but in the meantime we are going to have to deal with a lot of trauma which, hopefully we should be able to minimize.

**Dr. Gooding:** Okay, now the thing is, the bully himself/herself, that person needs help as well.

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes.

**Dr. Gooding:** So, we have to look at both of them as victims in a sense that there are certain needs that are not being met in that person.

**Mr. Chairman:** And we have focused on the bully that curriculum reform and other activities which may allow him or her to obtain the kind of self-esteem, he

needs to get rank and respect amongst his peers, but we are also looking—we have not done very much in this Committee for victims, you know. The victims of bullying is something we need to be considering as well, and I am hoping the psychologist will let me know, at the level of the Parliament, what, if anything, we could do differently to ensure that the victims are able to cope with this a little bit better. Because in my own research, the victims of bullying can commit suicide. So, it is a serious problem. It is not a minor problem that they will get over with, and so we do need to ensure that we can craft solutions in the short term to prevent this problem from getting to the point where we experience the loss of life. So, solutions for victims, short term, could you focus on that?

**Dr. Gooding:** One of the things we could think of is that attention in terms of what services are available for a person who is suffering as a result of bullying. What services are available, and when we think of the guidance counsellors being in the schools or so on, and we think about, is it at the level when you need psychological input in terms of our practising psychologists, what are the services in terms of somebody who—maybe the nurse, medical help, whatever it is that that person would need, there is a need for services to be able to attend to the person.

**Mr. Chairman:** Very well.

**Dr. Gooding:** We cannot say definitely that—

**Mr. Chairman:** We would focus on those services so that very clearly you said there is a need for services to assist victims to cope—

**Dr. Gooding:**—somebody could access—

**Mr. Chairman:** We would want to identify what some of these services might

be. Dr. Williams would you want to contribute here?

**Dr. Williams:** Yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** and then I would ask Ms. Margaret Chatoor to come in at this point, since we are dealing with the psychological makeup of the bully and the coping ability or inability of the victim.

**Dr. Williams:** Right, one thing I want to preface before I make my statement, is that it is rather important to anchor the short-term things that we are focusing on in a long-term strategic plan.

**Mr. Chairman:** Very well. Very well.

**Dr. Williams:** I want to make sure and press upon it, because the research indicates that the short-term stuff does not work, because it is not sustainable. Second, the educational system in Trinidad is quite burdened right now, and it is under-resourced in many areas, so, while the learning enhancement centres may exist, there are not enough of them, and I am hoping that there is some systematic evaluation that is happening with regard to the centres in terms of when the students go to those centres, what are the rates of violence, recidivism, example, that is happening after they return to the schools.

Second, because the school system is under-resourced, I think that we can actually train students in peer mediation, conflict resolution and restorative justice, and restorative circles which I am actually running in some schools.

**Mr. Chairman:** So, you are recommending, as something for the Committee to consider, the fact that students themselves can be trained in conflict management, peer resolution—

**Dr. Williams:** They must. They must.

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**Mr. Chairman:**—and that we can have a structure in the school where students can be trained to deal with other students who are bullies as well as to assist in the counselling of those who have been bullied.

**Dr. Williams:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. And such a programme does not now exist in the school system?

**Dr. Williams:** It exists in some places. For example, I am running a pilot programme at one school where I am training some students in this model with the hope the school will use the students in the future.

**Mr. Chairman:** Very well. Ms. Chatoor, you have something to add?

**Mrs. Nakhid-Chatoor:** Yes, you speak of the victim of bullying as if the victim always has some sort of academic issue also. But, the victim of bullying is always someone perceived as being different by the bully, and that difference has a lot of connotations. For example, I think the focus all of these discussions is that those children who are violent, who are engaged in acts of violence, there are some sort of academic issues. Unfortunately, there are many other issues that the Committee, I think, have not addressed, for example, emotional and behavioural disorders. A key issue that was identified by the Anti-Bullying Association as regards bullying in schools was that many of these students suffer or have gone through parental bereavement or loss of some kind, and our teachers in our schools are ill-equipped to deal with emotional and behavioural issues.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, point of clarification, once a report is made and a guidance counsellor interviews both the victim and the bully, is there any statistical evidence, having interviewed the bully and the victim, to find out what

the profile of the bully might be with respect to academic achievement, which we were advised is a big issue? You are saying that there are other issues such as parental loss, there may be a separated family, other issues. Do we have statistical data to indicate what might trigger someone to engage in this antisocial behaviour?

**Mrs. Nakhid-Chatoor:** Unfortunately, I think that many of these issues are not properly diagnosed. For example, we talk about students going into counselling, and we feel it is a one-off effort you go in and you speak to someone and you are okay, but a proper diagnostic assessment has to be done, which involves parents, involves students, involves files from teachers; for example what is the history of that student? What are some of the areas that are affecting that? And I think our school system at present lacks qualified people to do these diagnostic assessments.

**Mr. Chairman:** And are you saying that the guidance counsellors, and those who are charged with the responsibility now to counsel students, are not equipped to assess and evaluate the bully, so that we can create a profile which we can then use to treat this bully aimed at reforming him? Because, I was under the impression that the guidance counsellors do just that. They will take a report, they will counsel the victim, allow him or her to cope, and then with the bully, with the perpetrator, they will try to find out his psychological profile and try to find what are some of the things which could be done to ensure that he sees the errors of his ways and he is reformed. This is where I thought the data should be coming from school guidance counsellors. You are saying definitively before the Committee that that it is not done.

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**Mrs. Nakhid-Chatoor:** What I am saying and I am talking about the long term here. We talked about—the guidance counsellors I know, in the schools, are doing an excellent job. What I find is missing is that there is no follow through. It is not consistent, it is not—

**Mr. Chairman:** Could I get a response from a guidance counsellor now? I know the Chair is controlling, but I am waiting, because I am not seeing any complaints from Committee members thus far. So, could I get a statement, a position from a guidance counsellor before I go to Mrs. Newallo-Hosein, with respect to what you think should be done, that is not being done, to ensure that we can properly evaluate the bully, to reform him. We want to reform. You see, this is what we want. We want the student who has been victimized to be counselled so that he can cope and live his school life free of fear, and we want the bully to change his ways. With respect to the school guidance counsellors, could you indicate to the Committee what can be done now that is not being done to ensure that we achieve this objective? Anyone?

**Ms. Melville:** In addition to what we currently do, one of the things that in our assessments we will normally—the social workers will do some of the counselling. We have types of assessments that could be used to determine, maybe, what I should say, the level of intervention that may be necessary that we would not be able to handle, so we look at a multisectoral approach, and there is where we would refer the bullies in particular, we find that a lot of them have other conduct disorders happening, to Child Guidance Clinic. But, I want to put in a plug for Child Guidance Clinic who are one of the institutions which we refer to, but they are understaffed.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, I suggest solutions now, and solutions that we can implement immediately. Do you think that when a bully has been suspended for the five or seven day period that the principal is authorized to suspend the bully for, that this particular bully should be suspended not only to home, but on the caveat *improviso* that he attends one of those sessions that will assist over the next few days to contribute to his rehabilitation?

**Ms. Melville:** Yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, very well. I would like Sen. Nadine Stewart to come in and then MP Newallo-Hosein.

**Ms. Stewart:** Good morning again everyone, my question specifically has to do with treatment plans. I guess this is where the psychologists would come in. What are some of the mechanisms or interventions that you have in a treatment plan when treating with, let us say, the perpetrator of bullying or school violence?

