

EXCERPT OF VERBATIM NOTES OF THE TWENTIETH MEETING OF THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, HELD IN THE A.N.R. ROBINSON MEETING ROOM (WEST), LEVEL 9, (IN CAMERA), AND THE A.N.R. ROBINSON MEETING ROOM (EAST), LEVEL 9, (IN PUBLIC), OFFICE OF THE PARLIAMENT, TOWER D, THE PORT OF SPAIN INTERNATIONAL WATERFRONT CENTRE, #1A WRIGHTSON ROAD, PORT OF SPAIN, ON WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 31, 2018 AT 9.36 A.M.

PRESENT

Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir	Chairman
Mr. Esmond Forde	Vice-Chairman
Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein	Member
Miss Khadijah Ameen	Member
Mrs. Glenda Jennings-Smith	Member
Miss Allyson West	Member
Mr. Rohan Sinanan	Member
Brig. Gen. Ancil Antoine	Member
Mr. Julien Ogilvie	Secretary
Mr. Johnson Greenidge	Assistant Secretary
Miss Simone Yallery	Legal Officer I

ABSENT

Mr. Rohan Sinanan	Member [<i>Excused</i>]
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10.30 a.m.: *Meeting suspended.*

10.35 a.m.: *Meeting resumed.*

UNREVISED

OFFICIALS OF THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Ms. Lenore Baptiste-Simmons	Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
Mr. John Roopchan	Chief Education Officer (Ag.)
Mr. John Thompson	Director of School Supervision Management (Ag.)
Ms. Avril Rahim	Director, Legal
Ms. Darlene Smith	Guidance Officer II Student Support Services Division
Mrs. Leticia Rodriguez-Cupid	Coordinator of Special Education
Mr. Gerald Phillip	Information and Communication Technology
Mrs. Theresa Neblett-Skinner	Curriculum Coordinator

**OFFICIALS OF TRINIDAD AND
TOBAGO UNIFIED TEACHERS ASSOCIATION**

Mr. Lysley A. Doodhai	President
Ms. Kyrila Robertson	2 nd Vice-President
Mr. Fitzroy Daniel	General Secretary

**OFFICIALS OF THE NATIONAL
PARENT TEACHER ASSOCIATION**

Mrs. Raffiena Ali-Boodoosingh	President NPTA
Mr. Clarence Mendoza	1 st Vice President NPTA
Mr. Shawn Campbell	National Education Officer NPTA

Mr. Chairman: Good morning, everyone. Good morning to all citizens listening on the various media. Welcome to this the 20th meeting of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration, and as a background to

this meeting, persons may be aware that this particular Committee had, at its very first enquiry, the issue of violence among students in our schools. We consider this to be of deep concern because schools we know are meant to be places where we learn and we are supposed to be focusing our energies on Physics, Chemistry, Math, Biology and History but yet we have seen on the media, social media, main stream media, instances where children are engaging in violent actions.

And also, we have not focused too much attention on the cyber aspect, the violence which occurs with the use of social media. We have seen the more determined type of violence and we have seen girl-on-girl violence, boy-on-boy violence, we have seen groups and we undertook a detailed public enquiry as to what the causes may be and what some of the solutions are, which could be implemented within our school system so that such instances can be lessened over time.

This morning, we are here to examine the responses of the Ministry of Education as a follow-up to our public enquiry, as a follow-up to the report that we presented. We are here to determine what, if any measures have been implemented so far, we have a number of stakeholders with us to give us a progress report on where we are, with respect to addressing this worrisome problem in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

At this time I would ask the representatives of the various organizations to introduce themselves, so we will know who are here with us to advise the Committee on what is really happening in this troublesome area in our society. I can start with—I understand the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education is here. May I ask the honourable Permanent Secretary to introduce herself first and then we go on.

[Introductions made]

10.40 a.m.

Mr. Chairman: And we do have representatives of the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association. May I have introductions from TTUTA?

[Introductions made]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much officials. I will at this point ask members of the Committee to introduce themselves before we begin our full enquiry, and may I start with my right.

[Introductions made]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, MP Jennings-Smith, and I am Dhanayshar Mahabir, Chairman of the Committee, Independent Senator. May I ask when you are responding to please activate your microphone and when you are finished to please deactivate, that is for recording purposes.

At this time I would ask representatives from the three major—a representative from the three agencies to address us briefly, a brief, hopefully two-minute opening remarks, and may I start with the Ministry of Education.

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Once again a pleasant good morning. On behalf of the Ministry of Education we would like to express thanks for the invitation to participate at this post enquiry follow up meeting, on the first report into the current level of violence among students in schools with particular focus on physical and cyber-bullying.

The team, we met and we reviewed the recommendations and follow-up questions. And we recognized that the Committee is focusing mainly on the need for the Ministry of Education to develop and implement a whole-school approach which encourages several actors and stakeholders to collaborate, to reduce the incidence of violence and indiscipline.

The school-based management model is one such mechanism that we have identified to democratize our institutions and to create peaceful spaces in which learning is enhanced and students would know outcomes are achieved. This model primarily focuses on engaging in stakeholders and actors at all levels within the school community, that is, our administrators, middle managers, teachers, non-teaching staff, students, parents and the general community.

We feel that these actors are suitably placed to comprehend the school's context and are charged with assessing, designing and implementing data driven strategies to ensure the best learning environment possible. They are in fact the first beneficiaries of these peaceful learning environments, and the wider society is the ultimate beneficiary. Further, the Ministry continues to partner with its key stakeholders to develop creative and workable solutions aimed at promoting peace in our nation's schools. I thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. A representative from TTUTA, Mr. Doodhai.

Mr. Doodhai: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Good morning again to all members of the Committee. Firstly, let me say a heartfelt thank you to the Committee for inviting the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association to this sitting of the JSC. TTUTA remains deeply concerned about the level of school violence and cyber-bullying that continues to take place in our schools. Up to this week, there were reports in the media with respect to incidents of school violence that would have translated onto the streets of our country.

The Ministry of Education has been claiming that there has been a decrease with respect to the incidence of school violence in our nation's schools.

While we are not here to dispute any statistics from the Ministry of Education, TTUTA believes that even one instance of school violence in our nation's schools is too many. We believe that there could be more measures that can be put in place with respect to addressing school violence. One of the critical things that we see that needs to be done in schools is the filling of some of the vacant posts. There are hundreds of vacant posts that have not been filled by the Teaching Service Commission, and more critically these posts at what we refer to as the middle management posts in the secondary schools and also the primary schools, but more so in the secondary schools where the critical posts of Deans have not been filled. There are hundreds of vacancies. We know for a fact, on this side, from the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association, that as far back as June and July of last year, interviews were conducted. However, not one of these positions have been filled to this point in time.

So, we would want to zero in on that particular aspect with respect to the filling of vacancies, because that is where some control can be exercised in the school setting with respect to monitoring and supervision of students, to possibly prevent this plague of school violence from taking place.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Mr. Doodhai, we will come back to some of those. And the representative from the NPTA, National Parent Teachers Association.

Mrs. Ali-Boodoosingh: Chairman, today it is a distinct opportunity for the NPTA to stand before this august Joint Select Committee to represent our parent community, and to advocate for our children's best interest in the education process. The education process for all of our young people is a journey leading to a quality nation for the future of our nation lies in the book bags of our

children, according to our first Prime Minister, the late Dr. Eric Williams.

For this to materialize we have to take an optimistic, realistic and practical view; each stakeholder's passion, integrity and commitment to the process, so that in the end all of our future leaders, the children of this nation, would achieve their maximum potential, be culturally and socially adjusted, happy, healthy and mature, and develop positive, moral and ethical values. I am certain that the recommendations outlined by this Joint Select Committee, coupled with stakeholders' partnership, the business of education in Trinidad and Tobago will journey on a successful path.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much representative from the NTPA, Ms. Boodoosingh. As Chairman I would take the opportunity to pose the first question for edification, and afterwards Sen. Ameen will start the questioning on behalf of the Committee. My question is really to Mr. Doodhai, and the question is this: Whenever I see school violence I just see it on the media. I am not in the school system itself. Your teachers are on the front lines. Over the last year, have they been reporting to your organization an increase in instances of school violence? A decrease? Or in your opinion, has there been a stabilization of instances of violence amongst our school age population, say over the last year 2017? I am trying to get the trend here, is it that it is escalating or has it stabilized?

Mr. Doodhai: I would say, Mr. Chairman, based on reports that have been coming to the association from our members that the incidence of school violence continues in our nation's schools.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, so it has not stabilized. It seems to be on the rise then? Or it has remained is same? It is a persistent problem?

Mr. Doodhai: I would say it has remained the same.

Mr. Chairman: Right, very well. So, may I recommend that you collect statistics, that your teachers, once they have seen an instance can report to your organization, so that we have data, hard data to go by to know whether in certain schools there is an increase or a decrease in instances? I think without data we can only speculate. Is it that your teachers are encouraged, your members are encouraged to report to the organization when they have witnessed some of these violent instances in their classrooms? You see, you are in the first line.

Mr. Doodhai: Mr. Chairman, most times members would report to the association when the members of staff are directly affected. So, if something happens in a school where it does not affect the teachers with respect to their safety, it may not come to our attention, but when it impacts negatively on them they will bring it to our attention for our attempts to redress the situation.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, and you have seen, say on a year-to-year basis, that the reports to your organization have stabilized? Is it that you are getting a fall in reports, a rise in reports, or it has basically stabilized?

Mr. Doodhai: I would say it has stabilized.

Mr. Chairman: Very well. Thank you very much. A follow up from MP Esmond Forde.

Mr. Forde: Morning again, to the TTUTA representative, I am getting from you in terms of the question posed by the Chairman, in that you all do not have hard evidence, statistics before you that you could present to the Committee. I am hearing that your membership submits information, teachers report cases, but hard evidence that could be on document to say, well look, at this particular

school, this particular day X took place, at that particular school Y took place. You all do not have those statistics?

