

**Third Meeting of the 2015/2016 Session
of the Cayman Islands Legislative Assembly**

***Statement to supplement the presentation of the Baseline Schools Inspections
and the Education Governance Review Reports***

By the Honourable Tara Rivers, JP, MLA

Minister of Education, Employment and Gender Affairs

Wednesday, 21st October, 2015

Madam Speaker,

As indicated during my presentation of the reports pertaining to Cayman Islands Baseline Inspection of Schools and the Independent Review of the Cayman Islands Public Education System tabled in this Legislative Assembly last Wednesday, I make this statement in an attempt to provide this honourable House with more detail as it relates to the process carried out in relation to these reviews conducted, and discuss the plan of action moving forward to address the findings of the Reports.

As outlined in my debate in June of last year, it was anticipated that the outcomes of the education governance review, together with findings from the baseline inspection programme of all of our government schools during the 2014-2015 school year, would:

- Identify strengths and weaknesses and provide avenues for improvement;
- Provide feedback to the Ministry on the priorities being pursued in the reform agenda, documenting and assessing progress and future plans, and identifying any gaps or further areas of priority to be considered;
- Provide guidance to the Ministry on opportunities for a new governance role for community partners in the education system; and
- Establish a baseline evaluation of the education system, against which future progress can be measured.

These important reviews of our system were indeed carried out during the 2014-15 academic year as promised, and have helped the Ministry of Education to identify some of the gaps in the public education system, as well as some of the progress made to date.

Baseline Inspections

Baseline inspections were carried out in all 15 government schools across Grand Cayman and Cayman Brac between November 2014 and March 2015. The Inspections process was coordinated by the local Lead Inspector, Mrs. Mary Bowerman, who has experience working in and knowledge of the Cayman Islands education system. The Ministry contracted with Mrs. Bowerman as the local Lead Inspector because of her relevant experience of being the previous Director of the (then) Cayman Islands Standards and Assessment Unit.

I am made to understand that the International Schools Inspection Consultancy (ISIC) was chosen by the local Lead Inspector because of its extensive record of having conducted independent school inspections in a number of countries, and for a proposal that outlined a very thorough inspections process. ISIC and its parent company ISI inspects and provides school consultancies in over 50 countries around the world. It has over 1,500 experienced inspectors and consultants, a large proportion of which have both public and private school

teaching experience as well as experience inspecting for other inspection providers including the UK's Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted).

ISIC inspector consultants are experienced at inspecting under a wide range of inspection methodologies including ISI inspection framework, the British Schools Overseas (BSO) framework, OFSTED and nationally based inspection frameworks. In the UK, the ISI inspection framework for independent schools inspects compliance with the same National Minimum Standard (NMS) as OFSTED and is approved by the UK Department for Education and quality assured by OFSTED.

For the Baseline School Inspections, the "Cayman Islands Education Standards and Assessment Unit Handbook for Inspection and Self-Evaluation 2011" was used. As this is not a new document, all schools would have had access to the document prior to the inspection process.

The baseline inspections primarily examined and reported on the following areas:

- Student progress and achievement;
- Effectiveness of teaching and its impact on learning;
- Leadership and management; and
- The quality of provision and student outcomes in English and in mathematics.

Each school was given an overall grade in each of these areas, and the possible grading scheme consisted of the following: "Unsatisfactory", "Adequate", "Good" or "Very Good".

Education System Review

In addition to the baseline school inspections of government schools, the Ministry sought to engage the services of an external and objective body to conduct an independent review of the government education system. The review focused on:

- educational governance;
- provision and student outcomes in primary and secondary education in the Cayman Islands Government Education System; and
- provided recommendations for improvement.

KPMG was primarily chosen to carry out the exercise because it has a Global Centre of Excellence in Education, which was utilised as a vital resource in this review process. KPMG contracted, through its Global Centre of Excellence in Education, an education consultant in the UK who was brought in to lead the review, with the support of KPMG and its resources.

Carrying out and receiving the findings of the Baseline Inspections and the Education System Review was an important component of the strategy needed to drive continued improvements

in the public education system. However, the Ministry did not sit back and wait to receive these reports before taking action to address some of the identified shortcomings gleaned from my visits to the schools, and from my engagement with parents, with teachers, with principals, and with representatives of the private sector and wider community since taking office in May 2013. Instead, the Ministry has been tasked with and has been putting new initiatives and solutions in place to address the issues identified as a result of these consultations. Since taking office in May 2013, and prior to the start of the Baseline Inspections and Education System Review, six (6) Strategic Priority Areas for Education were identified as a result of my consultation with stakeholders and internal analysis of the education system. The six Strategic Priority Areas established since taking office are as follows – focussing on:

1. International Competitiveness & Raising Standards in Education
2. Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEN/D)
3. Conflict Resolution Training & a Crime Reduction Strategy
4. Technical & Vocational Education & Training
5. Information & Communication Technology and STEM
6. Public - Private Partnerships in Education and Training

During the 2014-2015 school year and whilst inspections were being carried out, these six strategic priority areas provided a guide for the Education Team to develop and implement a number of strategies and initiatives designed to provide the education system with the necessary support and guidance to drive the process of raising standards.

