



**CAYMAN ISLANDS LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

School Education
~ October 2019 ~

*Edited verbatim transcript relating to the Official Report of the
Standing Public Accounts Committee Meeting
7 February 2020*

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PAC Members Present:

Hon. D. Ezzard Miller, MLA, Chairman
Hon. Bernie A. Bush, MLA, Member
Mr. Austin O. Harris, Jr., MLA, Member
Mr. Christopher S. Saunders, MLA, Member

Apologies:

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly, MLA, Member

In Attendance:

Ms. Patricia Priestly - Acting PAC Clerk
Mr. Kenneth Jefferson - Financial Secretary & Chief Officer,
Ministry of Finance and Economic Development
Mr. Matthew Tibbetts - Accountant General,
Ministry of Finance and Economic Development
Ms. Lyneth Monteith, Acting Deputy Chief Officer,
Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports, Agriculture and Lands

Audit Office:

Mrs. Sue Winspear, Auditor General,
Office of the Auditor General
Ms. Angela Cullen - Deputy Auditor General
(Performance Audit)
Ms. Erin McLean - Audit Trainee
Mr. Adrian Murenzi - Audit Project Leader

Witnesses:

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education,
Youth, Sports, Agriculture and Lands
Mrs. Tammy Banks-Dacosta, Acting Director, Department of
Education Services
Mr. Dan Scott, Chairman, Education Council

**EDITED VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT
STANDING PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE
FRIDAY
7 FEBRUARY 2020
10:20 AM**

Meeting with witnesses

“SCHOOL EDUCATION—OCTOBER 2019”

Verbatim transcript of the Standing Public Accounts Committee Meeting held Friday, 7 February 2020, at 10:25 am, in the Chamber of the Legislative Assembly Building, George Town, Grand Cayman.

[Hon. D. Ezzard Miller, Chairman, presiding]

The Chairman: Good morning, everyone.

Let the record show that we have a quorum present and I would like to call the meeting to order.

First of all, I need to apologise for Ms. Barbara Conolly, the Member for George Town South who is a member of the Committee; she is unable to attend today because of other ministerial duties.

I also need to apologise for the late arrival of Mr. Austin Harris, the Member for Prospect, because he is stuck in traffic, behind a traffic accident.

Given all of that, we will get started and I will invite Chris to bring in the witnesses, please.

[Pause]

The Chairman: Go ahead.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

**ADMINISTRATION OF OATH
OR AFFIRMATION**

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports, Agriculture and Lands: Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports, Agriculture and Lands.

I swear by Almighty God that the evidence I shall give to this honourable Legislative Assembly shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

Ms. Lyneth Monteith, Acting Deputy Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: Lyneth Monteith, Acting Deputy Chief Officer, Ministry of Education.

I swear by Almighty God that the evidence I shall give to this honourable Legislative Assembly shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

Mrs. Tammy Banks-Dacosta, Acting Director, Department of Education Services: Tammy Banks-

Dacosta, Acting Director, Department of Education Services.

I do solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm that the evidence I shall give to this honourable Legislative Assembly shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

The Chairman: Good morning.

We want to welcome Ms. Cetonya Cacho, the Chief Officer for the Ministry of Education; she has brought with her Ms. Lyneth Monteith, who is the Acting Deputy Chief Officer for the Ministry and Mrs. Tammy Banks-Dacosta, who is the Acting Director of the Department of Educational Services. Thank you all.

The rules are that when you answer the first question you state your full name and position so that it appears on the record. You don't need to do it each time, just the first time.

We will do our usual thing and have the Auditor General give an overview of the Report.

Mrs. Sue Winspear, Auditor General, Office of the Auditor General: Mr. Chairman, members of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), colleagues from within Government and my Office, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to make some opening remarks.

The Report that we are considering here today is “School Education”, which my Office published in November 2019.

The Performance Audit assesses how efficiently and effectively the Ministry of Education is using its resources to maximise student achievement.