**Mrs. Nakhid-Chatoor:** Just off the bat, I would like to say it has to be a triangular approach. It has to be parents, school and student, and if you do not have that I do not think that we would be properly informed as regards what else. Because, many people think you just liaise with the student, but the home, the life situations have so many dynamic variables there that would help and inform us in our treatment plans.

**Dr. Gooding:** I would definitely say that it has to involve different persons. The context in which the bullying occurs is very important to consider. There is a context. A child does not behave in a particular way isolated just on his or her own, and we have to consider his relationship with his environment, how his environment impacts on him. We have been talking a lot about the home, and the

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home is a significant factor. But the conditions of our schools as well, the condition in which he is being educated as well has to be taken into consideration.

I remember even as a counsellor in school when a child misbehaves and is sent to me, I am given a day or sometimes a few hours to make a difference in that child's life, and it has to happen immediately. Next thing by the afternoon that child might be suspended. The thing is, are we willing to consider what is the context of his behaviour, what is impacting on him. So the treatment has to consider all of that. So my first issue in terms of seeing a child with difficulties would be engaging with teachers, observing him in his class and in his environment, talking with the parent, talking with the child. We all have to be part of that whole process. It is a systemic approach.

**Mr. Chairman:** But, is that not what the school guidance counsellor is supposed to do? To understand the context and to explain the context to the bully and the child, and to use his or her skills to do what the professional can do to allow both to cope. Because we are dealing with coping in a difficult, stressful environment.

**Dr. Gooding:** Well, the thing is, that when it comes to change, change cannot only be expected to happen with the child, without the change in the environment, and that is where I was talking about the setting.

**Mr. Chairman:** What I am focusing on is this. The school guidance counsellor is duty charged professionally to ensure that there is peace and harmony in the school environment, and any child who experiences discomfort, the victim, is provided with coping mechanisms determined by the school guidance counsellor, and the perpetrator is gradually being analyzed, assessed, so that over time, with continuous interaction with the guidance counsellor, there can be behavioural

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change. Is that not happening?

**Dr. Gooding:** I must say, it will not only start with the child and the perpetrator. It is not only just about two of them. The teacher—

**Mr. Chairman:** That is understood, but I would imagine and I am not in the school system at all, so that is why I am asking the question that the guidance counsellor will know he must speak to the parent, he must speak to the teacher, maybe the teacher has a problem with the child, he must speak with the principal. I would imagine it is left up to the guidance counsellor to determine how he or she will best treat with the child. Is that so, or is that not so?

**Dr. Gooding:** I would say that is so.

**Mr. Matamora:** Mr. Chairman, I think it is absolutely so. The process is we get a referral, the principal signs it, and it moves through the system where parents are immediately called in. In fact, before a child is dealt with there has to be an intake done with a parent. The challenge we are having—I can speak at the primary school level, there are some things that are inherent in the system. For instance, we have children in our primary schools that are 15 years old, that is the cut-off age, and they sit next to an 11 year old child, and usually because they are 13, 14, 15, it means that they would have been kept back on several occasions. They are struggling academically—

**Mr. Chairman:** Low self-esteem in your language.

**Mr. Matamora:** Low self-esteem—and they are frustrated, and they are sitting usually next to an 11 year old or so, let us say in Standard 5, who is outperforming them; it is a culture, it is an environment for bullying. It is an environment for boys who are struggling, or girls to act out their frustration.

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**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, vital point, and therefore let us craft a solution. You have been in the system, I am not, but do you think that these older children who feel in some way diminished by being in the presence of the superior academic child can in fact be given programmes which will make use of their skills, and to give them an opportunity to become someone of respect by achieving. So that change in the curriculum in the primary school can contribute in some way, targeted at these children.

**Mr. Matamora:** Absolutely, and that is what we are advocating, because we do have a system where the victim is counselled; we do have systems where the perpetrator, he is also counselled, but then we put them back in the system. What I have been hearing is that we, on the one hand, work with them and we achieve different levels of success. But we send them back into the homes. We send them back into the community and 90 per cent of what is done is undone, and they come back to us. You have that same system repeating itself over and over.

We have taxing at the level of the primary school, but, again it is done by the older child who is struggling and has all of the problems that we are talking about, and usually we put them to Standard 5, because they have to get out by 15 and they go into the secondary system and, of course, they are still way older. Because, remember they are dealing with a different set of challenges. They are going through puberty, their challenges are about body image, and girls, and so on, and you have the younger counterparts who are very playful, who are very active, who are outperforming them. We have actually two completely different streams of children and activities happening in our primary school and trying to marry them and they are not working.

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**Mr. Chairman:** Do you think that activities such as cricket, football, netball, the other types—arts and craft, sporting activities, a primary school football league, or something, which will give these children an opportunity to really shine outside the classroom is something that we should consider proactively, to allow them an opportunity so that they do not need to obtain respect by taxing when they can obtain respect by scoring a number of goals on the football field?

**12.05 p.m.**

**Mr. Matamora:** It will absolutely work, Sir, and that is happening. The challenge is, it is insufficient because you put me on the football field and I do well, but I have to come back to the classrooms. My colleague was talking about the removal of the universal system. Many years ago in my era, there was a post-primary system where children who not failed out of the system but children who are struggling were streamed elsewhere and they went in to more vocational type activities. We have children who have gone on to Servol, who have done extremely well.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, and proactively again, you will recommend that we reconsider that programme—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Matamora:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Chairman:**—where there are some children who may not be doing well academically but who could be doing well in other areas and be given an opportunity to so do within the primary school system. Because I understand in the secondary school system, correct me if I am wrong, there are opportunities in industrial arts, opportunities in the area such as the building trades, woodworking, the cookery and so on, which will allow students an opportunity to really shine in the non-academic area.

Do you think that we need in the education system to afford a measure, a

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greater respect now to these fields so that students who are there will not feel that they are in some way diminished by being in the woodworking area. Do you think we need in the society now to afford the kind of respect to these fields that will eliminate some of the problems you are facing?

**Mr. Matamora:** Yes, Sir. We know now that there are multiple intelligences. A lot of the children that we label as underperforming may simply be differently abled. Their intelligence may lie in another area. But we simple have the traditional chalk and talk. Even when we are trying to introduce technology, our school is so configured that in one of my schools we have multi—our lessons are designed for multimedia. But I cannot. I have to redesign the lesson to tell a story because there is nowhere to use a projector in the classrooms. Classrooms are still being divided by little blackboards where teachers are shouting over each other.

The child who is auditory or visual does extremely well, but the kinaesthetic child is lost and it is not necessary that in every case that he is bullying but he is acting out. So that is a challenge.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you. Already we are seeing some solutions emerging that there should be a little bit of channelling and streaming so that students who are not good in one area can be given an opportunity to excel in another area. But MP Newallo-Hosein you wanted to come in. Your mike has been on for quite a while so please come in at this time.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Chair. Regrettably I think this conversation is going to digress because I am going back to a question. I understand that data triangulation is extremely important in going forward. I just want to ask, how many Learning Enhancement Centres are there, where they are located and what are the times of operations? And, of course, importantly, does the parent play a pivotal role in that whole environment? That is just one question, Chair. I have other questions after.