Mr. Doodhai: We do not have empirical data if that is what you are asking, what we have, we have reports that come to the association on a day-to-day basis with respect to—

Mr. Forde: But Mr. Doodhai, I think from, you know, the organization where you sit I think this is definitely, you need empirical evidence in order to justify the case. Because you made in your opening remark that decrease in violence in school has not taken place, and you were sort of stating that the Ministry of Education is saying one thing, you are saying something else, and I hope that when we come to the Ministry of Education they would have evidence to say, listen, this is what has been happening 2005, 2015, 2016, 2017, and as we are going forward. Right? You made a strong statement, and I am saying you must be able to justify what you have said in order to let the Committee know, well, listen, this is the information, and you are combating what Ministry of Education is saying. I am of the opinion, you all need to work together; TTUTA, NPTA, Ministry of Education in order to ensure that this serious thing that we are dealing with has to be reduced, has to come to an end.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, MP Forde. A follow up before I come to you Senator, to the Ministry of Education. Are principals mandated to record instances of violence in their schools? A response from the Ministry of Education: Are they mandated to collect that statistics?

Mr. Roopchan: Good morning again, Chair. Principals have been mandated to collect such information, and to submit through school supervision to the office of the CEO.

Mr. Chairman: Have you been collecting that data?

Mr. Roopchan: We have collected. We have some data for the last year.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. And I will request then that you submit the information to the Secretariat because that would be valuable to guide the work of the Committee, and we would also share that information with the public as well.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: Mr. Chair—

Mr. Chairman: A follow up on this one?

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, right.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: I want to know whether that data collected is public data? And when I say public data, is that data available to TTUTA?

Mr. Roopchan: It can be made available to TTUTA.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: Was there ever an instance where they made a request for data and it was refused?

Mr. Roopchan: I cannot recall.

Mr. Chairman: I will ask Sen. Ameen to ask her direct question. These were all preliminaries. These were just setting the stage. Now, the real questions are coming. [*Laughter*]

Miss Ameen: Thank you very much. I know, Mr. Chairman, it may seem as though we are beginning in the middle, but this is in fact a post-enquiry follow up on a previous meeting that we had concerning the current level of violence in schools amongst students, and today I think it is important for us to look at the element of violence against teachers and staff as well. What I want to ask is a more general or holistic question in terms of an indication from the Minister in the Parliament in response to a question in the Lower House in this month of

January 2018, when the Minister was asked to indicate the actions initiated by the Ministry to curtail, well, bullying in secondary school, and his response dealt with violence on a whole, and he indicated that the Ministry has developed a national strategy for addressing students' indiscipline in schools. My question to you is: Has this national policy been documented and what are some of the key components of this national strategy?

Mr. Roopchan: The information I have, member, is that we have in all schools the establishment of school discipline plans, but it does not stop there. We have discipline plans that extend at the level of the education district and at the level of the Ministry of Education as well. So, the school discipline plans—the discipline committee, sorry, at the district levels there would be seven of them here in Trinidad and Tobago, and they are mandated to meet and oversee disciplinary measures within each education district. At the school level, the schools, both primary and secondary schools, they are asked to meet on a regular basis. We recommend monthly, but some schools have chosen termly, and they have been meeting to address their issues.

Miss Ameen: And in terms of your stakeholder involvement, what is the component of these disciplinary committees, are your stakeholder involved? Like TTUTA for instance?

Mr. Roopchan: We have recommended that the various stakeholders be engaged, including the student body and the student councils in the schools.

Miss Ameen: But are they in fact now members of those disciplinary committees?

Mr. Roopchan: I would think so.

Miss Ameen: Maybe if we could get a response from TTUTA—

Mr. Chairman: But also, when was this national strategy implemented? And I place it back to Sen. Ameen, when was it actually implemented, and was it documented? Because I have not seen any documentation.

Mr. Roopchan: Chair, all this has dovetailed from our school-based management approach where schools are being encouraged to be part and parcel of developing strategies to address challenges that may emerge. What we have in the school-based management is that various sub-components of that approach would have been dealing with things like discipline, and those committees would have been part of that whole governance structure.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: TTUTA, I would like to ask TTUTA and NPTA specifically, if you are aware of this discipline matrix and the discipline plan?

Mr. Chairman: Is this a follow up?

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Yes, this is a follow up question, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Is TTUTA aware of this?

Ms. Robertson: Good morning, member. While we are aware of what the Ministry had put in place, what we can say is that my colleague over there indicated that each school is expected to have this committee. What we know is that many of them do not include the staff rep at the schools, and some of them are not functional, and, case in point, do not report to the general staff. We had one such school this morning where I expect a School Supervisor II is visiting that school to investigate a matter of abuse by a student to a teacher, and several other issues, and the staff complaint is that they have not been getting any feedback from administration at the school, nor are the two reps there involved in that committee that should be set up.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: I just want to come back to the original question. Are

you aware of the matrix, the discipline matrix? Do you know how it functions? Do you know who is involved? Do you know what the plan entails? Are you aware of it? Do you know? Can you tell me at the back of your hand this is what it is, a, b, c, d, e, f, g?

Mr. Daniel: Good morning again, specifically Mrs. Hosein. I know from school to school you have a discipline matrix, and these discipline matrices, yes they are implemented on a school-to-school basis, but you have management problem in the school. That is how it is implemented. Because, I can recall going to a secondary school back in 2000, we had a document which was a system for implementing as school-based matrix. However, it was never properly implemented. It was just there, and sometimes you would question the principal as to whether this is the approach or not, but most times it is. They had some schools and it is documented, yes.

[Miss A. West raises hand]

Mr. Chairman: A follow up?

Miss West: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: A follow up from Allyson West, and after Allyson West we will have—we are generating some interest—Brig. Ancil Antoine, and after Brig. Ancil Antoine we will have Mrs. Jennings-Smith. Who has to answer before the PTA, after which I will follow with Sen. West.

Mrs. Ali-Boodoosingh: The National PTA we would touch base with our affiliated PTAs. What I can tell you in our meetings, we realize that many of our members are unaware of the school-based management committees in schools, because most times the principal does not inform the PTA, and also if there is a parent representative on the PTA, most times the principal chooses

that parent. So, there is no liaising between the school-based management team and the PTA to know what is going on. And we have done training with our affiliated PTAs on school-based management, from an official from the Ministry of Education so our parents would be aware of it.

But PTAs that are not affiliated to us, we would not know what is really going on, but we do know that sometimes even the local school board, which is another arm that helps with the improvement of the schools, and they would strategize and partner with discipline plans and so on, we know for a fact that sometimes we have two parent representative on the local school board and one on the school-based management committee, and sometimes they are unaware that the PTA elects these representatives and not the principal.

So sometimes the communications break down to know what is really going on in the school, because even with the discipline plan, it should be a stakeholder conversation, so everyone knows what is going on. Right?

Mr. Chairman: We have a response by NPTA, but we do have a follow up from Minister West. A follow up.

Miss West: Thank you, Chair. To the Ministry of Education rep: I get the sense that you instruct the teachers through the school-based management system to design and implement this disciplinary policy, but do you have a system of checks and balances so you follow up, you ensure uniformity, you ensure that the design of the policy is adequate for the needs? And that the principals or whoever is implementing are actually doing what they are supposed to do?

Mr. Roopchan: They system that the Ministry of Education has in place is where schools are required to develop their own school development plans, and

these school development plans are to be monitored—is to be submitted and to be viewed by the school supervisors. So, yes, we have that mandate that they prepare the school development plans, and we know that some schools are more advanced in where they are in the process obviously. But our school supervisors are the ones who will have the first view of it and to guide them in terms of having something that we see as workable.

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: At the level of the Ministry and under the office of the CEO, we have an officer who has been designated, and that person is responsible for the whole school-based management roll out, and a strategy had been developed, and that has been documented. Well, that officer along with the district officers have been rolling out the plans to schools. We have those SBM teams—this is the information that comes to me, because we were looking at it and we were looking at the model, and that is how it is rolled out. At this point we would have had in Trinidad the 444 primary schools and the 125 secondary schools presenting their school development plans, which would have been developed, as far as I am aware, and I have the team of persons who would have been part of that exercise. So, this is it. And all of the plans are looked at, at the level of the Ministry to ensure the compliance, as well as at the district level.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, thank you very much. Brig. Antoine has not been with us for—he has to come in after Glenda Jennings-Smith, MP, and then again we come back, and we are still on the principal point raised by Sen. Ameen. So, we have a number of follow ups coming up.

Brig. Gen. Antoine: Yes, good morning again. I am dealing with the Ministry's written response in term of disciplinary committees. You said that

there are seven disciplinary committees in each district, and there are disciplinary committees in the primary and secondary schools. I want to find out, what is the reporting relationship? So a disciplinary committee in a primary school, let us say in Laventille or let us say down in Siparia, has a disciplinary problem, what is the reporting relationship? It goes up to who in the Ministry of Education? And how does the Ministry of Education respond to this? And how does it bring it back to the school through the principal, through the PTA, through the TTUTA to deal with that disciplinary matter? What is the process that you are undertaking to deal with a disciplinary matter from one of your disciplinary committees?

Mr. Thompson: Thank you very much for your question, member. The oversight of the school is the responsibility of the line school supervisor, so that when a disciplinary issue emerges which cannot be addressed at the level of the school through the school supervisor, and principal reporting to the school supervisor, it comes to the level of the district where the inter-divisional disciplinary committee would review the issue and provide to the school guidance in addressing the issue, or, if necessary refer it further so that the situation can be addressed. So, essentially the line of reporting, and the line of oversight is provided through school supervision.

Brig. Gen. Antoine: And how is this information disseminated to TTUTA and to the PTA, if it is a matter involving a teacher or a student in terms of absence, in terms of discipline?