Our Audit looked at government-run schools and focused on four main areas:

1. Strategic direction.
2. Use of resources.
3. Student achievement; and
4. Students with special educational needs.

I will briefly highlight some of the key findings in relation to each of these areas.

The Government has identified education as one of its priorities and has a broad strategic outcome for education that has been in place since 2013. However, there is no long-term strategic plan for education, with the last one having expired at the end of 2017 although the Ministry does have some planning that could be used to inform a strategy.

Measures are set up as part of the budget process, but these are mostly inputs and outputs rather than focusing on the outcomes that are to be achieved, and performance against these measures is not monitored or publicly reported.

We also found that there is no clear link between the Government's strategic priorities for education and full employment for Caymanians.

The Government spent \$86 million on education in 2018, making it the largest area of government-spend. Since 2014, the government has increased spending on education by 17 per cent; however, there is a need for a better understanding between use of resources and performance.

As mentioned, there are some performance measures but these are not necessarily measuring the right things. For example, student/teacher ratio, whilst important often to parents, is not a good indicator of educational outcomes, whereas cost per student—which is a good measure—is not calculated or analysed. As part of the audit, we calculated the cost per student and found that it varied significantly by school and this is set out in Exhibit 10 on page 31. We also found the cost per student was high when compared to private schools on Island and internationally.

On a positive note, student attainment has improved over the five years we reviewed. However, performance fluctuated over this period and there were significant levels of under-performance at both primary and secondary schools across all subjects and between boys and girls.

The Government has also identified students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) as a priority, but there is no national strategy setting out what it expects to achieve. Over the five years reviewed, the number of students with special educational needs increased by 19 per cent and there has been a 49 per cent increase in funding. However, it is not clear if this additional investment has improved outcomes for students with special educational needs. Since 2014, the attainment of primary school students with special educational needs has gotten worse, whilst the performance of Year-12 students with SEN has improved.

Government has accepted all but one of the 18 recommendations set out in Appendix 3 and planned to start implementing all of these by February, 2020.

From my Office I have with me today, Ms. Erin McLean and Mr. Adrian Murenzi who undertook the

work, along with Deputy Auditor General of Performance Audit Angela Cullen.

Before I stop—because I know members of the Committee would be interested to know—I just wanted to inform the Committee that I am delighted to say that the financial audits for the Education Ministry are now completely up to date, which is a major achievement on behalf of the Ministry. We are just finalising the reports to those charged with governance, but the years 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018 all resulted in unqualified audit opinions.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Auditor General.

I would also like to offer our congratulations that the Ministry is now up to date in their accounting. For a while it was rather troubling that they were so far behind, but we appreciate the hard work that went into it to get it up to date so, they are to be congratulated on getting a clean report.

We will open up for questions. Mr. Bush.

Hon. Bernie A. Bush: Pleasant morning.

Through you, Mr. Chair, for the listening public to know, what do you see as the role and purpose of the Education Ministry?

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: Good morning; Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports, Agriculture and Lands.

Do you mean in comparison to Department of Education Services (DES) or just generally?

[Pause]

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: Generally? Okay.

The Ministry's goal is to set policy (direction), for education for public and private schools, early childhood centres and post compulsory education. Ultimately, we are seeking to raise standards in all of those areas.

The Chairman: I noticed that you said you were going to resume planning for the long-term education strategy in October, 2019. Is there any particular reason for the delay, the last one having expired in 2017 and what progress has been made on a new strategic plan?

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: The Ministry developed the process to restart the National Strategic Plan in 2017. At that time, I was in the position of Deputy Chief Officer and we worked on the consultation process that would have been necessary to develop a new strategic plan. I am not sure why, but it was not taken forward at that time.

As Chief Officer, during that period, we have worked to put in place a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) strategy—we focused on Science—which was completed and is being implemented currently, and a literacy strategy which was part of a larger teaching and learning strategy.

A numeracy strategy was drafted and we are in the process of drafting an ECC [Early Child Care] strategy. We currently have a family learning strategy drafted and out for consultation. A student attainment strategy is being drafted by the Department of Education Services [DES] and that is out for consultation as well. We are starting the work on the new larger, strategic plan which encompasses all of education.