The work undertaken thus far has proven to be fruitful and on target because many of the new initiatives and focus areas introduced since taking office in 2013 are in alignment with what is called for in the Baseline Schools Inspections reports and address some of the issues highlighted in the Education System Review. The outcomes of the inspections and the system review have confirmed that we are on the right track with respect to the six priority areas of focus introduced in the last 2 years. Also, as a Government, we have worked to ensure continuity (and strengthening) of programmes where those programmes and initiatives were showing positive results. This commitment to appropriate continuity was important given that the education system had suffered from a lack of continuity in many instances due to the change of Government administrations over the years.

Education Plan of Action 2015-2016

An Education Plan of Action 2015-2016 was developed in an effort to address the issues raised in the Baseline School Inspections and the Independent Review of the Cayman Islands' Public Education System. The Plan of Action is split into two main areas, with a focus on improving:

1. Leadership and Management; and
2. Student Progress and Achievement.

The Plan of Action has been discussed with school Principals for review and implementation during the 2015-16 school year. During the month of September, I, along with the Chief Officer in the Ministry of Education and the Acting Chief Education Officer, have met with all Government school principals, and have visited with the staff at many of the schools themselves, to discuss the plan of action for each school. As a starting point at these meetings, we have encouraged school leaders and educators by identifying the many positive aspects in their individual schools and encouraged them to work towards making those consistent in all classrooms and evident in all practices. I am heartened by the renewed commitment to excellence which has been demonstrated by several of the educators at many of the meetings attended thus far. Through these visits, we have also been promoting intra- and inter-school collaboration to share good ideas and good practice within and between schools. In the upcoming months we will visit the remaining schools to have discussions with staff as an important part of strengthening education stakeholder collaboration.

The Plan of Action, though detailed, outlines actions and initiatives that would be evident in any successful school and are not beyond realistic expectations for the Cayman Islands Education system. Some of the focus areas in the Plan of Action include, but are not limited to:

- Development of a 'role and responsibilities' outline for principals and senior managers/senior management teams at the schools that is directly linked to the performance management process;
- Identifying area(s) of improvement for principals and providing mentoring/coaching/training;
- Redefining education leadership meetings to focus on training and development for principals;
- Working with principals to develop Post Inspection Action Plans to raise standards in each respective school and to address the specific issues identified for individual schools through the inspection process;
- Supporting both formal and informal professional development for leaders and aspiring leaders within education through participation in the International Leadership Certificate training offered through the Ontario's Principal's Council which was developed and launched in 2014;
- Conducting an audit of under-performing staff, identifying area(s) of improvement for those staff and provide mentoring/ coaching/training to improve teaching practice;
- Reviewing behaviour policies to ensure that they provide appropriate consequences as well as positive reinforcement;
- Standardising a system for recording behaviour incidents and remedial actions developed using Student Information Management System (SIMS) for primary schools and high schools; and
- Developing a plan for implementing a more effective system to address the needs of students displaying serious behaviour issues.

A consistent theme resonating in the Baseline Schools Inspections and Education System Review was the identified need to increase resourcing in some areas and improve the training

and support for management of students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEN/D), and those with behavioural issues. Through the Plan of Action, principals will be required to work with teachers to utilise the information from planning and assessment to provide for the less and more able students. The Plan of Action calls for improved identification of special needs and provision of appropriate SEN/D interventions.

As discussed earlier, working to better address the needs of children with special education needs and/or disabilities is one of the six priority focus areas introduced since taking office in May 2013. The Ministry was tasked to find ways to better enhance the provision for such students. As a result, this school year, non-teaching Special Education Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) have been employed to provide support for all government schools. This includes identifying students with special or additional educational needs, coordinating assessment and essential interventions and then monitoring students' progress and achievement to ensure no child is left behind. This is the first time that all schools will have access to non-teaching SENCOs whose job it is to focus specifically on students with SEN/D.

