

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
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UPDATE ON THE SAFE SCHOOLS PROGRAMME

INTRODUCTION

Members are being asked to note that the Safe Schools Programme, being implemented by the Ministry of Education, has significantly reduced acts of violence in schools.

BACKGROUND

The Safe School Policy (SSP) has its genesis in the recommendations of the Revised Report of the Task Force on Educational Reform in Jamaica (2004). It is intended to curb anti-social and violent behaviour in schools, as well as improve the capacity and state of the physical plant. The concept of “school safety” was expanded beyond physical safety and security to encompass a state of well-being for those who study, work and visit our Nation’s schools.

The Ministry’s prime objective is to implement the necessary measures to transform schools and their immediate surroundings into safe zones through a multi-layered, multi-sectorial approach, utilizing both public and private partnerships, supported by legislation, where necessary.

THE SCHOOL SECURITY AND SAFETY POLICY GUIDELINES

The Ministry has also developed **The School Security and Safety Policy Guidelines** - a document of standards and guidelines introduced to the public school system in the 2008/2009 Academic Year with the stated objective of developing and engendering “*a culture of security and safety in the leadership and general population of all schools*”.

The standards are formulated to address specific facets of a school’s security and safety plan and deal with:

- Creating a security and safety network
- Controlling access to the school campus
- Controlling possession of weapons and other contraband in schools
- Controlling gangs, associations and anti-social cliques in schools
- Controlling movement and gathering in the school domain
- Controlling the physical environment

REDUCTION IN VIOLENCE & CRITICAL INCIDENTS IN SCHOOLS

The Security and Safety Unit in the Ministry of Education has been engaged in several initiatives with a view to reducing the levels of violence and critical incidents in schools.

Data in the Ministry indicate that over the past three years, there has been a steady decline in critical incidents.

INCIDENTS IN SCHOOLS (2012 – 2014)

INCIDENTS	2014-2015	2012-2013	% Reduction
Fights	786	915	14%
Weapons found in schools	987	1186	17%
Thefts	64	160	60%
Robberies	4	23	83%
wounding	25	52	52%
Murder (fatal stabbing)	1	3	67%

Data: MoE

It must be noted that from the data, possession of a pair scissors was the most frequent offense committed by the students. The reason often given by students is that is used for Home Economics classes and as such it is recommended that schools develop a zero tolerance policy as it relates to students travelling with this item.

In the 2013-2014 Academic School Year, there were 3 incidents of fatal stabbing of students. However for this current school year (2014-2015), there has been only one incident where a student was stabbed on the school premises whilst in the care of school. It is important to note that whilst several children were killed under varying circumstances since the start of the year, these incidents did not occur whilst the children were in school.

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 has been asked to develop a strategy/policy to address this issue. The matter of vendors must also be taken into consideration where this is concerned.

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 uniformed groups in schools, with 79 new groups

established in the past year. The presence of these groups is significant 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 uniformed group. The Ministry of Education has cemented a special partnership with the Caribbean Maritime Institute (CMI) and 10 schools will in September benefit from this partnership. 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 recognizes that notwithstanding security measures, students are still able to gain access to the school plant with weapons of various sorts. An audit was done recently and given the results, 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.

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 dropout and mentoring for the new school year.

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.

CONCLUSION

Consequent on the foregoing, members are being asked to note that the Safe Schools Programme is bearing fruit in the schools, with critical incidents in schools being significantly reduced.



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Minister

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