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**Summary of Proceedings  
Public Hearing**

**Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration**

Held on Wednesday April 20, 2016

**Inquiry:** An inquiry into the current level of violence among students in schools with particular focus on physical and cyberbullying.

**Venue:** The public hearing was held on Wednesday April 20, 2016 from 10:17 a.m. to 1:20 p.m. in the J. Hamilton Maurice Room, Mezzanine Floor, Office of the Parliament, Tower D, the Port of Spain International Waterfront Centre, 1A Wrightson Road, Port of Spain.

**Committee members**

The following committee members were present:

1. Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir – Chairman
2. Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine, MP
3. Mr. Esmond Forde, MP
4. Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein, MP
5. Ms. Khadijah Ameen
6. Mr. Hafeez Ali
7. Ms. Nadine Stewart

**Witnesses who appeared**

Principals and students of the following Primary and Secondary Schools appeared before the Committee:

Primary Schools:

**i) Canaan Presbyterian Primary School**

Mr. Daniel Sahadeo - Principal

**ii) Carenage Boys' Government Primary School**

Mr. Lance Mottley - Principal

Mr. Kareem Spears - Student

**iii) Chaguanas Government Primary School**

Ms. Melissa Mitchell - Principal (Ag.)

**iv) Laventille Boys' Government Primary School**

Mr. Carel Lewis - Principal

Mr. Mishael Henry - Student

**v) Moruga (Holy Trinity) A.C. Primary School**

Mr. Eric Christopher Floyd - Principal

Mr. Rennie Nicholas - Student

Secondary Schools:

**i) ASJA Boys' College, Charlieville;**

Mr. Faizal Rahaman - Principal

Mr. Raoul Kunjah - Student

**ii) Barataria South Secondary School;**

Mrs. Sharlene Hicks-Raeburn - Principal

Mr. Leonardo Brutus - Student

**iii) Brazil Secondary School;**

Mr. Robert Walters - Dean

**iv) Chaguanas South Secondary School;**

Mrs. Romeeda Ali - Principal

Ms. Charlene Charles - Student

**v) Naparima Girls' High School**

Mrs. Carolyn Bally-Gosine - Principal

Ms. Danielle Seunarine - Student

**vi) Presentation College, Chaguanas**

Mr. Gary Ribeiro - Principal

Mr. Tarick Boodoo - Student

**vii) Russel Latapy High School**

Mrs. Alicia Lucien-Baptiste - Principal

Mr. McKiyah Joseph - Student

**Key Issues Discussed**

The following are the key subject areas/issues discussed during the hearing with Primary Schools:

- i. There is a serious disconnect between parents and schools and there is need for greater parental involvement;

- ii. Poor parenting and the absence of parents in the home is one of the major factors contributing to violence in schools. If the issue of parenting is adequately addressed then the issue of school violence and indiscipline will subside;
- iii. A bully's attacks can be both physical and mental;
- iv. Bullies are mainly older students in Standard 5. Notwithstanding there are bullies who prey on student their own age;
- v. The National School Code of Conduct provides guidelines for treating with bullying while the Education Act treats with suspensions. However, the responsibility lies with the principal of each school to develop strategies based on the Code;
- vi. The issue of where a child goes when suspended, taking into account that parents have to work, and the utilisation of suspension centres;
- vii. The various principals outlined their procedure for dealing with a student being bullied which entailed in some measure engaging with the student, having a conference with parents and based on this, further action can be taken. One available option is that of suspension, based on the severity of the offence committed;
- viii. Some parents may attack the principal/teacher when they are invited to the school to account for their Child's behaviour;
- ix. Some parents refuse to accept the fact that their children have a behaviour problem and they too may be contributing to the problem;
- x. Primary School students cannot be dismissed from a school;
- xi. Other opportunities should be created for children to show off their abilities;
- xii. The TTPS faces the same issues as the Principals as it concerns meeting with parents when treating with violent and/or suspended students;
- xiii. The Police Youth Club has banned students displaying deviant behaviour from the club;

The following are the key subject areas/issues discussed during the hearing with Secondary Schools:

- i. Incidents of bullying in low risk schools entail verbal/mental attacks, and cyber bullying. In high risk school, there are incidents involving taxing, verbal and mental attacks which are more prevalent than physical bullying;
- ii. The Russel Latapy High School is located in the heart of a high risk area yet they are considered a low risk school in terms of school violence;
- iii. The Russel Latapy High School collaborates with stakeholders such as the TTPS, Guidance Officers and a School Social Worker who visit students at their homes twice per week. School officials meet once per week with the MTS head office to ensure safety and security at the school. Deans also are very active at the school;
- iv. The ASJA Boys College is run by the ASJA Educational Board which holds monthly meetings with the school regarding protocol for the entry and exit of the compound. Deans, the Principal and the Vice-Principal meet fortnightly and Deans meet twice per week. The School also collaborates with the Chaguanas Police Station;
- v. A Student with an irregular attendance record cannot be debarred from attending school;
- vi. Naparima Girls High School is considered a low risk school with less than .06% suspension rate. Preventing indiscipline is the key to treating with school violence and as such, the school's orientation programme sets forth expectations for students' behaviour. Students are expected to sign a behaviour contract and as well as another contract stating that they must have 90% attendance, must participate in at least two extracurricular activities, and must have a good academic performance. The church is also involved in school activities;
- vii. The Chaguanas South Secondary School is categorised as a high risk school because of where it is situated as well as due to the high level of violence at the school. The school is challenged in keeping students motivated who may be coming from bad homes and social backgrounds with high levels of violence;
- viii. The Presentation College Chaguanas Secondary School is a low risk school which has had 9 suspensions in 6 years. Notwithstanding, bullying does take place at the school particularly cyberbullying;

- ix. Despite parental involvement, there may be some students who will still engage in deviant behaviour;
- x. A lack of extracurricular activities contributes to bad behaviour;
- xi. There is value in principals meeting to exchange ideas on how to effectively manage indiscipline in schools. An association of Principals Conference is held annually, and principals indicated that the MoE highlighted the need for leadership conferences, as middle managers in particular, require that kind of expertise and training;
- xii. Barataria South Secondary School uses two prefects in every class to counsel students who engage in delinquent behaviour and to report wrongdoings;
- xiii. Presentation College, Chaguanas has an Anti-Bullying initiative to make other schools as well as the general public aware of bullying;
- xiv. The National School Code of Conduct is structurally sound but does not address the issue of cyber bullying.
- xv. Also mentioned was the fact that suspension is one of the major consequences of bad behaviour in the Code of Conduct. However, suspension may not be the most effective consequence. Extended suspensions also do not work, in fact it makes matters worse as student treat this as a vacation from school;
- xvi. Naparima Girls High School has a Peer Helper system, an Anti-Bullying initiative, and a “Big Sister Programme” to treat with violence in the school;
- xvii. Teachers are not being bullied but are disrespected and intimidated by students;
- xviii. Teachers are not subjected to psychometric evaluation; and
- xix. The main forms of bullying at the Chaguanas South Secondary School include taxing, obscenities, and shoving other students. There are gangs at the school comprised mainly of boys who vandalise school property.

**Recommendations proffered during the Public Hearing**

The following recommendations emanated from the discussions:

- i. That stronger commitment and involvement by parents and communities be fostered;
- ii. use law enforcement (police officers) to discourage bullying in schools;
- iii. use “boot camps” to deal with bullies;
- iv. schools can implement the *Behavioural Contract* utilised by the Naparima Girls High School with the consent of the MOE;
- v. Utilisation of School Community service and peer counselling as consequences to wrongdoings and as a means of encouraging behavioural change in students;
- vi. Institute a programme for bullies to do school service or community service, and/or Saturday duty in school or the community;
- vii. Both perpetrators and victims should be involved in school community service to foster bonding;
- viii. Counselling should also form part of the School Community Service Programme so that students are made aware of why they are being punished;
- ix. Parents must be notified and included in the process with consent of the MoE School Supervisor and the self-esteem of the child must be maintained when using School Community Service as a course of action;
- x. Use retired military personnel in the school system to provide a level of discipline or positive role model;
- xi. Focus on building self-esteem at the primary and kindergarten levels;
- xii. Implement mandatory life skills from Forms 1 to 5 as well as classes such as culinary arts and other areas so that every student who may not be academically inclined can find their talent;
- xiii. Implement a remediation programme (literacy and numeracy);
- xiv. Promotion from Form 3 should not be automatic, students may need to go to other schools;

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(Including Education, Health, Gender, Tourism, Public Administration, Labour, Culture,  
Community Development and other Social Services)*

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- xv. Parental involvement is critical, make it mandatory that employers give parents time off to attend school meetings, or at least there should be provisions made by the NIS to compensate parents who take time off;
- xvi. Each school should be assigned a permanent Guidance Counsellor/Officer to provide consistent and reliable support to the student population; and
- xvii. Have different CVQs to provide students with more choices;

**View the Hearing**

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

<https://youtu.be/VwM64rx9704>

**Contact the Committee's Secretary**

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*Committees Unit*

*April 28, 2016*