Mr. Thompson: Through the stakeholder engagement meetings which take place generally, either at the level of the district or at the strategic level, depending on the level of severity. At the level of the district, most districts will

meet with their stakeholders, the district, for example, with TTUTA the district field officer would have that engagement, generally monthly, and if there is not resolution at that level, it would then go up to the strategic level where it is addressed. So, there is that ongoing interaction and coordination.

Maj. Gen. Antoine: Because we have both TTUTA and the PTA present, is this your experience? What is your experience in terms of these matters? If I could get a feedback from you all, please?

Mr. Daniel: While I agree that there may be some interaction, but most times it is at the back end of the issue. So, in terms of the planning, the whole strategic planning, we would hear, yes, there are systems in place, but we come in at the back end when there is an issue at the school then we are involved. Then it means that we have to treat with the issue.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. We will get the PTA, and afterwards I do have to get MP Jennings-Smith, and then we come back to Deputy Speaker. [*Laughs*] It will come back to you, Deputy Speaker, but MP Jennings—the PTA then MP Jennings-Smith. A response from the PTA.

Mrs. Ali-Boodoosingh: Member, as far as I know there is no district committee made up of stakeholders that oversee the discipline plans or the discipline matrix in schools. And very ironic I had that in my notes to recommend today that we do have a committee like that in each district so that, you know, we can curb the violence in schools. Because as far as I know, there is no committee like that in the district. We do not meet monthly or weekly. The NPTA does not receive any information from the district level with reference to violence or indiscipline in the schools.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, and to TTUTA I would recommend, if

you could also send recommendations to the Committee so that your own involvement can be enhanced in this very important exercise, so we would get the recommendations from your organization as well as to the NPTA. I will ask MP Jennings-Smith to come in at this time.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: I will ask the PTA as it is the last. Can you tell me how formalized are your groups of PTAs? And tell me how many groups of PTAs you have in Trinidad and Tobago operationalized? How formalized are these groups?

Mrs. Ali-Boodoosingh: We have approximately 300 PTAs affiliated to us, and right now this new executive is on a drive to increase our membership. But we are very structured because the NPTA at the base we have the units, and the units will form the regions which are, you know, in sync with the education districts. So, we have eight regions, and then from that we have the central executive, the general council, and then conference of delegates. We do meet our units and regions on a monthly basis, so that at our meetings we will receive information about schools, what is happening in the schools, how parents are affected, what is happening with our children. As you would see, right now this new executive, we are mentoring a child right now. Mr. Mendoza is acting as big brother to that child, because that child is undergoing extreme trauma in the school, not attending school, so we are trying to help wherever we can help.

We touch base with the schools. So, right now we have a school where we are attending, a teacher is absent for months, because the teacher is a reserve army officer, just gets a letter and goes out and there is no replacement for the teacher, and the teacher is in a Standard 4 class. So, we have been on the ground, and we have been listening and we are trying to help wherever possible.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: So, I can safely say that most of your PTAs they have at least 50 parents attending meetings regularly every time meetings are called?

Mrs. Ali-Boodoosingh: Well, it will fluctuate, because you have small schools, we have medium sized schools, we have big schools. I am just trying to establish, you know sometimes you make claims that the PTA is not in the mix but then when you go to the schools, maybe you do not have the parents' interest in terms of being consistently present at PTA meetings. And now I am coming to the other point, and this is going to the Ministry. Now, the Minister said that, his reply, it is data driven, and I want to ask you all, this programme, did you develop this programme from any best practice internationally? Because when you talk about punishment, it could be either retributive or restorative. And I know when we are dealing with children you are dealing with young minds which could be tamed to a different way, and what we are having in society, what we are turning out is a lot of anger, hatred, and stuff like that. I did not hear the word "restorative" justice or conferencing in the school system, but I am seeing a programme which is data-led, data-driven, and I want to know something more. What influenced this particular programme?

Mr. Roopchan: If I may say, member, I know a lot of research has gone into the preparation and implementation of this initiative. I do not have the actual data before me, but I know a lot of research went into it in terms of examining best practices, as you asked, and in terms of doing the research itself to work with data on the ground. But I cannot say that I can provide you with anything more at this point in time.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: You see, Mr. Chairman, you talk about districts and district supervisors, what guides the district supervisors when they are liaising

with those districts with respect to dealing with discipline and maintaining discipline, and dealing with violence in school? What guides them? And it is not spelt out here. What I need to know is what guides them? How do they advise? And coming from my colleague across the floor, he spoke about how do you implement? How do you operationalize? What guides? Like, for example, long time a child commits an offence or whatever and a teacher would say, “Well, licks for you”, or they would say, “I’ll call in your parent”, or they would say, “Listen, we need to talk to you for a period of time.” Well, licks is nothing that we talk about again. That is a long time thing. So, now we talk about restorative justice, we talk about conferencing with children, and we talk about retributive where you all say dismissal from school and stuff like that. But what guides the ultimate action?

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Yes, Mrs. Jennings-Smith, hon. member. Now, the school-based management is—we look at a holistic approach, in that it is about the curriculum, it is about peace, but it is also about looking at your school development plans which looks even at your academic performance. It assesses where the school is at, and whatever the gaps are in terms of filling, that is what the school will be—the school has to identify remedial strategies. Now, with respect to the restorative justice, I am going to ask Ms. Darlene Smith, who is from the school Student Support Services to provide you with some additional information with respect to how it all comes together.

Ms. Smith: Good morning, member. Within the Ministry of Education, as our PS stated, we do take a holistic approach about our interventions regarding violence. From the reports that we would have submitted to you, restorative justice is part of our learning enhancement centres approach in our interventions

that we do with students, and it is a critical part of what we do. Because, as you know, we must and we do recognize that students can change, behaviours can be modified, and through the support of our school social workers, guidance officers, our clinical psychologists, behavioural specialists, and special ed teachers, we do the assessments necessary to beginning treatment and interventions, taking into regard the family backgrounds, the behaviour, the academic performance, and more importantly, the academic goals for each child.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: Chairman, so there is a role for the parents and the parent teacher body. Can you safely say here that you are satisfied with the responses you get from the parents and the parent/teachers body?

Ms. Smith: While we work with the parents we do not necessarily interact with the NPTA. We do collaborate at various—I have in the past worked with the NPTA in doing training for some of their staff, and there are various units. On Saturdays a person rarely attended an executed training sessions. What we do in essence, they would be more interacting through our parenting education programmes with parents, to help to do the necessary support while we do the rehabilitation and interventions with all students.

Mr. Chairman: I need to intervene, and the question is: Do you get the full cooperation of parents when they are requested to come to the committee and comply with certain guidelines and advice that you give? Or is it that you find reluctance from parents, or guardians, care givers to participate in the programmes?

Ms. Smith: It has been a mixed approach. What we recognize is that in some districts, we get the parents support while in some other areas and some

communities there is some resistance. However, when that occurs we do the second step, which is home-to-home visits, and we do go out and try to seek and find the parents where necessary. That is critical in terms of our intervention. In our strategic approach to treating with violence and indiscipline in schools, we recognize that it is a five-pronged approach whereby while we may be working with parents, society, community, relational individuals, but we recognize it is also an inter-ministerial approach required to addressing and treating with violence and indiscipline in schools.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, I would ask the Deputy Speaker to come in with his follow up.

Mr. Forde: And this is a follow up on the discussion that went prior to my colleague MP Jennings-Smith. In terms of the relationship and the communication process between the three bodies represented here today, I am sitting here and I am of the opinion that the relationship and the communication with regard to the topic on discussion—right, we are discussing violence and bullying in schools—I am of the impression, and you all will be given the opportunity each to say whether my opinion is wrong or whether it is factual. I am thinking that the relationship with regard to this particular topic and the communication process is poor among the three bodies represented here today. All right?

I make a couple jottings, NPTA mentioned “touched base”. I think if we really try to look at when we say “touch base”, you know, it does not happen regularly. TTUTA mentioned, “Well, we sometimes. Well, we sometimes.” “While I agree,” TTUTA again. “As far as I know”, NPTA mentioned that. Those are not definitive statements in terms of the communication process that

is taking place for a very important topic like this. So, with regard to, in the particular order, NPTA first, TTUTA second, the Ministry of Education third.

Sorry to put you all in the spot but I need to be clear. How is the relationship process and communication process with regard to school violence among the body? So, NPTA, how would you relate the relationship and the communication process with regard to school violence?

Mrs. Ali-Boodoosingh: We will be aware of the instances of violence in schools if our parents call us and inform us and sometimes it is only when it reaches the media we would know about it. However, we do have meetings with the Minister of Education and his staff at least once a term.

Mr. Forde: That is a general meeting or is it on violence alone?

Mrs. Ali-Boodoosingh: No, a general meeting. But, you know, we would ask for information on the violence and indiscipline, and just at our last meeting in January we had with the hon. Minister Garcia, he informed us that suspensions have been on the decrease. So, if that is an indication that the indiscipline and violence is decreasing in the schools.

Mr. Forde: Are you of the opinion that a critical thing like this should have a separate and apart meeting, like a meeting on violence in schools? Are you of that opinion?

Mrs. Ali-Boodoosingh: Yes, I am of that opinion.

Mr. Forde: Thank you. TTUTA?

Mrs. Ali-Boodoosingh: Because what we believe is that all stakeholders have to come together to discuss that and to bring remedy to it.

Mr. Forde: TTUTA, how would you relate to communication relationship, with violence—eh, I am not talking about anything else—in schools?

Mr. Doodhai: I would say the relationship is not very good with respect to this particular issue. While we meet on other issues and other areas with respect to violence and indiscipline, most times when the discussion takes place is after something has happened and we are trying to remedy a situation in a particular school.

Mr. Forde: But with regard to the strategic plan that you all talked about and so on, you all are not part of that process and so on?

Mr. Doodhai: No, Sir.