In addition, the Ministry of Education is spearheading an inter-ministerial and interdepartmental project aimed at better serving the needs of pre-compulsory school aged children (i.e. toddlers and infants) displaying special education needs and disabilities or those who may be at risk of such, with a renewed focus on strengthening the Early Intervention Programme and related services required by these children. Aspects of this multidisciplinary approach to servicing the needs of these children have begun this year and work will continue to further develop the holistic programme bringing together a number of Ministries and departments/agencies.

The Education Plan of Action 2015-2016 is solutions focused, seeking to address specific issues identified in the Reports through specific actions to be taken. In the interest of time, I have identified only a few of the areas from the Plan of Action.

The Education Plan of Action 2015-16 is an accountability framework which identifies one Lead Person for each action or initiative of the Plan, and introduces a reporting structure to document implementation and effectiveness of the outcomes. Support structures have also been put in place but accountability rests with the Lead Person. Termly reporting, which includes an analysis of individual school data, is due from Senior School Improvement Officers to the Chief Education Officer who in turn will submit a report to the Ministry of Education. The reports will include an analysis of data related to staff performance, student academic progress and achievement, professional development, and behaviour incidents.

The Plan of Action is a direct response to the issues raised through the schools inspections and education system review process. As a Government, we are not shying away from the issues. As a country, we need to ensure that the education system addresses those issues and that our children have the high standard of education that they deserve. We also know that there are strengths in the public education system and we need to identify those strengths and ensure that those good practices are consistent in all schools.

CI Teaching and Learning Strategy 2015-2019

As a part of the overall Plan of Action to address the issues identified in the reviews, the Ministry has launched the Cayman Islands Teaching and Learning Strategy 2015-2019, with the initial focus on Literacy (as literacy is the building block, the foundation, for all other learning); but successful implementation of the objectives outlined in the Teaching and Learning Strategy will improve student achievement in all subject areas. The Teaching and Learning Strategy outlines specific measurable achievement targets for each academic year, beginning this 2015-16 school year and for the next four (4) succeeding school years thereafter. The five year literacy target established for the Cayman Islands is that by the end of the 2019-2020 academic year, all students will read and write on level by the end of Year 2. The literacy target established for this school year is to have 85% of students leaving Year 1 who are reading on level. From the 2016/17 school year and for every year thereafter, there are specific, measurable targets for year 1 and year 2 students, culminating with 100% of students leaving Year 2 reading and writing on level.

The Cayman Islands Teaching and Learning Strategy 2015 - 2019 will build upon the strengths of the education system, while also providing specific tools and objectives that are required to navigate the change process and create the kind of educational system that will enable all our students to achieve at the highest international standards, and certainly to their highest individual potential. Every objective outlined in the Teaching and Learning Strategy is rooted and anchored in a body of research that has been made to fit within the Cayman Islands context.

Also in addition to monitoring the implementation of the Plan of Action 2015-2016 (including aspects of the Teaching and Learning Strategy contained therein), during the course of this fiscal year the Ministry will be considering in greater detail the recommendations of the Education System Review as it relates to introducing some form of enhanced education governance model. The public education system has experienced the benefits of public-private partnerships, and we want to build up on this work with the community to improve the education system and the outcomes for our children. As Minister, ***I want to state my unequivocal commitment to public education***; and as a part of that commitment to providing the best possible education for our children, it is recognised that there is scope for greater cooperation, participation and collaboration with parents, the private sector, NGOs and the community at large when it comes to public education.

Professional Development

A key plank in the Education Plan of Action 2015-2016 is increased targeted professional development. More targeted Professional Development is recommended in the reports, and this is already underway. During 2014, a professional development course targeting school leadership (i.e. Principals and Deputy Principals) - the International Leadership Certificate offered through the Ontario Principals Council - was locally developed and rolled out during the

previous 2014-2015 school year. Training pursuant to this leadership programme will continue this year as well. In addition, some education staff has had the benefit of participating in a 3 day training programme with Dr. Avis Glaze, an international leader in the field of education, held during the first week of October 2015 in order to enhance capacity in:

- Education System and School Leadership Support;
- School and Education System Effectiveness;
- School Improvement Planning;
- Assessing School Effectiveness;
- Self-Assessment and Accountability Measures;
- Strategies for Monitoring Improvement; and
- Teamwork and Collaboration (Developing a Shared Vision).

Dr. Avis Glaze is an imminently qualified education expert sought after to assist education reform efforts in countries worldwide. According to her biography, as one of Canada's outstanding educators, she has been recognized for her work in leadership development, student achievement, school and system improvement, character development and equity of outcomes for all students. As Ontario's first Chief Student Achievement Officer and founding CEO of the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, she played a pivotal role in improving student achievement in Ontario schools. Her primary focus in education is on building capacity to ensure that all students achieve, regardless of background factors or personal circumstances.

