

## **STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ON THE SAFE SCHOOLS PROGRAMME**

Mr. Speaker I have tabled in the House today a ministry paper that details the progress being made in the implementation of the Safe Schools Programme for the period 2012-2014.

The Security and Safety Unit in the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Community Safety and Security Branch of the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF), has been engaged in several initiatives that have resulted in a steady decline in the levels of violence and critical incidents in schools for the past three years. The total number of incidents recorded in high schools in 2014 is a less than three percent of the figure for 2012. The details are as follows:

### **Offences in High Schools for the period 2012-2014**

Fig.1

<b>Offences</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>
Fight	915	168	13
Robberies	23	1	0
Murder	3	4	1
Theft	160	64	3
Wounding	52	25	3
Other Incidents	135	28	13
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1288</b>	<b>290</b>	<b>33</b>

In the 2013-2014 Academic School Year, there were three incidents of fatal stabbing of students. However, for the 2014-2015 year, there has been only one incident where a student was stabbed on the school premises whilst in the care of school. We take no comfort from this, as several children have been killed under varying circumstances whilst they were off the school compound since the start of the year.

In terms of weapons seized, the total number has declined by more than two thirds over the three-year period.

#### Weapons Seized for the period 2012-2014

Fig.2

Weapons Seized	2012	2013	2014
Knives	915	128	138
Scissors	486	122	306
Machete	15	2	5
Icepicks	46	6	23
Other weapon Seized	208	122	23
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1670</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>495</b>

It must be noted that there is a significant, almost three-fold, spike in the possession of scissors from 2013-2014. The reason often given by students is that they are used for Home Economics classes. The Ministry of Education has recommended that schools develop guidelines for the use of scissors by students and as it relates to them travelling with this item.

Additionally, the Ministry is in the process of procuring 135 new metal detectors to ensure that all high/secondary schools have these in place for the new school year.

Mr Speaker, while the Ministry of Education is responsible for developing the policy framework for the Safe School Programme, law enforcement is carried out by the School Resource Officers (SROs) from the JCF. The Ministry of Education publicly commends them for the preventative and corrective work they carry out in schools.

Data collected showed that the SROs performed less searches of students last school year than in the previous year, moving down from 8871 in 2013. The view of the Police is that because of the fewer incidents and lower threat rates, there was not a great need to extend resources in this regard. However, the number of students searched in Area Five increased dramatically from 294 to 2008 between 2013 and 2014. Area Five of the JCF comprises the divisions of St Andrew North, St Catherine North and South, and St Thomas.

**A NOTE ON THE USE OF GANJA:** The Ministry is concerned about the access to marijuana and other illegal substance within school zones, given the data provided by the National Council on Drug Abuse. Of the 38 schools in the sample, **50.4 %** students report how easy it is to obtain these substances in and around the school. As a result, the Safe Schools team is developing a strategy/policy to address this issue. Where this is concerned the matter of vendors/vending is being reviewed.

## **INITIATIVES TO STEM VIOLENCE/ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR IN SCHOOLS**

The Ministry of Education has been involved in a number of initiatives through the Safe Schools Unit to ensure there is a continued reduction of critical incidents in school. These include:

- The Security and Safety Guidelines which are being revised. The revised manual will be ready for the start of the 2015 School Year and will, for the first time, feature areas such as bullying in schools to also include cyber bullying. It will also address human trafficking which has been incorporated in the Social Studies curriculum and will be taught in schools for the first time in September 2015. Sections of the Child Care and Protection Act will also be included.
- Continued promotion of uniformed groups as one of the means to address behavioral problems. There are over 600 uniform groups in schools, with 79 new groups established in the past year. The presence of these groups is significant in this regard in promoting positive values and attitudes of our students. Plans are in place to add another 105 new groups to schools that are operating without a uniform group. The Ministry of Education has cemented a special partnership with the Caribbean Maritime Institute (CMI) and 15 schools will in September benefit from this new initiative. Training of the representatives from the schools took place July 3-5, 2015 at CMI.

- A new Chaplaincy Programme will be launched in September, 2015. The Ministry has formed a partnership with the Jamaica Constabulary Force Chaplaincy Services Branch that will in September, see the assistance of Force Chaplains and over 450 volunteer Police Chaplains in different parishes, lending support to a school near their location. These chaplains will give support to trauma incidents/critical incidents and also provide general moral and spiritual guidance during the academic year. During the month of August, 60 persons from schools will be trained with 8 modules of the International Conference of Police Chaplains in preparation for the new school year.

The Ministry continues to enjoy a great relationship with other stakeholders and in particular the JCF/School Resource Officers who play a key role in the schools. A mentorship programme was launched in 40 schools this school year and over 20 schools benefited from a safe school tour.

The JCF, and by extension the National Police College of Jamaica, in March 2015 conducted a special training with all Deans of Discipline and this training will continue in July 2015 to further build capacity of the Deans to take on the challenges of the new school year.

The Ministry's position in treating with safety should be seen as a holistic approach and not left up to an individual. As a consequence, the Ministry has mandated that a**Security and Safety Committee** be established in each school. This committee comprises both internal and external partners who should develop and implement a security and safety plan to treat with the aforementioned at a local level.

Minister Thwaites July 14, 2015