Mr. Forde: Right. Ministry of Education, how would you rate against—same answer.

Mr. Roopchan: Vice-Chair, I would say that at the level of the school, all stakeholders, as we are aware, are engaged. The PTA at the school would be engaged. They have been mandated to be part of the discipline committees. The total TTUTA representatives, we expect them to be part of it, but we note that at the district level, the district committee as it presently stands is involving Ministry officials. And we take the recommendation that was made some time earlier that perhaps we should engage the stakeholders at that level.

Mr. Forde: Just now, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: One last follow up before we go to MP Newallo-Hosein.

Mr. Forde: And again, as mentioned by NPTA and also TTUTA, “They know after the fact.” Let us say, it is aired in the media, or unless a parent tells them. Again, from where I sit, I was of the belief, or I would want to think that again something as critical as this that they would be notified accordingly, that they will be part of the discussion—members of TTUTA, you all are teachers?

Ms. Robertson: Yes, Sir, we are.

Mr. Forde: Right, and NPTA you all are not necessarily teachers?

Mrs. Ali-Boodoosingh: No, we are not.

Brig. Gen. Antoine: Right. And I am thinking, there must be some collaboration. You know, I mean, we are hearing about school violence every day. I mean, you read the papers, I think, you know—

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, member. We now get the drift that there is a need for closer collaboration, and we have gotten it today that the stakeholders need to communicate, and communication is easy, electronic communication. There is no good reason why all stakeholders cannot be kept abreast of development, untoward developments, favourable developments. We will come back to the question, yes. After Mr. Doodhai has made his contribution, MP Newallo-Hosein has to get in again on a follow up before we go back to the question posed by Sen. Ameen. So, Mr. Doodhai.

Mr. Doodhai: Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to make a short contribution based on the question asked by Mrs. Jennings-Smith with respect to restorative justice. The representative of the Ministry of Education, Ms. Smith, Guidance Officer II, would have spoken about the involvement of the Student Support Services Division with respect to the use of restorative justice with respect to violence and indiscipline in schools.

From our side we would want to submit that the Student Support Services Division is understaffed to deal with the current numbers of issues that are coming to the fore, and therefore if—well, of course we will want to call for a beefing up in terms of the numbers of the Student Support Services Division. Failing that, we believe that training should be given to teachers with respect to restorative justice, because they are the first line persons in contact with the

students and they are the ones who can implement or use the tool of restorative justice. And I just wanted to point out that TTUTA would have recognized the importance of restorative justice, and we would have partnered with the American Federation of Teachers in June of 2017, where they would have come to Trinidad and we would have exposed 40 of our teachers, five from each of the eight educational districts to restorative justice, and they were asked to go back to their schools and expose their fellow members of staff to what would have been shared with them at that particular two-day training.

Mr. Chairman: We would come back to that, and I myself have some concerns with teacher training and so on. So, many of your teachers are going to be females, I would imagine who would have to be in the presence of some of these violent acts, and I am concerned about the welfare and what that can have with respect to entry into the teaching service. Is violence and the incidence of violence a deterrent to getting high quality persons to enter the teaching service? So, some of those issues will come subsequently, but I want to ask MP Newallo-Hosein to pose her follow up before I go back to Sen. Ameen.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Chair. In concurring with MP Forde, I would like to say that there is definite disconnect, as we could see. And my question goes back to what Mr. Thompson has said earlier, indicating that the principal would write to the school supervisor advising that there is a problem, so a physical report comes in. Is there any law or policy that prohibits the supervisor, the principal from in fact copying the report to TTUTA to indicate that this problem is being submitted to the Ministry of Education, so that everyone is on the same page and that they can have some follow up action so that there is no disconnect? Is there any policy prohibiting the principal from

copying that report? That is the first question.

Ms. Rahim: Hon. member, thank you. There may be issues of confidentiality arising, so even if the report may not be copied, certainly some form of notification can be done so as to inform TTUTA and so on. Perhaps not so much the content or copying of the primary report, until we know like what kind of information would be in it and that sort of thing.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: TTUTA can you advise if there has been any indication that a principal cannot or a teacher cannot advise you of certain things that take place in the schools that may affect their own ability to execute their performance of their duties efficiently and effectively?

Mr. Daniel: Member, we are unaware any of such legislation that prevents a principal from sharing that information.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: TTUTA, do you receive any reports from teachers stating that they experienced fear, and that they are intimidated in the execution of their duties, and if you do, how do you deal with those reports?

Ms. Robertson: Member, that is almost a weekly report that comes to the IR department. At times we would advise the teachers to go through the proper procedure, which is to have—we would send out field officers or a district executive to have conferencing with the principals of those schools, and when we cannot address it at that level, certainly we then attempt to speak with the DSS or the CEO, or somebody to have those matters addressed. There are a number of reports that involve teachers having to make reports to the police station that we also come by regularly.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Are these reports able to give you enough data to determine what is happening within the schools? Because, I mean, this comes

as empirical evidence as far as I aware. If a teacher brings a complaint of something that is happening and they have to actually make a report to the police, does this not supply you with the empirical evidence to provide data to indicate that you need to speak to the Ministry as to how we go forward? I mean, yes you made a point that you need to put in more deans, you need to fill the positions which amount to hundreds, but it is not just a matter of filling the positions, it is also how do you proceed with how you manage discipline. How do you go with restorative justice? Because you could have persons in there, but if you do not have a proper matrix, how do you implement the procedures that are necessary to bring down the level of violence and bullying in the schools?

Ms. Robertson: Okay member, I am going to have to say, while we have the information I do not think we have probably collated it and put it together, but it is something that we certainly can work on with the reports and the files that we do have in our industrial relations department of TTUTA.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: Mr. Chair, am—

Mr. Chairman: And the last follow up before we go back. Last, last follow up.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: Yes. And I want the go back to the whole restorative justice approach because it is called conferencing. It is something that is a school conferencing, community conferencing, and it is known to be a highly effectively process. Now, listen to Mr. Doodhai, It seems to me as though we were on that dry track some time ago and persons were actually trained, but somewhere along the line it may be seemingly, it was never followed up and measured.

Because we talk evidence-based, and we talk data, and we talk all these nice words, but if we had process, did we put it in place? Did we measure it to see if it could have been successful? Because we are talking about changing a whole culture that seems to be invaded our school system. This whole hate, anger. How do we control hate and anger amongst students? And this is a programme which has been tested and tried in other countries like Australia which is a peaceful nation. And, have we tested it, so we could say now that 100 students engaged in that process in these schools, and what has happened since then to now? Was it successful?

So we could maybe change the strategy and say it cannot work here, and change it and say, we will do something else. I want to know if that actually happened and we remove ourselves from, because seemingly we do not have enough teachers. We do not have enough deans. We do not have the people in the schools to even initiate that conferencing process with the students. So, I need to get some answers on that.

Mr. Chairman: Permanent Secretary, yes.

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: On a point of clarification. Now, in the Ministry of Education you have posts that are vacant. For example, you would listen and you would hear acting and acting. They are vacant with bodies. Yes? So that you have in the school systems—now, I did not walk with the data with respect to deans, and heads of departments, and senior teachers. But we have persons who are actually performing the duties, and we know that as Mr. Doodhai indicated that we had the interviews conducted through the TSC, Teaching Service Commission. But it is not that all of the positions would be vacant, because I know that for a fact.

The thing about it, I did not walk with the information to tell you how many deans that would discipline, that we have in our schools, but there are positions that are vacant with bodies, but if you look on the establishment you would see vacant because they are not substantive holders. The positions have been advertised and they will be subsequently filled. But we have persons because you are older teachers and you have who would know that we have teachers who are in those positions. So, on a point of clarification before you move ahead, and that it is that we do not have persons. It is that in the government systems you have persons who are in the positions but they are not the substantive holders, so you write, "with bodies". All right? Vacant with bodies and vacant without bodies.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: Chairman, I have not gotten the answer. I am asking you to tell me how many people—

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: No, no, I just wanted to point out. Okay, but Ms. Smith will respond.

Mr. Chairman: Very well. I need to move on, and we have had a long round, we would come back—yes, we would come back to some of these follow up issues, but I would like to get back to Sen. Ameen for her to raise another substantive question.

Miss Ameen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think it is safe for us to conclude this round, that there is a deficiency in the policy with regard to the whole school-based management approach and engagement of stakeholders, because it seems that the stakeholder participation is an ad-hoc engagement. It does not seem that—I have not gotten a definitive answer, but it does not seem to be a part of the policy that the specific stakeholders are involved. For instance, that

they comprised committees, and there are recommendations for, for instance, who should sit on committees. And I want to recommend that these stakeholders be named and that they comprise the committees. So, for example, you have your regional district discipline committee, the school-based management teams, if there are committees there that it must be mandatory for, for example, TTUTA to have a representative on these committees, National PTA and any other significant stakeholders who are identified.

Mr. Chairman, my next issue actually has to do with what was mentioned by the Permanent Secretary, and this Committee is actually in the process of considering a proposal for an enquiry on the state of contract employment in the public service. Because of that same complaint that you made in terms of vacancies. In our initial enquiry into school-based violence we had a number of guidance counsellors, deans, and other persons involved in the counselling aspect of schools, and we recognized that there is a significant shortage. The ratio of the number of students to guidance counsellors, for example, they are significantly overburdened. We had sometimes one person dealing with three and four large secondary schools, populations ranging between 700 and 1500. Where the ratio ought to be about 300:1. Can we have from your—perhaps begin with the Permanent Secretary to indicate to us, what is the prevalence of the shortage of staff to deal with discipline problems in schools? And I mean in a preventative manner as well, in terms of provides counselling and so on. Your system with guidance counsellors, and all the other positions, if you can name them and indicate to us the challenges with the staffing to begin with as well as the resources?

Mr. Chairman: The response is the deficit that you have staff. It is a deficit of

staff. A staff deficit, yes.

