

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

MINISTRY PAPER

A PREVENTATIVE INITIATIVE IN SCHOOLS TO AMELIORATE JAMAICA'S CRIME PROBLEM

INTRODUCTION

Members are being asked to note the Ministry of Education's preventative initiative to help ameliorate Jamaica's Crime Scourge and to partner with the *Unite for Change Project* of the Ministry of National Security.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

Criminals are not born; they are formed – often by neglect or poor socialization. The major positive environments in the formative process are school, church and/or family. **Every child goes to school at some time.** There is no other institution with such potential for positive socialization. As such, law-abiding habits ought to be expressly connected with the school experience.

A recent local study identified the links between the behaviour patterns of children and their later anti-social conduct and noted that both can most often be predicted from school days. (See **attached study entitled, “Education and Crime: Evidence from Prison Inmates in Jamaica”, dated March 2012**, attached as **Appendix 1**).

ISSUES

Studies show that many who end up committing serious crime were frequently absent from school; exhibited cognitive or social abnormalities; were not assessed or treated adequately; had little or no effective family/ teacher support and dropped-out/ “graduated” with inadequate or no certification

The Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) study identifies certain junior high/high schools which the individuals in the study attended.

MoE's RESPONSE

Given the identification of fifty - six (56) seriously affected schools (inclusive of 18 identified by the JCF), beginning February 2014, a special intervention will be crafted for each of these schools to:

- a) Identify troubled, deviant and seriously disadvantaged students
- b) Assess and address their situations
- c) Prevent drop-outs

PROJECTIONS

Building from the emergency response detailed in the foregoing, the MoE also proposes a system-wide intervention beginning in 2014. It will:

- Administer a test to determine the social and emotional state of at-risk students - first in an early grade and later at an intermediate level, for example Grade 9, in selected schools
- Complete development of Regional Referral Centres to treat with major dysfunctional tendencies
- Offer teachers in primary schools training in counselling, parental engagement and primary therapies related to challenged children
- Request a revision of the courses in Behaviour Management in all teacher training institutions to ensure that they cover the emerging behavioural challenges being displayed by students
- Appoint Social Workers in Education Regions who will network with relevant Ministries and Agencies
- Provide instruction to Principals on how to identify and respond to disturbed students
- Implement a programme to detect and address disruptive conduct and drop-out risks in certain grades by September 2015
- Expand opportunities for students to become involved in uniformed groups, sports and creative arts and thereby to engage and reform those with negative tendencies
- Engage the Police and Military as part of a team to periodically attend the most vulnerable schools in a non-threatening way to befriend, promote order and reinforce positive constructive behaviour.

PROVIDING ALTERNATIVES TO GANG ENGAGEMENT

Starting in 2014, the MoE proposes to strengthen all the programmes in schools including home, family life and personal development programmes as well as the Civics curriculum. This, in an effort to highlight appropriate values and attitudes expected of students, as well as to sharpen their understanding of the dead-end nature of gang involvement as well as to reinforce positive and law-abiding behaviour patterns. The programmes will also emphasize character-building and positive socialization as both a preventative and corrective approach to anti-social behaviours.

Schools will be instructed to devote substantially more time within their periods for assemblies, and form periods, to the students' personal and social development, in order to enforce order and discipline, wholesome inter-personal relationships and respectful speech.

Over the next three years, schools will be enabled to intensify uniformed groups, physical education, sports and cultural engagement. Two (2) persons with social work training/skills will be deployed to each Region within this School Year, to treat with likely drop-outs or children identified as having behavioural problems to deepen engagement with family and community.

Where necessary, teachers and/or volunteers will be chosen, trained and given responsibility for engaging students in sporting and cultural pursuits. Appropriate teaching and learning materials

are being prepared for September 2014. The programme entitled “**Valuable Pathways**” is one that will enable students to develop positive values and attitudes to improve behaviour in school, home and society. The programme will also assist parents to develop appropriate values and attitudes, not only towards their children, but to others in their community. The media will be engaged as an important partner in the process.

INVOLVING THE WIDER COMMUNITY IN SCHOOL-BASED CHARACTER BUILDING

Further, the MoE invites and challenges all Service Clubs, Sports Clubs, Churches and all other civic groupings to identify a school(s) of special interest and commit themselves to a programme of youth mentorship. This will be achieved through cooperation with School Boards, Administrators and Teachers. The National Parenting Support Commission has been asked to coordinate initial meetings of leaders of religious denominations, Presidents of Service Organisations and Citizens’ Associations. The assistance of the Social Development Commission will be sought. The primary objectives are to create a community of interest and care around each public school and improve productivity and **STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**.

COORDINATING COMMITTEE

A Coordinating Committee to refine, implement and evaluate this initiative has been identified and includes:

- Representatives of the Association of Guidance Counsellors, Deans of Discipline and School Safety
- Head of Guidance & Counselling Division, MoE or Nominee, National Parenting Support Commission (NPSC) as well as Representatives from Ministries of National Security, Justice, Youth & Culture, Sports and Social Security as well as eminent persons drawn from the fields of health,

The Committee will recommend a construct/entity to implement, monitor and evaluate the approved interventions and embed them as necessary.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Budgetary provision will be made in the 2014/15 Financial Year to support the full implementation of the programme. Much of the cost can be met by inter-agency partnership and by re-allocation of existing resources.

CONCLUSION

Members are being asked to note that the MoE has empanelled a committee to develop a special pre-emptive intervention through the school system, which when fully implemented, should significantly contribute to the reduction of crime in Jamaica over the medium to long term.

Ronald Thwaites, MP
Minister
January 20, 2014
File No.C2258