Dr. Glaze has extensive experience in international education and was chosen by the Canadian government to assist with educational reform in South Africa. As well, she knows schools across the globe first-hand, having worked with educators in Australia, England, Finland, Singapore, Ireland, Scotland, Germany, the Caribbean and many parts of the United States. She also served as Adviser to the Minister of Education in New Zealand on national standards.

The Ministry of Education has collaborated with Dr. Glaze over the last two years in professional development events for our teachers. She has a unique perspective which is to our benefit in that, in addition to her global eminence in the field of education, she is originally from Jamaica and can therefore understand the Caribbean context which needs to be considered when making significant changes to our system.

Having had the opportunity to review the Education Action Plan 2015-2016 and the Cayman Islands Teaching and Learning Strategy 2015-2019, Dr. Glaze indicated that "these policies are, indeed, of world class caliber. They are second to none that [she has] examined across the globe". She went on to state that "they reflect the knowledge and expertise of [the education] staff and their desire to achieve international comparability". This glowing endorsement by Dr. Glaze of the work that has been done by our local educators already in response to the Baseline Schools Inspections and Education System Review in an attempt to establish the framework to address the issues identified is something to be highly commended! I want to publically congratulate the team in the Ministry of Education, the Department of Education Services, the Education Quality Assurance Unit (through the work of the Lead Inspector contracted in that

Unit) and the schools for the work done to create the Education Action Plan 2015-2016 (and individual schools Post-Inspection Action Plans) and the Cayman Islands Teaching and Learning Strategy 2015-2019. Our educators are committed to improving the system and now have a robust and internationally sanctioned framework in which to work to help achieve the stated goal of excellence in education.

Madam Speaker, since taking office as Minister of Education it has been a priority to have a thorough review of our education system so as to truly understand where we are, as a country, in the education improvement journey, and how to get to where we need to be. Driving educational excellence was a key campaign commitment and is a key commitment outlined in the Independent Members' National Priorities Plan. As Minister of Education, I am committed to doing my endeavoured best to move this agenda forward as expeditiously as possible; however, it will take support from the entire of Government with respect to the allocation of resources, and the support of the community at large, in order to achieve it.

I am content to say that, although the Baseline Inspections and Education System Review reports have highlighted some difficult realities about our education system, the reviews have been completed as promised, and we have utilised this information to develop a clear pathway to improvement on all fronts.

In keeping with this Government's commitment to be open, transparent and improve communication, all the reports have already been released to the public and placed on the Ministry of Education website, and tabled in this honourable House as a matter of public record. As a government, we recognise that there is a lot of work to be done. These reviews were called for because we needed to have an objective understanding of the quality of our education system. Since taking office in 2013, we have listened to stakeholders, and as a result six strategic priority areas have been introduced to create focus in the education system. Whilst waiting for these evaluations to be completed, the education team has implemented a number of strategies to address the issues identified as a result of internal and other evaluations.

We have the reports and we have made them public. We have the reports and we are taking action. As discussed, we have already developed a Plan for Action to address the findings of the Baseline Inspections and the Education System Review which is being implemented starting this 2015-2016 school year. This Government has no intention of having these reports sit on a shelf. The results are in and the work continues. Improvements need to be made. We are shifting to a system of accountability for all. Reporting mechanisms have been built in and the education team is expected to make improvements. Our children deserve nothing less.

It is important to stress that the issues facing the public education system have not developed overnight. In fact, they are as a result of many, many years of growing challenges faced by the system; and thus, all the solutions to address the myriad of issues themselves cannot be implemented overnight, nor will the process implemented thus far to address the issues yield

overnight results. There are no quick fix solutions! We cannot take a “band-aid approach” to address systemic problems in the education system; but, we must first acknowledge the extent of the issues faced, and deliberately seek to address them with collective resolve. This isn’t about politics – this is about the sustainability of our country.

I am confident that as a result of conducting these reviews, as a result of owning up to the findings, and as a result of a renewed commitment to educational excellence and taking decisive action at all levels to begin to address some of the shortcomings in the education system identified in the reviews, the education system is poised to see significant improvement in the coming years.

I want to reiterate my unequivocal commitment to public education, and to all those who work in our public education system. I want to sincerely thank all of the hard working, committed educators and those working to assist in this process of education transformation in the Cayman Islands. These are exciting times, and with a renewed commitment to excellence, and an optimistic outlook to addressing the challenges, I’m confident that together we can achieve the goal of raising standards and addressing the educational needs of all our children.