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: The deficit I would ask the officers from the Student Support Services to provide. But what I know is that we have been making a lot of attempts to fill the positions, and we have advertised, and we would have received quite a lot of applications for both Guidance Counsellors, which would have been the contract. There is a difference between the contract and the established positions. Which would have been the Guidance Counsellors and the School Social Workers, and we were processing and doing the shortlisting. Well, we have made representation to the DPA with respect to the filling of the established positions. But in terms of the discipline, I would ask—

Mr. Chairman: PS, you are working.

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Yes, we are working, but I am just—do you require the information now?

Mr. Chairman: Not now, we can get it in writing.

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: So you can get it in writing? But during our initial enquiry a recommendation was offered that there ought to be a ratio of, I think, 250 students to one social worker. What I would like to know is, how close are you to satisfying that particular ration? That seems to have been to consensus from the ancillary support staff with respect to efficiently solving the problem. That was a short-term recommendation. It seemed to be something that was necessary. It addresses the concern of Mr. Doodhai, that there seems to be deficit in certain critical areas. Are you close to the 1:250 or are you far from it? How many more staff members do you need to get to that optimum ratio from the people in the know from the back?

11.40 a.m.

Ms. Smith: Chairman, we would have begun interviews for our school social workers last week, so at this point in time our staff in terms of social workers and Guidance Counsellors and some of our special ed teachers are on month-to-month contract.

Mr. Chairman: Optimally, the ratio we were told is one for 250 maximum. Could you give us an indication of what the current ratio is in the school system in Trinidad and Tobago?

Ms. Smith: With regard to social workers it would be approximately 1:6. Sorry, 1:600.

Mr. Chairman: So we basically need to expand the population by about 50 per cent to get to the 1:300?

Ms. Smith: That would be correct.

Mr. Chairman: Very well. This is critical information because these were recommendations that we made about a year ago and we are not seeing much traction, but I will ask Minister West to come in. Is there a follow-up, a burning follow-up?

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: I just want to enquire. You said 1:600, right? How many—what is the population in one school? And the population in the school, meaning, how many students and how many deans or counsellors are assigned to how many number of schools? In other words, is it that one dean per school or is it that the deans or the counsellors or the psychologists are roving?

Miss Ameen: Social workers.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: The social workers, are they roving?

Ms. Smith: Member, in the secondary schools we have some officers, one per secondary school, but the vast majority, for example, in the primary they are roving so they address a cluster of schools. So it is approximately 1:3 schools or

1:6 schools as I indicated earlier based on the size of the district and the shortfall and staffing in some of our districts. So it varies in number. With respect to deans I will let the DSS answer that question.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: So therefore, the earlier answer where you indicated that there is 1:600—

Ms. Smith: That is general in terms if you look at the total population of students in the schools.

Mr. Chairman: A very important statistic. It means that the establishment ought to recruit about 50 per cent more than what it currently has. So I would now ask Minister West and I want to emphasize she is not with the Ministry of Education. Minister West is with the Ministry of Finance.

Miss West: Thank you, Chair. I just want to change gears a little bit and look at the issue of cyber-bullying. In the report that I read, it seemed that the Ministry's focus was in respect of control of the availability and use of cell phones. So if that is correct, can you give me some detail on what your policy is with respect to cell phones? And secondly, have you gone or are you going beyond that to deal with legislation if that is necessary setting policies and guidelines in respect of cyber-bullying?

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Mr. Phillip will respond to that question. Mr. Phillip.

Mr. Phillip: Member, the Ministry of Education does have a mobile cell phone policy, but it also has a policy that speaks to cyber-bullying, a policy that speaks to responsible use and a policy that speaks to students with general maintenance of integrity and the preservation of a digital footprint when using social media and the Internet.

In particular, the cell phone policy is one that allows or facilitates teachers to maximize the use of these devices for teaching and learning. The Ministry sees

these devices as imperative for keeping step with technology and for maximizing the power and potential of these devices.

In particular though, we stress responsible use especially when it leads to or references discipline and violence. So the three-pronged approach as identified in our policy speaks to—first off, ensuring that students maintain an identity that is observable when using the Internet and that they in turn have open relationships with their peers and teachers in a manner that can be tracked and followed in an official manner.

So we have in our policy then, in our social media policy conditions that speak to teachers, administrators having clear and finite guidelines that determine how they interact with students, such that principals and administrators might be aware of the sites that are being perused on the social media platforms that they are using and that parents as well are privy to what is being exposed or how students are being exposed to those particular social media.

We also speak to the laws of Trinidad and Tobago and the policy stresses, first off, a zero-tolerance approach to any infraction in terms of areas and instances where students and/or teachers may utilize this media that would contravene the laws of Trinidad and Tobago. So having said that then, the policy and a copy of the policy was made available to the panel. The policy goes to finite detail in a strategic way and allows schools in turn to operationalize those policies according to their various environments.

Mr. Chairman: A follow-up question on that and that is with respect to cyber-bullying, because these electronic devices are the basic media which would be used to engage in that kind of activity. If a student is—if it has been determined that a student has engaged in cyber-bullying of another student, do you have a policy with respect to by removing his cell phone or ensuring that he does not have this

device in school. Do you have a policy for that particular problem?

Mr. Phillip: Chairman, we speak to that issue strategically and the policy goes quite clear in speaking, first off, to zero tolerance to any infraction and adherent to the laws of Trinidad and Tobago. But it allows operational policies to be developed at the level of the school. So while the Ministry's ICT in Education cyber-bullying policy gives overarching strategic guidelines, schools are given that leeway to make their operational policies at their level. As in a case and an example there are some schools that would take away or confiscate the cell phones when students enter in the morning and give it back to them in the afternoon. There are other schools that use other means, other strategies and that may be the purview of the school in terms of keeping in line with the Ministry's policy but having their own operational policies at the school level.

Miss West: A follow-up on that, Chair. You said that the policy contemplates adherence to the law, the existing laws of Trinidad and Tobago. Has the Ministry done an assessment of whether the existing laws are adequate for the purpose of control of the issues and whether you should be making recommendations for change of those laws.

Mr. Phillip: Member, there has been in February of last year, 2017, officers of the Ministry met with the police service and an inter-ministerial team that sought to further the discussion on cybercrime and by extension cyber-bullying, not in the schools only, but in the community at large. That particular approach has been ongoing although that particular committee has not yet met since that initial meeting. But we have been liaising with our own legal department at the Ministry and we have factored in the existing laws as we know it to ensure that the principals and administrators are guided by those laws as they encourage and facilitate the use of digital devices in schools.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Thank you very much. I want to have a follow-up with TUTTA on that issue and I do not want to get sidetracked, but cyber-bullying is part of the problem as well. Have your teachers reported to you that the use of these electronic devices in schools is really disrupting the teaching process in any significant way?

Mr. Doodhai: Mr. Chairman, the reports that we have had from our members do in fact support what you are saying, that the use of these devices have a negative impact on the teaching-learning process and it does in fact disrupt the process.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. And if you have any recommendation to make to the Committee, please do so, could be as was indicated prior that the devices are placed in a secure place in the morning, given back in the afternoon and they are not held on the person during the classroom hours, yes.

Ms. Robertson: Mr. Chairman, while the phones and other electronic devices create problems sometimes during the school day, it does not really start all the time at the school, because there is no control that the teacher has when the child is at home. Because much of the physical violence stems from the cyber-bullying that starts sometimes months before and that happens when the children are at home a number of times—well, the after-school hours, which teachers have no control.

There is also a concern, some schools as the gentleman indicated, teachers collect these phones. Sometimes we have an issue with that because there have been times when teachers have been made liable and have to replace phones for students because students come and complain that something is missing or it is not working and now you may not know because a teacher might just collect a phone that may actually come in dead, but it may be an attempt to get that person to have a new device.

Now, we are not saying that the phones should not be allowed in the schools, because there are also reports of where phones have been used positively to help enhance a particular lesson or so at the school. So we would in fact look at the—

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much for that intervention and maybe then the solution would have to be that cyber-bullying has to be made into a crime. Cyber-bullying, if it is made into a criminal offence and we can track the IP addresses of the cyber-bully, then a criminal offence has been committed and that particular offender can be made to answer for his infraction of the law. But MP Jennings-Smith, you had a follow-up.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: I just want to say I agree with the 2nd Vice-President, because it is a message that is sent through your phones. Cyber-bullying, it happens anytime. and when you give back the students the phone they could receive a threat. What I am going to ask is, what is the school doing to initiate a programme to say that it is intolerable and unacceptable in the schools? And you know, something that happens in this country is that, when people do things and the consequences of their action. How do we deal with them? Is there a consequence to the students' action what they did? I believe maybe they would be handed over to the police because it could be investigated and I think it is an issue, a burning issue worldwide and very challenging in coming up with strategies.

Mr. Chairman: We would have to be looking at whether cyber-bullying as a criminal offence is punishable or should be made to be punishable and that individuals, whatever their age who engage in this type of action would be committing a criminal offence. We have to be looking at that. What is the response of the Ministry or the stakeholders on this particular issue since this seems now to be perhaps one of the triggers and the generators of what we are seeing. You see it is not a surprise to me that the incidence of school violence is

correlated with the rise of the use of electronic devices. I am not saying that it is causing it, but it is correlated. And since it is correlated there may very well be, from my perspective, the need to look at criminalizing the abuse of the technology. Yes, MP Newallo-Hosein.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Chair. Just before I continue with my question, I just wanted to ask the NPTA on how do you as a body look at cyber-bullying and what are your suggestions as to how do you circumvent this type of behaviour?

Mrs. Ali-Boodoosingh: We have discussed the use of cell phones in school. We have asked our parents, why is it necessary for you to give your child a phone to go to school, especially a very expensive phone with all the features on it? Most times they would indicate, well, I want to know where my child is, especially when school is dismissed, because of the violence in society and the social ills. We discussed it and we did discuss this with the Minister of Education also, that I do not see the necessity of the child using the phone for education purpose in the schools.

