

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

MINISTRY PAPER #421

CHILD FIND INITIATIVE

INTRODUCTION

The Child Find is a major activity of the Special Education Project under the Education Transformation Programme. It is among the 2004 Task Force recommendations for the improved system-wide management of special needs. The Find is intended to locate and identify children and youth (0-18 years) with special needs in:

- a) Special educational settings
- b) General educational settings; as well as
- c) Residential/state-run institutions and community rehabilitation programmes

The Child Find targeted students who were:

- At risk for academic failure in the general education setting;
- Identified with a documented disability, but were not attending school;
- In residential or hospital facilities, who were in need of special education services; or
- Enrolled in special educational facilities island-wide
- Undiagnosed or had undetected special needs in the general education classroom.

Purpose:

- To identify children with undiagnosed or undetected special needs in the general education classroom.
- To further determine the possible issues affecting attainment of mastery on the Grade Four Literacy Test (GFLT).

BACKGROUND

The Child Find was conducted in three (3) phases. *Phase I* produced a preliminary count of 4,212 children in 66 sites offering special education programmes across the island. The number reflects data generated from the annual census conducted by the Educational Policy and Planning Division of the Ministry of Education. The areas of special needs listed in the census includes Learning Disability, Intellectual Disability, Autism, Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, Deaf and Hearing Impaired, Blind and Visually Impaired, Physically Impaired, Speech and Language Impairment, Multiple Disabilities and other unspecified disabilities.

Phase II of the Child Find focused on children in state-care facilities. The information gathered indicates approximately 1,500 children with documented disabilities in community rehabilitation programmes (Community-based Rehabilitation of Jamaica, Clarendon Group, Early Stimulation Programme and the National Children's Home), and approximately 612 in State care under the

Child Development Agency. The reports from regional hospitals indicated 15 children with documented special needs. It will be necessary to revisit the data from these institutions for a recent and more accurate count of children with special needs in the care of the State.

Phase III of the Child Find focused on children in general educational settings who may have had undetected and undiagnosed special needs. Schools with performance of 50% or below on the Grade 4 Literacy Test for at least three (3) years, and identified by the Regional Office as *critical schools* were selected for the activity. Students across Grades 1-5 were referred based primarily on their performance on the tests in the National Assessment Programme (NAP), as well as observed chronic performance deficits. A smaller representation from Grade 6 was referred for screening.

The Child Find team comprised registrants shortlisted from the Professional Registry of Special Educators and included Clinical Psychologists, Psychologists and Educational Assessors or Diagnosticians. The team was assigned to conduct screening to determine functioning levels of students referred as having learning challenges. Children were assessed for general academic skills using intelligence, academic, vocabulary and receptive language tests.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The assessment activity was conducted across all six regions, beginning in July, 2011, and ending in November 2014.
- A total of 7,628 children across Grades 1 to 6 were assessed from 302 primary level schools.
- Children from the sample were found mostly to be at borderline and extremely low levels of intellectual functioning. Borderline may be interpreted as *'slow learner'* and extremely low level, as *'mild to moderate intellectual disability'*. *Performance gaps ranged from 1 to 6 grade levels below current age or grade placement.*
- The sample included 4,323 boys and 3,305 girls.
- Recommendations based on screening findings include; school-based intervention; alternative placement; further evaluation to address other complex issues such as emotional/behavioural or neurological disorders.

PROJECTIONS/PLANS

Information from the Child Find will inform the development of a systematic process to identify, assess, and categorize disabling conditions, to ensure appropriate educational accommodations and placement decisions; thus filling gaps in the delivery of services to students with special needs or in need of special intervention. This will entail the:

- Continued institutionalization of a system of early identification and intervention to continue the identification of children with undetected special needs in schools. Vouch has already been identified as a diagnostic centre for early childhood students.
- Reassignment of 30 special Education Teachers to selected areas across the island to provide support for special needs.
- Retention of the services of the Child Find team to continue assessment as part of the MoE's services in the regional offices; and by the end of 2016 for the services to be delivered from the Regional Diagnostic Centres.
- Creation of a Student Support Network System to allow for a more fluid system of early identification, referral and intervention to promote improved student-outcomes. There are currently 249 special educators in general education settings.
- Continued undertaking of capacity-building activities for teachers in schools by the Special Education Team to improve competencies to address learning challenges.
- Continued identification of existing space or facilities to accommodate special education units or classes across the regions.
- Assignment of one Special Education Teacher in at least 60 secondary level institutions by the end of 2017.

Inter-ministerial collaboration is urgently needed to formulate a more solid network of services and programmes to meet the cognitive, social, emotional and behavioural issues identified as affecting education and welfare.



Ronald Thwiates, MP

Minister

April 8, 2015

File No. G207/094