**Ms. Melville:** So currently we have three Learning Enhancement Centres: One in the South East District, we have one in the Caroni District and we also have one in the St. George East District. Part of the assessment, part of what is done is that we do have the social workers having to meet with the parents, the parents do an intake when the children begin the programme and then—[*Interruption*]

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Is it mandatory?

**Ms. Melville:** Yes, it is mandatory. And they are there as part of a case conference in the end. What I wanted to include initially was that part of the evaluation for those children would be to do an assessment to find out how the students are performing and also looking at the multiple intelligences, looking at how they function in school to see if we are going to channel them back into school or if we are going to channel them to another programme that may be able to—that they would benefit from and that will be capitalized on their strengths and abilities.

So what you find is, at the end when the supervisor, the parents and the social worker or guidance personnel as well as the child meet and the principal for the school, we are able to channel now the children into—maybe back into the school, but sometimes it is at Servol, it is at MIC, it is into other programmes that meet the needs of that child.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** So therefore you are speaking of a secondary school?

**Ms. Melville:** Yes, the secondary school.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** I think it is between Servol and MIC. How long has this centre been in existence? And how many persons have accessed the programme and how many have been successful?

**Ms. Flavinney:** Okay. Hi. So in the the South Eastern District is where the LEC was piloted. Initially, in terms of just going back, in terms of what my colleague was saying to just give you a mindset, in terms of how the LEC is run, we at Student Support Services take a multidisciplinary approach. So when the child comes to the

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LEC Centre first and foremost the parent is mandated to come.

In addition, there is the special education teacher—*[Interruption]*

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** What if a parent does not come, what happens?

**Ms. Flavinney:** That is the issue. Because what it is we have found is that, one, LEC is not mandated, it is not written into the law and therefore even at the different schools that I am at and when the student is suspended and we advocate—*[Interruption]*

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** When did the pilot programme start?

**Ms. Flavinney:** When it started was in 2015, I want to believe.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Okay, and how many students have been enrolled with parental intervention?

**Ms. Flavinney:** With parental intervention. Okay, so in terms of the the South Eastern District—I do not have the statistics for all the districts right now, but in terms of the South Eastern District there are 56 students that have passed through the LEC programme.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** And what is the success rate? Passing through does not mean that you are successful.

**Ms. Flavinney:** Yes, I agree. So what it is we have noticed is that when they return to the school our success benchmark lies on whether or not the students repeats the offence. So if it is we see and what we have noticed is that we have only three repeat offenders that have come back into the LEC programme, where we now will look in terms of doing further intervention, whether or not we have to look for alternative placement, based when the special education teacher did her assessment, whether or not the child needs alternative education.

**Mr. Chairman:** Could I ask Brig. Gen. Ancil Antoine to come in at this time.

**Brig. Gen. Antoine:** A pleasant good day. I just want to follow up on the conversation. What we have been hearing from the NPTA, the principal, the

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denominational leaders about the lack of parenting says that there is lack of cooperation by parents when their children are involved in deviant behaviour, whether it is bullying as the case may be. What happens when a parent fails to respond? So the child—is he still sent to the Learning Enhancement Centre without parental support? What happens when the parents refuse to respond to the measures being used by the guidance counsellors, et cetera, to deal with a deviant student, what happens?

**Ms. Flavinney:** So in terms of when a parent fail to come to the LEC or even fail to come to the school, on the basis of the school social worker, we do home visits. And at the home visit is where we make our assessment when we speak with the parents in consultation, in terms of seeing what are the precipitating factors that would have contributed in the environment that would have led to the student acting “deviantly”. And then, depending on, based on the assessment we know how we are moving forward. Whether or not be it in the environment, what interventions are required, so whereas we can work with the parent, the school and the student, whereas we have a holistic development approach to deal with situation with the student.

**Brig. Gen. Antoine:** Again, what if the parent still does not corporate? They are unavailable.

**Ms. Flavinney:** Well, this is what we have noticed. So in terms of it personally, in terms of my intervention, when a parent fails to, I will go to the nearest police station and make a report because in the Education Act, especially when it comes to absenteeism, because what it is we have found in the the South Eastern District is that a lot of parents have not paid particular attention when their children come to school.

So they will go off to work and whether or not the child attends school they do not pay any particular interest because of whatever factors or dynamics, in terms

of the home environment, they cannot facilitate the process. So we would go to the nearest police station and make that report and try our best in terms of follow up with the police, in terms of intervention.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** How many reports have you had to make to the police?

**Ms. Flavinney:** In terms of me personally, when it comes to various issues I probably have made 15 reports.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, and on that point I need to get an indication from the social workers and the guidance counsellors in relation to the caseload. How many students do you normally deal with during the course of a day, on average? Anyone with experience in the field, what is your average interaction on a daily basis?

**Brig. Gen. Antoine:** In particular, one counsellor said she has three schools she is responsible—

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Ms. Quamina?

**Brig. Gen. Antoine:** Ms. Quamina, yeah.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Yeah, it was Ms. Quamina.

**Mr. Chairman:** I need to get an average on a daily basis, you are interacting with students, I would like to get an idea as to the numbers, and how much time do you often spend with a student? Is it adequate? Is it inadequate? We were told that guidance counsellors by the Ministry of Education are available to all schools, and then we are told that there are guidance counsellors who must visit schools. So we were given conflicting testimony. I would just like to know whether the workload you have is optimum. Are you looking for more students to counsel or are you hoping that you could counsel less? Please be as truthful as possible in this response.

**Ms. Paul:** With respect to school social workers I just want to keep in mind with my answer that we deal with psychosocial issues with the students. So when counselling a student the time frame, it may vary in length. So in one day I may see five students for the most, depending on the situation or the type of infraction that

they did. So with respect to the caseload, with respect to South Eastern in particular, which I am part of, we are overworked. We have a lack of human resource as well as various other resources, simple things such as stationery.

So in summary, we are overworked, we are unable to meet the specific needs of the child. We are unable to sit and develop a custom design and intervention that would suit each child specifically, because of the amount of cases, time, as well as human resources.

**Mr. Chairman:** So you said you deal on average with five persons per day and that is every day of the week and you think that you need more time to spend with some of your students' based upon their own personal problems.

**Ms. Paul:** With respect to school social work what we need to take into consideration is that we may be at the school, but sometimes based on the amount of schools that you are at and based on a response basis, we may now have to leave one school to address an urgent incident in another school. So right there we see a little challenge with respect to fulfilling your duties within your school because you may not be there from 8 to 4 every single day.

**Mr. Chairman:** I hope you can hear me, but is it that you rotate among schools.

**Ms. Paul:** Yes, we do.

**Mr. Chairman:** How many schools do you rotate on a weekly basis?

**Ms. Paul:** Me in particular, five.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, you spend one day at a school and then another day at another school. So during the course of a five day period you are visiting five schools?

**Ms. Paul:** Yes, but that is just in respect to me. In other districts, now what you need to understand is that not all schools have social workers because of the lack of human resource.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Just in terms to clarify, could you tell me what the social

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worker does that is different from what a guidance counsellor does?

**Ms. Paul:** Okay, sure. So with school social work we treat basically, we have selective interventions and we have targeted interventions. Speaking on these two we are proactive and we act. So with the proactive part we will have group sessions where we would discuss a range of topics from anger management to human sexuality, inappropriate behavior. The targeted interventions, that is where the deferrals come in and we would now sit with individual students where we would counsel these students.