So what we suggested is that we look for a phone that is just able to call. Not all the fancy features and that will diminish the cyber-bullying. A very simple phone, and we say okay, let us get a provider for the phone and the parents buy that particular phone because it is a complex situation that we need to look for a solution and it is an added responsibility when these children have the phones with all the features.

It is an added responsibility for the teachers in school to be looking at the students and the use of the phone and most times they would not use it during class time. And we know that teachers, although they have duty of care, we have teachers who, you know, choose not to exercise duty of care in the schools,

especially at lunchtime. So we are saying, is it necessary for the children to have these phones in the school? And if it is necessary why not just have a simple phone and the student should also be thought cell phone etiquette.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Well, just to—I am looking at your colleagues' heads and they are indicating that it is not going to work; and it is not going to work because of course cyber-bullying does not start and end at school. There is a point that was raised earlier by MP Jennings-Smith about the anger and the hate and I will add unforgiveness. And the reason why I am stating that is because of the fact that a lot of this type of bullying takes place because there is a lot of anger, a lot of hate and a lot of unforgiveness and it does not stem from school, it stems from the home. And this is why I think it is important for the NPTA to become more involved in what happens at home. Not just what takes place in school, because what happens in school is just a manifestation of what takes place at the home.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Could I follow up with maybe a solution because I think that is a very valuable question? Where the home fails, the state institution—called the school—may have to compensate and I am simply wondering whether in terms of the curriculum, you see, in our last hearing we did recommend that we focus on things like multiple intelligences, we are not going to only emphasize the physics, chemistry, maths, but creativity, the arts, talents and so on so that the outlets are there for students of different intelligences to exploit.

And from the perspective of the Ministry of Education, do you have as a matter of education policy courses in interpersonal relations, courses in anger management, or modules with respect to ethics, proper behaviour, etiquette, courtesies. Do you have that as part of the curriculum so that students who may not be exposed to it at home are exposed to it in the school environment? Is it well established or is it in its nascent stages? Religious instructions or if it is a

non-denominational school, will instructions in ethics, proper behaviour, morality, courtesies—

Mr. Roopchan: Yes, Chair. The Ministry of Education in our last two cycles of curriculum revision we have seen it fit to address those said issues and therefore our curriculum that we have implemented in schools right now would have been an integrated type of curriculum that will consider authenticity in implementation. You would be aware that in the past we had curricula that were, shall I say, disjointed, that we implemented different subjects separately and then we hope that people would bring it together. But, we have an authentic way of implementing curriculum now where we are not emphasizing those borders, but we are making it blurred and therefore we teach by using context, situations for problem solving, situations that would involve all the intelligences of the students.

So what we are actually doing in the present school curriculum we are implementing the various visual and performing arts, character, citizenship, education. We also have Health and Family Life Education in the system and it is mandated at the primary level, it is integrated into the curriculum and at the secondary level we have it as a stand-alone subject for the lower secondary level.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. So you can give the Committee the assurance that in every primary school in Trinidad and Tobago the teachers are mandated to offer certain modules on Health and Family Life Education, from when?—Standard 1, is it Infants 1 or Standard—

Mr. Roopchan: From Infants.

Mr. Chairman: From Infants they are taught that. Since when you have initiated this particular programme?

Mr. Roopchan: The last revision of curricula—well, we started in 2013 I think when we did the primary curriculum review and that curriculum should be fully

implemented at all levels at the primary school at this time. So it has been there.

Mr. Chairman: And teachers have been trained, you have training material prepared so that teachers can refer to them as they discharge that particular mandate?

Mr. Roopchan: We have so done. We have also liaised with the tertiary providers to ensure that they have made that part of their Character and Health and Family Life Education, that it is also addressed in the training of teachers who we will employ.

Mr. Chairman: Very well, thank you.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Chair, if I do recall, I remember when we had the initial enquiry there were concerns as to the health and life factor and that a number of schools had opposed teaching it and that opposition came also from some parents, and I want to know where we have reached in regard to that?

Ms. Smith: May I just add something? While we have some persons in resisting the HFLE programme I must say that the guidance curriculum ensures the delivery of all the topics that you just listed, the anger management, the conflict resolution skills which are delivered through the guidance curriculum within all the schools where we do have the staff.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, just a follow-up, especially to our colleague there. A teacher has delivered and I am trying to get the operability of this programme. She has delivered the courses but she is finding that there are a couple of children in her classroom who are continuing to misbehave, they are not absorbing the information. But if there are no school guidance officers who will then provide the additional support, is it then that having the curriculum change alone is going to be inadequate without the school guidance support? I wanted to get your perspective on that.

Ms. Smith: Okay, thank you for that Chairman. So while we may not—the instances if we do not have a resident guidance officer all principals are fully aware that they make the deferrals to the district officer, which is the Guidance Officer II or SSSD, the multidisciplinary team whereby we will send personnel to either do group work with a particular group of students who may not be reforming or may be giving some issues or problems, we do sent the personnel to work and support the schools.

Mr. Chairman: When? The question is, is it going to be a month from today because in changing behaviour I think as soon as the infraction is committed you ought to alert the student that something wrong has happened and he ought to change his way. If you were to seek to amend a month later he may have forgotten what he or she did wrong and so I think clearly there is a gap. We do need to have, from what I am seeing now, a closer association between the teachers who are trained in family life education and the students who may not be absorbing the lectures with assistance from the school guidance officers. And unless we get that ratio right I think we are going to have persisting problems.

Miss West: Chair, a follow-up. A comment made by the President of the NPTA. You indicated that one of the things that is needed is a telephone etiquette training. I am wondering on whose shoulders you place that responsibility. Because I find that more and more we are asking our teachers to parent children and I want to know what role the NPTA sees in moving away from that trend and getting the parents to parent their children more.

Mrs. Ali-Boodoosingh: Okay, how we see it is that if parents are trained on the cell phone etiquette then they can transfer that knowledge to their children. Also, it could be done in the school through different programmes. For example, you have the student councils in schools and then you would have, I am sure you would

have periods in school where you would—like the home room period where you talk on different topics, you can bring it in there.

Miss West: You have not answered my question as to what is the role of the NPTA in finding the solution, what do you see your role as?

Mrs. Ali-Boodoosingh: Well, we see our role as training the parents, finding some way to train the parents, get them together. As I told you all, we have our structure, units, region, right? And we bring them together and we do a training with them, so that we would know what behaviour is expected with the children, with their cell phones at the schools.

Miss West: Okay, and I am assuming that the people who come voluntarily to your meetings are parents who are already engaged. Do you have a plan for parents who are not engaged?

Mrs. Ali-Boodoosingh: Okay, well, how I look at it, you know, we are talking about negatives, indiscipline and violence. But if we look at the proactive way we see the symptoms and we try to correct it before it gets out of hand. So I am saying that not all our parents are able to come in the school between half past eight and three, because of work. So they may be able to come later. And the parent conferencing is important. Teacher and parent conferencing is important if you want to see a change in behaviour and you want to make a difference with the children's behaviour. And why not, why can we not adopt a programme where you use the after-school hours and you do what we call a parent academy?

So you have the parents who, the children who are identified with the gaps or with certain values that they need improvement. You get these parents on evenings, you know, establish something like a parent academy where you can talk, conference, advise, counsel the parents so that they can help their children. And I think that will help a lot in improving the behaviour of the children because

sometimes you have to think out of the box and you have to meet the parents at their convenience to.

Mr. Chairman: Just a follow-up. In our last enquiry, during the last enquiry— [*Crosstalk*—could you take off the mike?

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: Sorry.

Mr. Chairman: We did encounter a problem where parents could not, during school hours, visit the schools because many of them are employed. And that the recommendation was made that the Ministry of Education make representation with the employers of Trinidad and Tobago to provide the necessary hour during the work week, or alternatively to have meetings on a Saturday so that the parents can be represented. Has that been followed up on so that you meet on a Saturday or at least you get time off from work to attend PTA meetings?

Mrs. Ali-Boodoosingh: In conversing with parents I know from school to school it differs. Sometimes if the need is to have a meeting on a Saturday I know some PTAs call their meetings on a Saturday. I know some employers do give the parents time off. They have the letter—the principal or the PTA President would sign it, stamp it, but it is ad hoc, it is not something like a rule for all.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, very well. It is something we would be looking at, yes. MP Jennings-Smith.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: I want to conclude on some issues and I want to go back to Mr. Doodhai describing the situation at school as a plague, right? And when you talk about plague you talk about public health approach, and when you talk about public health approach you talk about all the stakeholders being involved. I mean, this is no easy solution and I really want to express my support to you all because I know it is really a difficult task because you have different stakeholders.

And listening to some discussions this morning I felt that maybe we do not

have any problems in Trinidad, because I am hearing all the solutions and all the answers and all the quiet responses to the varying issues that we face, because we face criminality at school level now and different instruments used. We talk about the cyber-bullying, we talk about the phones, we talk about violence, hand violence, we talk about fighting, we talk about safe environment for teachers at school and I just want to ask and recommend that we seek the help of restorative justice expertise. There are practitioners in Trinidad and Tobago who from time to time come within my view too and within my discussions and I feel there is the need to take it, because we are now forging a movement, a movement to maintain peace and serenity and harmony for the learning in our school environment and, Mr. Chairman, I just want to conclude with that piece of information and to encourage you all to keep working hard because it is a lot of problems within our system.

Mr. Chairman: A brief response from the Ministry of Education, because that refers to policy?

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: As the hon. member has indicated that there is a need to generate peace and she had indicated that the Ministry of Education would like, again, probably would have engaged in using this particular methodology, but it is just that, probably we moved away from it without even analyzing the data to see whether or not it was actually working in our system. So I am thinking it is, I mean, once we have all our teams on board we have the training in terms of the SSSD, I think it is a good way that we can consider and move forward.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. In order to rehabilitate the bully, because he has problems, and in order to counsel he or she who has been bullied we do need the trained support staff in the school system and the Committee has learnt that they are not there in the numbers which would be necessary to make the

difference.