The Chairman: You have decided to do individual strategies as opposed to doing an overall strategy and that overall strategy guiding the individual plans.

Is the plan now that the overall strategy will be guided by the individual plans?

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: In the absence of the overall strategy, we focused on specific areas that would have high impact, in terms of student performance and achievement.

The Chairman: How was that applied to your budgetary projections?

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: In developing the strategy there is always budget consideration.

What we do is ask our staff to see if those things can be implemented without any impact to government funding and/or spending. Most times it can be done through reallocation of resources, staffing, et cetera; there are times when additional funding is needed and we may be able to find it through savings or requesting additional funds.

The Chairman: Do the individual strategic plans shift from an emphasis on input and outputs to outcomes, and how would your outcomes be measured?

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: Yes. This has been an ongoing process for us. It is really a shift in the culture of education, in terms of when we are writing strategies, our first sets of drafts that we received talked about what we were going to do, rather than what the impact on children would be.

Ms. Monteith and Ms. Tammy have done a lot of work with staff, focusing on that *“So what? Why are we doing this? If it does not have an impact, what is the point? If you cannot say this is going to have a measureable impact, what is the point of doing it?”*, and staff have been asked to rework strategies quite a few times to really focus on that area.

We are currently looking at projects that we have done—kind of historically—and asking those questions again: *So what? What has been the impact?* And, if we are not able to pinpoint where historical strategies or projects are impacting students’ performance and achievement or some area of their education development, then we are looking to strategically dismiss those to restart others.

The Chairman: How is the Inspectorate involved?

Is the Inspectorate the body that is going to measure your success in these strategies and whether the output was achieved, or is that something that the DES is going to do?

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: It is a mixture, really.

We value the inspection reports; they give us an outside perspective of how individual schools are doing. Some of the measures from that report provide feedback on the strategies that we put in place, but they are not always direct to a specific strategy.

For example, the inspection report will not comment on how well the science strategy is being implemented. When we develop those strategies, we have monitoring and evaluation mechanisms already thought out as well as those key performance indicators. All of that has to be identified in the development of the strategy along with success criteria.

We have had to do a lot of work over the last few years starting with the first plan of action, in identifying success criteria that was actually measureable. Many times, people would say something like *“something was put in place”* but again, how is that successful? What is the impact of that?

So we do that at the Ministry and Department level, based on the strategy, but that is put in place before it is even implemented.

The Chairman: The strategy assigns specific responsibility to some office or officer to do the monitoring?

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: Yes, sir.

When we did the first plan of action in 2014/15, when we created the format—the template for the plan of action in all of our strategies—each action point had to be linked to a specific individual, not a group of individuals, because that created ownership for that action and accountability.

We have stopped saying things like *“DES will be responsible for...”* The actual individual or post is identified for delivering that output or outcome.

The Chairman: Is there any likelihood that some of these measures are quantitative and qualitative instead of observation only?

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: Yes, sir, and that has been very important. That has been our driving point; it has to be both qualitative and quantitative.

The big drive for us is student performance; if it is not impacting a student's ability to make improved progress and then drive up their achievement, we tend not to focus on those strategies. There are a lot of things that are nice to do but, because our students are under-performing in certain areas, we are really focused on improving performance.

The Chairman: Another recommendation from the Auditor General was number two: **The Ministry of Education should publish the Education Data Report on a timely basis, ideally by December of the same year of sitting exams.** The Ministry committed to do that in December, 2019. Was that done?

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: Yes, sir, it was done.

The Chairman: Okay and will that be ongoing?

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: Yes, sir.

We are looking to adjust the data report as well. We would very much like to add private school academic data, as well as the profile of SEN students in government schools as well as private schools. I am not sure if we will have that information done by the next data report, but that is what we are seeking to do in the future.

The Chairman: Okay.

[Pause]

The Chairman: I know that you introduced a completely new curriculum in the primary schools last September.