In addition to that, we also invite parents, we have parental consultations. We have parenting in education programmes that social worker does in each of their schools. This is where we invite parents to come to several meetings. Now, this is just by invitation only, they are not mandated to come. Right?

**Mr. Chairman:** And the difference between, what you do and what a guidance counsellor does. Could you indicate—

**Ms. Paul:** The difference is they treat with the universal, they have universal interventions and we have targeted and selective interventions.

**Mr. Chairman:** Very well. Thank you. Sen. Stewart.

**Ms. Stewart:** My question has to do with the whole issue of counselling. I have been hearing counselling all morning. What I am trying to understand, I mean, I have my own experience being a counsellor myself, but what I am trying to understand, what does counselling entail in terms of the start to finish, what does it entail? Is it on going sessions or is it just one session? Is it a 45 minutes session, a 30 minutes session, 10 minute session and how effective has counselling been?

**Mr. Dyer:** Good morning member. I could speak from a social work perspective. Like my colleague said, we deal with the psychosocial issues. So one of our main roles and functions in the school is to really help students and families make the best use of the available resources which would include, the school social worker whose

main goal is really to enhance the emotional and to improve the well-being of the child in the school environment. But like she mentioned we are restricted with human resource. So I would start one week and because, unlike my colleague, I have seven schools and it is five days for the week, two of which are secondary schools.

**Mr. Chairman:** And what would you recommend with respect to optimality? How many schools would you like to service professionally to see the positive outcomes that you would like to see?

**Mr. Dyer:** One.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, so you are saying as a recommendation there should be one social worker attached to the school and one guidance counsellor as well?

**Mr. Dyer:** Yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** Very well.

**Mr. Dyer:** The mere fact that we take a multidisciplinary approach, like my colleague Mr. Matamora in front, we work together at a particular school and because we work together at that school we have seen a decrease in the amount of referrals and incidents that will take place. So we have seen where the multidisciplinary approach has worked.

**Mr. Chairman:** And what school is that, Sir?

**Mr. Dyer:** St. Paul's Anglican.

**Mr. Chairman:** Where is St. Paul's located?

**Mr. Dyer:** In Victoria, San Fernando.

**Mr. Chairman:** Do we have statistics, I am sure—okay, we will want to look at the statistics because that is a very important point that you are making—

**Mr. Dyer:** No, problem.

**Mr. Chairman:**—because if the statistics, in fact, actually show a decline in repeat offenders then clearly there would be a positive recommendation coming out.

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Before I ask Nadine to ask her second question, is there any other experience that a member would like to share in the same area?

**Mr. Matamora:** Yes, Sir. Mr. Chairman, we have—you were asking the question on the difference between social work and guidance. Guidance focus on three main areas: We focus on career development, academic development and personal social behaviour. What we do generally is the universal intervention. We have group guidance where the guidance officer or counsellor conducts classes, usually between three to five per day and take referrals thereafter. The challenge we have as well is understaffing, because I am at the optimal level universal, the optimal recommended level is one counsellor to 250. This school that I am at, St. Paul's, we have 577 students and in my second school I have 413, all boys. So I work with essentially, close to 1,000 boys.

**Mr. Chairman:** And we will be looking, really, at 250. Very well, Sen. Stewart and then Sen. Ameen.

**Ms. Stewart:** Following up on my question. I am not sure my question was answered, but let me rephrase the question. Now, of course, counselling entails, we have different methods, different types. We have group therapy, we have play therapy, different types, individual therapy. So what my question is, do you utilize these methods?

Let us say, for example, in the primary school level, we may have a student that you just cannot get to sit down to talk to, in terms of talk therapy. So in that case, do you now utilize play therapy, ask the student to draw something so that we get a better picture? Do you group students together in terms of an offence they would have committed, in terms of perpetrators or victims and get them to talk amongst each other where we would have more of different students talking about their experiences. Do we utilize these methods? Do we utilize play therapy? Do we utilize group therapy or do we just only use talk therapy? That is what my

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question now stands.

**Mr. Dyer:** Well, to answer your question, yes, we do. I would love to do more play therapy with my boys because I see it work in comparison to talk therapy. But I probably started off on a not so good note by listing the challenges and it is because of these challenges I am unable to really sit as a professional and do the therapy that my children need first and what I wish to execute as a professional.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, again you would recommend the same—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Dyer:** But we do it.

**Mr. Chairman:**—one to 250 students.

**Mr. Dyer:** Yes, to answer your question, we do it. So we do talk, we do drawings we do our play, but, because of the challenges with human resource we are unable to really perform these the best that we could.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, and again to reiterate the point, if you do have the optimum ratio, the 250 students maximum, do you think you would be able to perform all the task advanced by Sen. Stewart?

**Mr. Dyer:** Yes, I will, yes, that will be.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, that is another positive recommendation. Sen. Ameen.

**Miss Ameen:** Thank you, Chair. Early in this segment, Dr. Hakim Williams who described himself as a son of Laventille said, to me, one point that, because we continue to hear it repeated in different ways, the local school system, the support is insufficient. We heard it from teachers, we heard from the boards, the denominational boards where their support system based on their religious organization and the volunteers that come out of that that the support is given there.

So where you do not have guidance counsellors, for instance, you do have people from the Parish, for example, who play a role. And I am hearing from many of you who are hands on in counselling and social work that once again you are talking about insufficient resources, being overworked, and overburdened. You are

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dealing with four times your workload, Mr. Matamora. If you have 1,000 boys you are dealing with four times your workload.

To me, Mr. Chairman, this is very clear, because in many of those schools where there are low incidents and are considered as having a high level of discipline, the boards very rarely have to discuss instances where the police has to be involved. I will tell you that there are schools, because I am a mother myself, there are schools where if a child comes late more than four times for the week, the parent is called in or the home visit takes place for late coming. If a child is sleeping in the classroom, interventions begin from there. And very early you can detect issues at home before it reaches to the point of violence. But if you are dealing with 1,000 boys you really may not be able to pay as much attention to the chronic latecomer or the child who is sleeping in class because he has issues at home.

So, Mr. Chairman, I continue to hear the recommendations because these people are very well qualified. They also have experience on the ground but what they are missing is the support, the administrative support and that has to come from the Ministry of Education and from having a board system possible.

**Mr. Chairman:** If I could then pose an additional question and I will also like, second, to pose a question to the police representative. The police has been very silent, and we may think that there is no problem when the police is silent. A silent police is a good sign but I think that we only—we would like to pose a question to the police officers, right. But I just want to elaborate on what Sen. Ameen has said and that is the type of support that you would like to see coming from the Ministry of Education to ensure that you can discharge your professional responsibilities as social workers, psychologists and guidance counsellors, efficiently, so that you will be professionally satisfied that you have done your best. I would like you to think about that because that will be part of the solution we will be looking for as recommendations that we would make to the Minister of Education himself. Any

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follow up—okay, MP Newallo-Hosein and then I do want to preserve the right to speak to the police themselves.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Well, thank you, Chair. I am actually going to be addressing my next question to the police and I would like to ask, sergeant, has the unit ever received a cybercrime case involving students and, if so, can you describe the procedure for treating with such cases?