So MP Antoine has to come in. Do you want to come in?

Brig. Gen. Antoine: Yeah.

Mr. Chairman: All right, but let us give—colleagues just a brief intervention, it is 12.11 p.m. and this session can go on, but I have to terminate at 12.30 p.m. So in terms of time management I will ask colleague Brig. Antoine to pose his question. Is it a follow-up, Sen. Ameen? After Brig. Antoine has posed his substantive question a follow-up from Sen. Ameen, then it is going to be a substantive question from Deputy Speaker Forde. And we will come back to the left. And I have not asked any of my questions yet. [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Brig. Gen. Antoine: Morning, again. The Minister of Education in his response on the 12th of January in the House of Representatives says that the Ministry will be developing a positive reinforcement procedure which would focus on rewarding desired behaviour displayed by students and serve to promote the recurrence of the same. You are looking at a tangible and intangible reward system.

Could the Ministry explain how this positive reinforcement arrangement would work and the time frame for its implementation and what are the tangible and intangible rewards being offered to students for this desirable conduct?

Mr. Roopchan: Member, in dealing with situations like that we have been mandating our principals to provide the positive reinforcement for students who are showing that they are conforming and they are showing signs of improving. In the school system we know that there are opportunities that students who have been deviant and have shown signs of realigning themselves, so to speak, that they are given opportunities to serve as class prefects, as mentors, and so forth. That is just one instance of where we can have that positive reinforcement. We have put together a team involving supervision and curriculum to explore other ways in

which we can address this.

Brig. Gen. Antoine: Are they on board with this positive reinforcement procedure being adopted by the Ministry of Education?

Mr. Roopchan: Not totally there. Member, what I can say though is that within recent time our engagement with our stakeholders has been very intense and I think that it is a good sign.

Mr. Thompson: Tomorrow.

Mr. Roopchan: In fact we are meeting with them tomorrow. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Chairman: Could we get a response from TUTTA?

Mr. Forde: They now plan that there. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Chairman: A response from TUTTA as to whether their engagement is very intense as indicated by Mr. Roopchan, the Chief Education Officer. Is that so, is that not so or is it wishful thinking?

Mr. Doodhai: The engagement is intense in certain aspects, but with respect to the issue that was raised by Mr. Antoine there has been no engagement in that regard.

Mr. Chairman: It will be intense then in short order. Very well.

Brig. Gen. Antoine: And is there a time frame for the implementation, Ministry of Education?

Mr. Roopchan: We are optimistic that we will have this thing in the not-too-distant future, but again we will have to—it will be contingent on our engagement with stakeholders.

Mr. Chairman: Sen. Ameen, your follow-up.

Miss Ameen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. All of the initiatives discussed would really be ineffective if we do not have the adequate staff to implement. Earlier there was an indication that advertisements have gone out for contract positions,

for School Social Workers and Guidance Counsellors. My question is whether the positions to be filled or the number of contracts being offered, if that will then create a full complement; the full complement that is required as well as, what is your time frame, when should these people be, when are the interviews, the deadline for interviews, when would those people be hired?

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Hon. Member, with respect to the numbers it would be, the positions are fixed, the numbers are normally Cabinet approved. So the numbers are fixed. But with respect to the process we have shortlisted—the interviews have started for the School Social Workers last week and we have scheduled for the Guidance Counsellors, it would be around March or April of 2018. So we are probably looking at June. I know it seems long but this—you know how the process works because we had about 437 applications and 652. So we have shortlisted and we are down to the numbers that at least meet the criteria.

Miss Ameen: But will that fill your requirement for the number of School Social Workers and the guidance—

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: What I am saying is I did not look at it in terms of what was asked, in terms of the optimal ratio. What I know, it would be fixed against the positions that we have in terms of the Cabinet. So I did not look at—I would be honest, I need to provide you with that. I think we decided that we would have, but I did not look at it from that angle. I just looked at it in terms of the positions that we have as Cabinet approved. So it means that if we need additional we would have go back to Cabinet but we would have had a merit list from which we can then draw from, from the interviews that we have.

Miss Ameen: All right. Well, Mr. Chairman, through you, I want to ask if the Committee could be provided with the optimal number of School Social Workers as well as Guidance Counsellors required in the schools so then we can look at

filling that gap.

Mr. Chairman: But I understand that we have that information from the last hearing, that information came. What we were seeking to enquire today is how close are we to the optimum and we are told that we are very far. But the Permanent Secretary has indicated that the interviews are ongoing so we should revisit come September because for the next academic year, 2018/2019, it is then the hope of the Committee that the ratio would be enhanced for the next academic year because there is going to be a period of time necessary to recruit and retain the particular staff. I will now ask Deputy Speaker to pose one of his substantive questions.

Mr. Forde: With regard to the Ministerial response you would have received from the Ministry of Education, and to tie it in with a statement made in his opening remarks, Mr. Doodhai, with regard to vacant posts and there being a lot of vacancies and then also tying in the Permanent Secretary, Ms. Baptiste-Simmons' statement that vacant posts with bodies. With regard to attendance and punctuality of the teachers in schools, what role will that play with regard to violence in schools? It probably "come in" too late.

Mr. Chairman: The absentee teachers, late teachers, do you have a programme for substituting teachers when the teachers are absent? So this is a query that we would like to pose at this time.

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: There is a substitute system and it is computerized from the schools. I tested it about two months ago to see if it was actually working. So we have a substitute, whether it is working efficiently I will have to ask the DSS. But I tested it myself when a school contacted me with respect to the need of substitute teachers. I went online and tried and told her what to do.

With respect to punctuality, the Ministry of Education is working along with

the Teaching Service Commission with respect to looking at punctuality and regularity and treating with teachers who we have felt above, you know, because I think the progressive discipline commences at 180 minutes late and we are looking at that along with the Teaching Service Commission.

Mr. Forde: Is it possible that we can—I know you may not have the information now, but could the Committee be provided with the statistics in terms of, again, attendance, punctuality, in some of the various, same districts you all would have identified; the same districts you all have identified. If it is that we can get some statistics in terms of the attendance and punctuality as we go along, because again, if again there are no teachers present it means that the children could have a field day.

Mr. Chairman: Basically, it is the seeking of statistics which maybe could correlate the teacher absenteeism, teacher lateness with school violence. So if we can get data on school districts with high instances of violence, is it that it is correlated with high instances of teacher absenteeism we would be able to see maybe there is a solution there. But out of curiosity, does the Ministry of Education have a website where someone who wishes to get any information on protocols and procedures to be followed by teachers and pupils for anything, including becoming a substitute teacher, is readily available on your website or do you have a website?

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: www.moe.gov.tt.

Mr. Chairman: So if I want to be a substitute teacher, can I go on that website and find information on how to apply to be one?

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Yes. Okay. I believe because I think most of the information is present there, but I would like the opportunity to double-check for that specific one, but I know that most of the information, applications,

registration, everything is online.

Mr. Chairman: And just out of curiosity again, if a student has had to miss classes because she was pregnant and gave birth to a child and has to be reintegrated into the school, can the parent of that child or the child go on to the Ministry's website to find out the protocol that has to be followed so that reintegration is going to be easy and facilitated?

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Ms. Smith will respond.

Ms. Smith: The information regarding reintegration to schools will not really be available on the website. However, any parent given, following pregnancy can return to the school principal and given our protocols, should be and would be allowed back into the school. If that principal for any reason is resistant, that parent can seek assistance from the district management team which may be comprised of the Guidance Officer II, Senior School Social Worker and/or School Supervisors and we will ensure that that child is placed in a school upon case conferencing with the parent and the school.

Mr. Chairman: And again, is it that the parent who may perhaps have a problem with getting this child reintegrated can communicate electronically via the email address of the School Supervisor so that the actual communication process can be made easier? Do you have the email contact for the school supervisor in case of any problems or the School Social Worker or the school official who is responsible for navigating his way through the bureaucracy?

Mr. Thompson: Chair, that interface takes place at the Education District Office. At this time, the electronic interface is not available.

Mr. Chairman: May I recommend then that you do make electronic interface since all the students are using computers for cyber-bullying, or many of them, we can use the computers for ease of communication too. And so it should be used for

the positive purposes. So I would recommend that ease of communication be facilitated. Minister West, you have a follow-up?

Miss West: Yes, just quickly. I am interested in finding out what TUTTA sees its role in addressing the issue of absenteeism and tardiness among its members.

Ms. Robertson: Member West, we continue to ensure that our teachers are guided, that their regular attendance and their punctuality at the schools is of course of importance to the proper functioning of the school and development. So we continue to remind our members—I know our colleagues on the other side do not readily believe this, but we do admonish them at times when they come before us and they are made aware and we do remind them through our study circles and other things that TUTTA has to reach its members that they must be regular and punctual at the job site because it not only creates problems with the students but with their own colleagues because it adds additional stress and pressure to the teacher who might have found themselves to school on time.

But before I finish, while the PS has said that interviews and so have started for some student support services what is not being said is that some of the persons who are now on the month-to-month contracts have had to reapply for their very positions and this creates a sort of discord and discomfort among the members of student support services. And those are some of the many problems that we have with the persons who apply.

Student Support Services Division, as far as we are aware to date, does not have an actual head and she also made the point that while there are vacancies with bodies that too creates a problem within the management of the school, because if I am sitting performing the duties and in some instances not even being remunerated for that, then my ability to function where I may be a head or a dean and also still be attached to many classes, my class load has not been reduced to fill those

positions, then I can aptly do that and we have a number of members who have come to us complaining about being in such a position.