**Mr. Joseph:** To answer your question, yes, we have received a number of cases. We would have submitted to the Committee some statistics on the last JSC that I was present in. In the year 2014 we would have received 14 cases straight up to 2015 where we would have received 25 cases of online bullying involving students. So the police and the Cyber Crime Unit have been playing a part in trying to deal with this situation, but we are engaging some challenges. One being that the technology is ahead of the legislation and two, the majority of the times law enforcement gets evidence to proceed with the matter, the parents tend not to want to proceed with the court matter. They do not want their children involved in any lengthy court processes.

So that is a challenge for us as law enforcement, but we have been working hand in hand with the Ministry and we continue to work hand in hand by doing proactive and reactive measures. The proactive measures we do, we actually go to the schools and do lectures. Reactive measures, we actually do investigations with the view of identifying the perpetrators and eventually putting them before a court of law.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, thank you, Chair. And I just wanted to ask Dr. Hakim, I was going through your résumé and I saw you did some research and you designed a case study to collect data on school violence. Could you tell me what were the results of those findings and were you able to share it at all with the Ministry of Education going forward?

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**Dr. Hakim:** I have tried to reach the Ministry in sharing my results but I have mentioned before I think the Ministry is very overburdened and so, yes it is difficult getting that information to the Ministry. Also the Ministry is also in possession of lots of regional school violence that has been done, that has been somewhat embargoed. It is very difficult to get access to them and I think that is a problem in terms of transparency, because I think any research that is done on school violence throughout the country should be made available to anyone to read. So that is one.

**12.35 p.m.**

**Dr. Williams:** Two, I have been looking at one school for the past six years because I want to be able to see patterns over time and so lots of the things that have been mentioned here they have been reinforced in the research and so I do not want to take up any time in sort of reiterating them and I can also supplement the report that I have given to you with the findings as well.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** The trend analysis that you apparently have observed is throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago where there are hotspots, I would assume. Have you found a finding or a recommendation to alleviate or to reduce the level of deviant behaviour?

**Dr. Williams:** There are tons of things and I have enumerated them in the report that I sent to this Committee. One major finding is that however we approach school

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violence it has to be multi-sectoral and it has to be systematic and long term because the research really shows, internationally and my own research, that short-term interventions, they fail, because you do not get buy-in, people are left out of the decision-making processes.

For example, I am not sure which government that spent millions of dollars several years ago on the Violence Prevention Academy and they hired some sort of criminologist from the United States. Lots of money and time was spent on that. But now schools could barely register what happened with that process because the way it was implemented, folks did not own the process and so it did not take root within the schools.

So I would say if it is one major thing I must stress is that I know, Chairman, you were stressing what can we do now but it has shown, international research, that when we reach for things in the short term, it is not really getting at the root issues. And so there are short-term things you can do but they have to be anchored within a wider strategic plan.

**Mr. Chairman:** And we will be working with the plan. But one very important short-term thing we can do that will generate some results is, as indicated, 250 students for one guidance counsellor; one guidance counsellor and one social worker in a school. So we are getting some things we can do now for immediate changes. We understand very well.

**Dr. Williams:** That is short term, yes, but you also have to make sure that they also have the resources, and a guidance officer and a social worker have to be working within an environment, a culture of learning and caring within schools. It is not just reducing the numbers.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, have you ever heard the term *natura non facit saltum*?

**Dr. Williams:** No, tell me. What does that mean?

**Mr. Chairman:** Nature does not make any sudden leaps, Alfred Marshall. You

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have to move incrementally because if you are going to get things done, you have to start the journey on getting it done. You cannot say I cannot cut the woods because the forest is too big. You have to look at the low-hanging fruit; pick those. Get into the habit of doing the things. You see, what we are doing in the Parliament is getting a culture of change out in the society.

**Dr. Williams:** Well, what we are saying is not mutually exclusive from what I am saying. You can do incremental things but they must be anchored within a wider—

**Mr. Chairman:** And we understand because—

**Dr. Williams:** Just let me finish. They have to be anchored within a wider strategic plan.

**Mr. Chairman:** Quite acceptable. The wider strategic plan is what will occupy our attention, subsequently. But there are things we can do now. Sen. Hafeez Ali, you have a question to pose?

**Mr. Ali:** Thanks Chair. It is just a follow-up question to Sen. Stewart to the guidance officers and social workers. All those interventions you all were discussing and when it reaches to the point you have to report it to the police, is there any intervention, out-of-school activities with the parents themselves, going to the homes and the environment?

**Mr. Dyer:** Yes there is.

**Mr. Ali:** And what type of intervention, if you would like to elaborate on that?

**Mr. Dyer:** Well I could speak for Victoria. I heard in the last panel some members of the denominational board were specifically speaking towards culture and I quite agree with that, in terms of the response that we get in Victoria, because of the relationship we have with the police, because of the relationship the police have with the community it then creates an environment that is conducive for a proper response in our eyes. So even if we are having a challenge at the school level and the police is involved, then we do not get much, what we will call static, or anything of that

nature, because of the relationship that, I guess, the community police have with the community.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much.

**Mrs. Bruce-Webster:** Can I also say, Chair, at Caroni what we have done at one of the outer school programme, is have a group called Fathers Programme and we have named it From Foundation to Finish. Too many times when we ask to see a parent we would see the mothers coming to school. So, we at Caroni decided, you know what, let us have a chat with the parents, male, and we are on our second phase. The first phase we had different groups coming in and sharing different things with parents, how we can empower them.

The second phase, well of course still sometimes we get parents, you know, a little less interested. The third phase is where we plan to have now, fathers with their children coming together. Not everything is formal but in a sort of a play and to socialize. So this is the third part we are planning where fathers, not just mothers, could socialize with their female and their male sons.

**Mr. Chairman:** When the father is absent, as you would find in many instances, will you ask for an uncle, a grandfather, a big brother or a relative to stand in to be the surrogate male?

**Mrs. Bruce-Webster:** Yes, Sir, we certainly do.

**Mr. Chairman:** Sen. Hafeez, followed by Brig. Antoine.

**Mr. Ali:** I just want to get an answer from the guidance officer from Barataria North and probably Five Rivers Secondary as to how those interventions with the parents as well. I want to get some feedback from you guys.

**Ms. Melville:** Okay, in terms of Barataria North Secondary School, we try to engage parents at different levels. One of the things we do that we really get a lot of parents at my school, we have a form level parent meeting on a yearly basis. So at Form 1, we know it is January, we bring in their parents and by February we will have the

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Form 2s. We have a lot parents coming in to that, when we have issues with parents not coming in. And it is a collaborative effort, so it is not just the guidance officer but it is the guidance officer, it is the principal, the deans, the form teachers, some of the subject teachers are involved in the process.

We know our parents. We know what some of their situations may be and because they know that we want to see them and that they want to be a part of the process, what you find happening is that they would make alternative arrangements to meet individually. So you have situations where they will say that they have to work and they cannot make it but they will arrange an alternative time to meet. When that does not occur, we have the social worker that would also do the home visits to the home to meet with those parents.

**Mr. Chairman:** Very well. Brig. Antoine, followed by MP Newallo-Hosein and then Sen. Nadine's last question. Sen. Ameen, do you have a last question? Okay, I am just going through the list. Very well.

**Brig. Gen. Antoine:** I would like to introduce two measures that we have not discussed today but it came up in the course of previous discussions, and seeing that I have the psychologist, the guidance counsellors here I would like to get a feedback. It is the concept of boot camps for chronic, deviant students with criminal behaviour, some of them. There is a programme in the military called resettlement because military officers retire early. They go through a programme paid for by government where they are resettled into another career. They have never taken up the education system as one. They tend to go into security, sports, OSHA, small businesses.

Some personnel have determined that there is a lack of male figures in the school system and maybe if the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of National Security can get together for a programme they can attract former military personnel who are academically inclined to come into the school system. I just want to throw it out to you the possibility of those two interventions: one, the introduction of boot

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camps for criminal deviant behaviour and also the introduction of resettling military personnel into the education system.

**Mrs. Nakhid-Chatoor:** Can I answer that? Yes, when you hear the word “boot camp”, I think it is always synonymous with some sort of punitive discipline for children and all of that. When these bullies, because Mr. Chair has asked for solutions, when children become bullies or even victims there is always a problem there because they lack social skills and they cannot interface with people. So when you mention boot camps you are removing children who themselves cannot interact with people into an environment that is not real, I think. So that when you put them back into the society they are dysfunctional because they have not been exposed to real-life situations.

And I hear you, Sen. Antoine when you said that it is a way for your military personnel possibly when they have resigned or retired, and so, to help them get back into whatever it is. But there are a lot of problems associated with military personnel; a lot of problems with their own ability to relate. There are high incidences of domestic violence amongst military personnel. We know, and amongst people in protective services.

**Brig. Gen. Antoine:** There is a high incidence of domestic violence amongst teachers.

**Mrs. Nakhid-Chatoor:** Which is what I am saying, which is why—*[Interruption]*

**Brig. Gen. Antoine:** So do not go there, please.

**Mrs. Nakhid-Chatoor:** I am not going there. What I am saying is that before you even get them involved in our students who are volatile, they have to go through a period of de-freezing themselves and training.

**Mr. Chairman:** Let me intervene here and to build up on what was done in the Caroni district. There was the programme where fathers are involved and I raised the issue of whether you can involve big brothers, uncles, cousins. Do you think

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that some of these military officers who are now going to be fitting into civilian life can perform a critical role here to act as a role model for some these children?

**Dr. Gooding:** I would like to make a contribution here, please. I am just hearing, and I heard recently where the children/young people were asked to comment on this issue and they were regurgitating lots of things that they hear from the adults.

We are continuing to look at this at the reactive end, where we are seeing violence in schools and we want to take whatever measures we use in the wider community. The thing is, this is education. We have these children since they were three years old, some of them when they were five. What developmentally are we expecting of them? We have to go back and I know you said short term, short term, but you see this is the whole problem. Short term, we have had a hodgepodge of interventions over the years. Violence is not new.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay.

**Dr. Gooding:** It has been building.

**Mr. Chairman:** Interventions such as what?

**Dr. Gooding:** Interventions of—a lot of money spent on programmes coming from abroad. We have had interventions where we tried alternate education a few years. Then we try a next thing. We have had out-of-school suspension in the Ministry of Education. We stopped that.

**Mr. Chairman:** And what would you recommend as an alternative since all those have failed?

**Dr. Gooding:** No, I do not think they have failed. We have not put a target to them to specific— In terms of strategic planning we have not said what are the needs. Like this morning the board had a lot of things to share that were helpful. Over the weeks we have had a lot of things to share. The thing is parenting is a key issue. Let us just take that.

**Mr. Chairman:** Right, give me an example of how we could, at our level, ensure

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that parental involvement is intensified—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Gooding:** That is a good question, Sir.

**Mr. Chairman:**—in the life of the child. How could we do that?

**Dr. Gooding:** That is a good question. But the thing is, one of the things, a simple thing I could think of is in terms of home-link workers at the school. We have to bridge school and home. We have to train teachers to be able to engage with parents. This is not just guidance officers engaging or the—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Chairman:** And the—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Gooding:** Let me just finish, please.

**Mr. Chairman:** No, no, no, let me finish. The solution you are saying is this—

**Dr. Gooding:** It is based on our developmental process being used in education, not a reactive one.

**Mr. Chairman:** And let us find something which could be done, not something we can talk about in circles. What can we do with respect to more effective parental involvement and teachers?

**Dr. Gooding:** Listen.

**Mrs. Nakhid-Chatoor:** Speak the language of the parent.

**Dr. Gooding:** Understand, be part of the community. You see how the board schools, some of the things that work is that they are part of a community.

**Mr. Chairman:** And okay, as a solution are you then recommending—  
[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Gooding:** Talk in the school, at the level of the schools.

**Mr. Chairman:** That the teacher should now be given a programme where he or she is better able to communicate with the parents?

**Dr. Gooding:** Let us begin a process of talking to our schools, having consultations at the level of the school where parents know, not the consultations where we hear people just invite us to talk and then you know they are not listening. We have to

start to listen. Parents have something to say. Teachers have something to say. Teachers say all the time that over the years they are not invited to share their views and they are the people on the ground.

**Mr. Chairman:** Could you give me an example of how this process might work?

**Dr. Gooding:** The process will work when we decide we are not going for a quick fix here, we are deciding to stop to listen.

**Mr. Chairman:** I do not think you are understanding me and I tend to be very clear. I am asking the following: you are saying that there is a need for communication. I would like to know how, so that if I am speaking to a Minister of Education I need to tell him that this is how I think there has to be a better dialogue between teachers, parents and principals in a school so that we can then communicate with our students. How is it? What will you recommend now that does not currently exist?

**Dr. Gooding:** Okay, a needs assessment for each school.

**Mr. Dyer:** Mr. Chair, I just want to interject. We have been doing needs assessment at our schools and that is how the Parenting in Education Workshops came about. Because we saw a need for parents to be educated as to how to really parent a child. Coming out of that. We have been dealing with topics like alternatives to corporal punishment, alternatives to discipline, homework, punctuality. We have been collaborating with the community police, in terms of absenteeism and the law. We have been dealing with topics such as what is an appropriate response. We have even been talking about this topic of bullying. So we have been dealing with it at the school level.

**Mr. Chairman:** Could you explain concretely, given what our former contributor has said, that there is a need for greater communication. We understand that, but how is it going to be implemented so that we can see results now and in the future? How should the process work? We have heard about the involvement of PTAs. We are now told—*[Interruption]*

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**Mr. Dyer:** We have to take a multidisciplinary approach, an inter-agency approach.

**Mr. Chairman:** We are taking that approach. I would just like to know how it is to be done. We need to do things in the school. Is it that you are recommending concretely, in the administration of a school, that on a monthly basis teachers speak with parents, the principal speaks with the parent body as well, the students and the teachers come together for regular class meetings? I need to know what could be done to ensure that we can communicate more effectively.

**Mr. Dyer:** I can speak personally at some of my schools where I have seen my principals open that channel of communication between them and the parents. I have a very functioning parent/teachers council at one of my schools who have opened that line of communication for parents and have really bridged the gap between the parent and the school because there is a lot of miscommunication and what we would do also at student support—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Just one moment. I need, as I said, to get the thing concretized. Are you recommending that on a monthly basis? Because you see schools operate according to periods, lunchtime breaks, evenings, weekends. Are you recommending that on a monthly basis, a term basis, that the parents and the principals interact, the parents and the teachers interact in a particular class, the parents and the children and the teachers and the principal for each class should have a day in which we come to dialogue?

**Mr. Dyer:** As it speaks to parents and teacher, I suggest on a daily basis.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. That would not be practical because parents have work to do. Let us look at what—

**Mr. Dyer:** We also have the social media. I have parents and teachers who are in groups on WhatsApp and other social media—

**Mr. Chairman:** Very well.

**Mr. Dyer:**—and they communicate with the parents and the teacher via social

media. So we need to let technology work for us.