So yes, there are bodies acting or performing the duties at the schools but they are not being able to adequately do so because they are still holding classes that they have to attend to outside of what a dean or a head should have in order to really do their job properly. And in terms of the teachers, the ones to respond when a teacher is absent that programme—substitute teachers—that is ineffective. I know the PS would have to double-check, but as a teacher who would have tried to utilize that at a school, especially the geography of where some of them come from, while they should have bases and especially the primary school level you do not get the benefit of having a substitute teacher come to you in apt time.

So in most times and if you look at how our schools are built you cannot get a substitute teacher before lunchtime, especially if your school is in Blanchisseuse or in Toco. I am just calling—those at the remote areas, but even right in the main frame areas you are not getting somebody to respond to your school and we already have many schools that are understaffed by maternity and otherwise.

Mr. Chairman: Ms. Robertson, I am running out of time. It is 12.27 p.m. I know the NPTA has one short intervention, please a short intervention. I will ask my colleague Mr. Forde to raise his last question before and Miss West you have a question?

Miss West: No.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, very well. Okay, NPTA.

Mr. Mendoza: Chairman, members, my whole thing—I am hearing of absenteeism and punctuality but I am really not hearing anything about our teachers on the dress code. I know teachers do not have a dress code and when I say teachers, I am speaking in particular to our female teachers that our boys are

now targeting. I am saying that because I have been around a lot of schools where our teachers are being targeted by our students, our senior students in secondary schools and we are not hearing about that. Teachers are being touched inappropriately and teachers are leaving the classroom and are now sitting in the staffroom because of that.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. I leave that for the teachers union, TUTTA, to address with their members so that if there are matters with respect to dress and so on I think that would be a matter that I would leave for you to address. But MP Forde.

Mr. Forde: With regard to, as we are on NPTA, you mentioned that you have roughly 300 active PTAs and some of the schools are not affiliated. How is that possible that you cannot be affiliated? Is it not an automatic process? Is it not a compulsory process that once you have a PTA you automatically fall within the NPTA?

Mrs. Ali-Boodoosingh: No. You have to affiliate and pay a subscription fee every year to be a member. So not all PTAs are affiliated to us.

Mr. Forde: And then my last question, Mr. Chairman, the Learning Enhancement Centres is grouped into educational districts—Caroni, St. George East, South-eastern and Victoria. South-eastern would consist of what area to be exact?

Ms. Smith: Rio Claro, Princes Town, Mayaro.

Mr. Forde: And I am seeing the number of students who are assessed based on the document that you all provided were 200 students. Is it as a result of the density of schools in the area or is it that it is a lot of repeat offenders there, that 200 figure that students that would have accessed these services?

Ms. Smith: Deputy Chair, the reason for the high numbers in South-eastern was because the first Learning Enhancement Centre began in South-eastern. For the

year 2015, the actually LEC began in April of 2015 and that district was the only operational LEC in the country.

Mr. Forde: So students from throughout Trinidad went there?

Ms. Smith: No, no, Sir.

Mr. Forde: That is not the interpretation.

Ms. Smith: In 2015, so the LEC is a district base. So that the first, the reason that the documentation, we would have provided the figures would have seen that high number was because it included the original onset from 2015 to present and it is not because it is all students went to the South-eastern district.

Mr. Chairman: And colleagues it is 12.31 p.m. I am a minute and 21 seconds over my allotted time. I will have to close. But before I close, please permit the Chairman of the Committee to have the last word. What I have gleaned from today's meeting is that there is supposed to be a disciplining committee in all schools but there is inadequate communication amongst the stakeholders. We hope that the stakeholders will work together. The PTA, the TUTTA, the Ministry of Education, the school administration and the social workers, that is a critical element will work together to have the disciplinary committee functioning and functional.

We were told that what was recommended in our report that critical ratio of 1:250 students at the outer limit is around maybe 1:600. So there is a huge gap there with respect to the kind of support that we need in the school system for students who have a need for emotional support—that is, those who are being bullied and those who are the perpetrators; both would need to be guided in a timely manner. I know we were told that the students eventually seek the guidance but there is such a thing as a timely intervention so that the problem does not get out of hand.

So we will be looking at how efficient and how successful you are with respect, over the next few months, to getting up to that ratio. It came up that cyber-bullying may very well be the initial source and the trigger for actual physical fights and physical bullying. We would need to be looking at criminalizing bullying at the cyber level, that once it is a criminal offence it means that the devices that we have so critical now for communication will not be used for activities which are injurious to societies.

We did not focus at all on the issue that we raised on multiple intelligences. This is for the Ministry of Education and the curriculum officers. We now know that students come to the school systems with a range of talents but the schools in general in Trinidad and Tobago have focused on the training that most of us have had—Physics, Maths, Chemistry, Algebra. But there is a need for students who are not talented in physics to be exposed to creativity and to different types of programmes which would make use of their skills because we were told by the people in the know that if they are frustrated in their mathematics class they may want to find another outlet to become a superstar which would be an improper outlet.

So we would want to be looking to see what the curriculum reform exercise in the school is. I am very happy to hear that family life education is being taught by schools, teachers from Infant 1 level in the schools so we await to see what programme—I am sure it will have a beneficial impact, but it will take time as the cohort that comes through the system. We have discussed at length a number of matters but really the need for communication among the stakeholders in my mind is critical. Everywhere we see problems it is because the parts are not meshing together and the activities and the actions of one sector, say the Ministry of Education, may not be implemented at the school level for many reasons. We

would be monitoring the situation, we would be looking at it carefully, aimed at a solution which would lessen the instances.

MP Jennings-Smith spoke about restorative, the question is we need to be changing our mind as to how do we get young people to change their behaviour, anger management. I suspect family life education will deal with some of these issues so we await to see the outcome. Education as we know is one of those time-consuming processes. It is not one year in and out. It takes five years or seven years in the primary school, it may take another five years in the secondary school, so we would be subjecting the students to this type of treatment, family life education, courtesies and so on. I do not know if you have courses now in civics, it used to—when I was in primary school way back when we had courses in civics, understanding who the Minister of Health was and so on. We were taught these things, we were taught about how to function in society, how the society was structured. I am hoping that we get back to that and our students are anchored from Infants 1 in being part of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago as productive citizens.

Before I close I will ask the representatives of the organizations who have been here with us to give us brief closing remarks. I will ask the PTA to give us a few seconds of closing remarks, then I will ask the TTUTA and I will give the Ministry of Education the final word. PTA.

Mrs. Ali-Boodoosingh: Chairman, we have realized that we have a different kind of child in the school now. The profile of the child is different. It is a 21st Century child and so we are living in a dynamic society and education is not business as usual. We have to think out of the box. Sometimes it is very complex and intricate to deal with the students and of course we need to have that communication between all stakeholders so that we can put all hands on deck and solve the

problems in schools so that our students, our children, would not be denied their basic right of education.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you PTA. TTUTA.

Mr. Doodhai: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think what came out here this morning, if we did not know it before, is that there is a need for greater collaboration and communication between the various stakeholders if we are to address this issue of violence and indiscipline in the school. So I hope that going forward that there can be this greater collaboration and communication between the Ministry of Education, the NPTA and TTUTA. I just want to say, before I conclude, that from our side here we would be submitting some recommendations to the Secretary of the Committee with respect to addressing issues with school violence and indiscipline.

Mr. Chairman: And to facilitate the communication, may I recommend you exchange email addresses. Email is free, I like it, it is cheap and it is instantaneous and you can communicate effectively in that way. Thank you very much. The Ministry of Education.

Mrs. Baptiste-Simmons: Yes, it has indeed been a pleasure. The team, we recognize, as was said earlier, that we need to collaborate and when we collaborate it must not be as you say on paper, but that we actually ensure that we are creating peaceful spaces in our learning environment and it means that the Ministry of Education in engaging our teachers, we also have to engage with TTUTA. In engaging our parents we need to engage with NPTA.

As we move forward we would like to let you know that in terms of multiple intelligences we have been looking at that. If you go through the *Guardian* of today you would see a young lady by the name of Judith Crichlow a graphic artist. She was one of our graduates from our schools. We are seeing fashion, persons

coming up with fashion design, we are seeing persons coming out with PE, Physical Education, kinesiology. I am trying to remember the various areas.

So we have in terms of the curriculum reform we are seeing where students, their multiple intelligences are being considered and we are offering—one of the things that you said is ensuring that our children are actually engaged in the learning process that our teachers are present and they are there, that the School Social Workers are there, that the whole team that is required to ensure that our children are in the learning environments and that we can achieved the learning outcome for Trinidad and Tobago, that it is done. I think that is the message that the Ministry of Education would like to take away from this meeting today.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Permanent Secretary and a final word from the Chair. I cannot function without data and it would be very good if the stakeholders can collect information so that we could compare the instances of violence in 2018 or in 2019 on a school-by-school basis. And if we are able to use the data to see how the trend is behaving, hopefully it should be downward, we would know that the interventions are working. Without the data we will not know if the interventions that we recommend are successful or not.

So we need much more data and it should be possible for TTUTA to assist because teachers are in the frontline, they should be able to record and report to the head office on a weekly basis the instances they have seen and therefore on a yearly basis we ought to know how schools are performing with respect to these violent instances and maybe instances also of cyber-bullying.

I want to at this point to thank all our officials for being here. I want to thank of course members of the Committee of our Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration for participating in this very critical discussion. I want to thank members of the media who have been covering us and

to all of our viewers and listeners in the public on Parliament Channel and on the YouTube, *ParlView*. I want to say thank you for being here with us and usually we get recommendations also from members of the public who have expertise we invite you, if you have any comment to make on the proceedings this morning please submit to the Secretariat so that our recommendations will be informed by as many stakeholders as possible. At this point in time I want to bring this meeting to a close. This meeting at 12.42 p.m., 12 minutes overtime, is now adjourned I would say good afternoon and thank you.

12.42 p.m.: *Meeting adjourned.*