**Mr. Chairman:** And you are recommending that we use social media then for parents who are in social media, for effective communication. But I am looking at parents as a group coming together because dialogue is not only one. It is dialogue with the group. Would you say, as an implementable measure we can achieve and is achievable a once a month meeting—

**Mr. Dyer:** Yes.

**Mr. Chairman:**—between the class teacher, the school administrator, the social worker, simply to indicate well we are dialoguing as our psychologists indicate? I see Miss Chatoor wanted to come in at this time.

**Dr. Gooding:** I said needs assessment, not just dialogue.

**Mrs. Nakhid-Chatoor:** I want to talk about a parent involvement that has worked. It is realistic that many parents who we want to come in will not come in to our meetings with our children. They just would not. Something that has worked is that we had once a month, a meeting with parents but we offered incentives so we had a breakfast seminar. We invited them into breakfast to talk about issues. Parents would only come in if they feel that we want to address the needs of their children. Parents are interested.

At that seminar, we also had mentors there because many of these parents were single parents. So we had male mentors who would talk about situations. They hardly wanted to hear women teachers. They wanted to hear, okay they do not have males in their families, what would be the male viewpoint. So that worked, and I feel that is an intervention that possibly we can look at. Parents will not come in unless incentives are given to them and unless they feel that they can buy in also to what is happening with their children in schools.

**Mr. Chairman:** So, thus far in the dialogue that we have I am able to summarize things that we can do, not things that we can talk. We all have to do things. First

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off, what has emanated thus far is that, let us recommend that the ratio of students to guidance counsellors be 1:250. That is something that seems to be implementable and doable, that we will give consideration to, each particular school having its own guidance counsellor.

**Mr. Dyer:** And social worker.

**Mr. Chairman:** And social worker, one to one.

**Dr. Gooding:**—and specialist teachers.

**Mr. Chairman:** Please, let the Chairman complete. Yes, yes. Assume that you are in a classroom and I am the teacher and I need to keep all those who want to get my attention under control. Okay, no, no, no. Let the teacher speak so that the students will listen and then I will get the students' feedback.

**Dr. Williams:** I am not a student. I do not like your analogy. We are all professionals here. Please do not address us as students.

**Mr. Chairman:** No, please, please, let us get to the solutions and the solutions are as follows: different classes for bullies; different classes or a different type of curriculum that will allow the students who seem not to be comfortable with academia to get into programmes where they could excel. That seems to be something that is coming out.

**Dr. Gooding:** But who does the labelling? This is something we have to be attending. Who does the labelling?

**Mr. Chairman:** Please! Please!

**Dr. Gooding:** Where is the needs assessment before we label?

**Mr. Chairman:** Right. Let us focus on what I have here, involvement of teachers and parents. We need to get mechanisms for teachers and parents to be involved more with the administration of the schools. How do we get parents involved? We have heard from Ms. Chatoor that there is a need for incentives. We need to look at our incentive systems and we need to get more fathers involved. Fathers being

involved would provide that kind of missing figure. We have a recommendation from Ret. Gen. Ancil Antoine that we would have to give consideration to. I understand that there are some concerns, but we need to give consideration to that. We need to look at the issue of the cybercrime legislation, as far as the police members are concerned.

I was told that you are not students. Well, of course, let me indicate the basis of an enquiry. When individuals appear before the Parliament, the objective is this: we need to get to the root of the problem and we need to craft solutions.

The objective of a Joint Select Committee is different from the objective of the debate that you would see air on a Bill. The Joint Select Committee is charged to analyze the root cause of the problem and the Chairman of the Committee is charged with the responsibility of conducting the committee meeting so that he will elicit from the participants, the truth and we would then distil the reports. So that we would be able to make our recommendations to the Parliament.

I would want, in the few minutes that we have left, to do the following. We have had a number of contributions so far. We have had a number of implementable solutions. We have seen the need for a needs assessment. We need to concretize what it means. But what I would like to do is invite all committee members who would like to make closing remarks to the Committee, aimed at addressing the problem, briefly to indicate what do you think the Committee should leave this afternoon's meeting with, so that we can make the best decisions possible for all the children of Trinidad and Tobago. Sen. Stewart you have one last question? Okay.

**Miss Stewart:** Mr. Chair, I think this question is very, very critical. There are many instances of interacting with students, both perpetrators and victims of violence and bullying, where they would say to you: "This is what I see at home. This is what happens at home. My siblings fight, mummy and daddy fight, my brother abuses me, takes advantage of me." What interventions do you make when you have

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situations like these? Anybody.

**Ms. Melville:** Well, basically we are working with the child and we do understand that bullying is learnt behaviour and it is behaviour that has been learnt in the home, in the society, in the community and from our country, through violence. In working with the child, we are specifically working with the child and in a lot of situations, what we have to do with them, is in terms of coping mechanisms so that they would be able to cope. But, in terms of working with the brothers and the sisters we may not necessarily—we may be able to work with the parents. Sometimes what we do is refer to Family Services for a family intervention. But, in terms of our controlling how that is done, sometimes that is not possible.

**Miss Stewart:** Well, that is exactly what I was getting at, in terms of referrals. If you refer to Family Services.

**Ms. Melville:** We refer to Family Services.

**Miss Stewart:** So you would have answered the question, thanks.

**Ms. Melville:** But Family Services, I could put in a plug for them too, they are understaffed, heavily understaffed.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Dr. Chatoor, if I may ask—

**Mr. Chairman:** Final, final question because we are at one o'clock, Senator.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Can you quantify the success rate of, yes, and the at-risk students, do they include the dyslexia and ADD and ADHD?

**Mrs. Nakhid-Chatoor:** Yes, we got into dyslexia because remember we recognize that many of our students who were coming in for aggressive behaviour, violent behaviour, had learning difficulties and that is why I recommended a holistic diagnostic assessment of a student who comes in because many—and in one of the things I said 83 per cent in one institution in Trinidad of these persons in the institutions, boys, median age being 15, 83 per cent are functionally illiterate. So we know that there is that channel that persons/students who are not doing well in

many areas, and not just academic, they are more prone to violence.

The question was what is the success rate? When we use the triangular approach, as I said, especially with parents and especially having those programmes for parents with mentoring; mentoring not only the boys usually, but also having that parenting skills programme, I think the success rate is really, really high.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Dr. Gooding, I recognize that you had spent some time in Britain and I do not think that we should reinvent the wheel, personally speaking. The success rate is out there already. What is done differently in the British system that you would recommend for implementation in our system? That would be my last question.

**Mr. Chairman:** Short response, please. We are pressed for time.

**Dr. Gooding:** The availability of resources, services, is a very important thing. I think initially it is building that culture where people believe that they are going to be supported, so that a teacher has an aide in her classroom because you are catering for developmental issues. If we understand child development, then we would understand that we have to provide the system to support that development. We are quick here to label and blame and say the child is a bad child or doing the wrong thing, and so on. But normal child development means things happen and, therefore, in the classroom we have to cater for that development. So a British classroom will have aides. You know, we talk about a child getting bored in a classroom. There have to be different aides available for the differently-abled, for the way we learn to cater to that need.

We support the developmental goals of the community, in terms of working within groups so that the arrangement of the desks—if we look at the way our desks are arranged, it is inherited from the colonial system where everybody faces this teacher who is the fount of all knowledge and the blackboard.

Then we have the technological age where we have children learning through

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their tablets, and iPads and all different things. Children learn differently. We have different needs in the classroom and therefore we have to cater for those needs.

Children who get bored start to talk too much. Children who get bored start to hit. You know, I am working now with a seven-year-old child who is being reported to the police, is being reported. She is a little girl. Because she is a little big for her age, she is accused of bullying or hitting. One said the child she hit fainted, and so on and this little seven-year-old is being reported to the police, instead of looking at what are her needs. She has learning issues as well. She does not understand the social situation. She needs some social skills. We do not cater for those things and that is having professional support—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Chairman:** I would have to ask you to stop because of the time, and Brig. Antoine I know you said you cannot but please pose your last question because I will go to the panel subsequently.

**Brig. Gen. Antoine:** No, this was just a response. The military as an institution, over the last centuries, has been able to take 16-year-olds, 17-year-olds, 18-year-olds and transform them into presidents, into monarchs, into generals. I am certain that we can identify soldiers who are about to leave the military, who are adequate and who can be tooled to work in the education system in Trinidad and Tobago.

**1.05 p.m.**

**Mr. Chairman:** And that will be a report. Let me—no more responses. What I will ask for now is this. There are some invited participants who did not have the opportunity to offer a statement to the Committee. I will, in closing, ask all those who have not yet spoken and who would like to leave the Committee with some particular message aimed at solving the problem, to address us on that matter briefly Thank you.

**Ms. Mohammed:** Yes, Mr. Chair. Some of my recommendations that I

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would like to include would be a school matrix, you know, like whatever activity was done or something that is deviant, that there is a process to be followed. In addition to that, forming clubs so that the students would be able to identify their strong points and be able to add something to the school. For example, I know of students in England, in the UK, they have a reward programme where they find themselves in forms of karate and they get certificates and recommendations, and it is working. In addition to that, we should also have an inter-ministerial website where as soon as a behaviour is being mentioned, that it is across the board.

**Mr. Chairman:** Very well. So you are recommending extra-curricular activities, such as karate and netball, football and so on, Girl Guides. That is part of the recommendation.

**Ms. Mohammed:** Yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** Any other recommendation you would like to make I invite you to submit it in writing to the Committee. Anyone else who has not had an opportunity? One other participant?

**Mr. Driggs:** I would like to endorse the statement of Brig. Antoine concerning the use of ex-military officers. I think it would go a long way. In my case, I used to be a prison officer. I was a prison officer for 27 years and I am now a social worker—a school social worker—and I am able to use that in Five Rivers Secondary to explain to children when they are going along a certain path what are the consequences of that behaviour. I think that would be helpful.

**Mr. Chairman:** Any other comments from someone who has not yet spoken?

**Ms. Nicholas:** I would just like to say that parents are the first socialization agents, therefore it needs to be mandatory that they actually attend our sessions or workshops that we are implementing in the schools; that they

actually come out to these sessions. Secondly, social workers are not covered under the Education Act. We are just asking that, you know, you could put in a provision were we are covered under the Education Act so we can function fully and maximally.

**Mr. Chairman:** So basically you are saying that we should include social workers and give them the same kind of stature in the school system as guidance counsellors and teachers.

**Ms. Nicholas:** Yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** Are you also recommending that we review the organizational structure between school principals, the social workers, the teachers and the guidance counsellors, so that the four key principal operators will understand clearly how they fit into the structure?

**Ms. Nicholas:** Yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. And is there any recommendation you can make to that effect? What kind of structure you would like to see in place in the day-to-day running of the school so that you interact in a very efficient way with the teachers and the principals? Any recommendation?

**Ms. Nicholas:** We already—[*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. If not, it will be part of the school system. Anyone else who has not yet spoken who would like to leave a final word?

**Ms. Flavinney:** I know I already have spoken but—

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, but I will permit you.

**Ms. Flavinney:** Okay. One of the key things that I want to leave here with, however, is in terms of what it is we need to understand in terms of addressing school violence in the school, most importantly. Because in the Ministry of Education, currently we are looking in terms of addressing issues within the school environment, and because so, we are doing in particular schools,

especially in Barrackpore West Secondary School where we already started, where we develop an internal action plan that speaks to addressing school violence and indiscipline, where we are looking through the SARA model, which is Scanning, Analysing, Responding and Assessing the school environment to make it more conducive to learning.

And in addition to that is, we are creating the school environment with CPTED, which is the Crime Prevention through Environmental Design, where we are creating the environment to look at it in a more holistic manner, where you look at it as a triangle. You have the offender, the victim and the opportunity, and if we are able to pull one of these aspects out, therefore the incidents of school violence will not exist. So it is either we remove the opportunity, remove the offender or—not really remove, but to deal with the offender and the victim properly and efficiently where we would be able to address this. So we look at it in four dimensions.

**Mr. Chairman:** Very well. We will have to close. But if I may sum up, what you are saying is what our colleague psychologist has indicated, there is a need for communications between perpetrator and victim, parents of perpetrator, parents of victim. We need to communicate across all the vested interest groups with an aim of understanding the circumstances of each, the victim and the perpetrator. Once we understand the root cause, we would be able to undertake the kinds of measures that we need to undertake to really get to the root of the problem and to start solving it.

I want to thank all Members of the Committee who have been with me as Chairman since this morning, in camera and now. This has been a long session and an enquiry. Today is the last day for our enquiry. We are at the verge of preparing our report. I want to thank all participants today, the denominational school board representatives this morning, and now the

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psychologists, the police, the career guidance officers and people who are involved in the day-to-day relationships between bullies and victims. We have a clearer understanding—not a clear understanding—a clearer understanding of what we can do.

There are a number of things we can do now to start the process of change. This is what the Committee is all about. Out of your deliberations you have a number of recommendations which can be concretized and implemented. The participants were passionate. This is a healthy sign, to see psychologists disagreeing with each other and with individuals in the Chair. The objective of the Chair has been to ensure that the proceedings are conducted so that we get to the root of the problem and we are not side-tracked by issues which are not the subject of the enquiry.

So I want to thank you for your spirited contribution. I want to thank you for sharing your experiences with us. I want to thank you for the insights you have offered, for the recommendations you have made with respect to school administration and legislative changes. I am sure out of the experience we are going to start a process where the Parliament, having recognized that this is a problem which needs to be solved, we are in the process of solving it.

I want to thank all members of the media for being with us this morning and for covering the story. I want to thank all members of our listening audience and our TV audience for being with us. This particular subject has generated a considerable amount of interest in the national community and it is my hope as Chairman of the Committee that we will be making recommendations.

One of the accusations levelled against the Committee was that we may simply be talking, as all other committees in the past have spoken. This particular subject was analysed in the 1990s when there was a report on school

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violence. Very little was done. The assurance I would like to give in my capacity as Chairman is that we will see that things will get done in the short-term, in the medium-term and in the long-term. The objective being the following: A school must be a safe place to study and to play and children must not be fearful and scared. Children must not feel that they belong to a member of a committee that taxes. They are doing an illegal act. Children must interact so that the billions of dollars we spend and approve in the Parliament for education will result in better citizens for Trinidad and Tobago.

Good afternoon. I thank you all.

**1.14 p.m.:** *Meeting adjourned.*