As a parent whose children go to public school, I want to tell you that I think that curriculum seems to be a great improvement over what was there previously; however, I still get back to my perennial beef of the grading system. I was impressed when I looked at my daughter's report card and saw that you raised the standard and the passing grade was 70, but then she can get up to a 130 so we have not really increased the standard, we have just extended numbers. This is not a part of the Auditor General's report but for my own edification—why do we go past 100?

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: I will ask Ms. Tammy Hopkins to speak to it. It is not a percentage score, it is a scale score, but she will be able to speak to it in more detail.

The Chairman: I know, but automatically, when you start choosing numbers, people like me resort to percentage of 100, if it is even 9 or 10 or whatever; and I think the general public does.

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: Okay.

Tammy Banks-Dacosta, Acting Director, Department of Education Services: Tammy Banks-Dacosta, Acting Director, Department of Education Services.

We developed a parent handbook to go along with the assessments in order to explain the scoring system. As Ms. Cacho stated, it is not based on percentage but rather a scale score with a range between 70 and 130. Traditionally, A, B and C and percentages have been something that persons are familiar with, so a lot of time has gone to educate and to consult with our teachers and principals to ensure that that message is out.

We do have an assessment strategy, as well, and, in preparation for that, we outlined if children are falling below 70. The target is 100, but if it is 70 and below it is flagged and then we are looking at those children's needs as well. That is where you get the range.

The Chairman: My question is why go to 70 and 130 as opposed to 50 and 100. What is the numerical significance, other than to give the impression that we raised the standard from 50 to 70?

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: I will just add, sir, that because we are using the curriculum from England and that is the assessment mode that they use, we used their assessment modes as well.

We have purchased FFT Aspire, which is a software-tracking for student grades. Because they use the same score system as England does, it allows us to make direct comparison with students in England that match the profiles of our students here; as well as to compare our students to some Caribbean countries. So, we have regional and international comparisons.

The Chairman: I did not hear you mention a strategy for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), which is a big concern in the public. One of the recommendations of the Auditor General was a national strategy for TVET. It said that you would begin it in January, has that happened?

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: Yes, sir.

Currently, the high schools offer TVET programmes: Travel and tourism, music, technology, construction, creative media, automotive technology, building technology, and beauty therapy.

CIFEC (Cayman Islands Further Education Centre) offers: Art, business, hospitality, IMI, work skills, IT extended and sports are some of the TVET courses that we currently offer in our system.

The Education Council, led by Chairperson Mr. Dan Scott, has a working group that is currently looking at a TVET strategy. I believe that working group met at the end of last year or early this year. We have a Ministry representative on that working group looking at TVET as well.

In the Ministry we are currently working on a post-16 education strategy looking to track those students who are out of high school, whether they go into A-Levels, UCCI (University College of the Cayman Islands), or into the work force and then what happens to them beyond. That strategy will also target young persons who are not in employment, WORC or training. The person in the Ministry who is working on that is also on that working group looking at TVET, so that we can identify any synergies and avoid any overlap.

The Chairman: Is any consideration in the overall strategy being given to reintegrate CIFEC into the two high schools so that it is a year of that school and not a year somewhere else?

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: I am not on the working group, so I am not able to specifically say what they are doing, but they do have open reign, so that could be a consideration.

The Chairman: The Government seems to be duplicating efforts in several areas of education. For instance, in the budget, I think there is about \$400,000 or \$600,000 for PWD (Public Works Department) to build classrooms to teach the subjects that you are offering. Were the Education Ministry and Departments consulted and have you agreed to that?

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: We liaised with Public Works for the apprenticeship programme that they offer, it is slightly different than what we do at CIFEC. They offer a full apprenticeship programme in construction, which has been highly successful for the students involved.

I am not able to say the extent to which our Project Manager would have been involved in any discussions regarding their building at this time. [Would you like me to check into that and get back to you?](#)

The Chairman: My concern is that we are not creating a parallel system that may in fact be lowering entry requirements, because it could be a political decision

as to who goes to that programme, and not an academic decision driven by performance.

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: Currently it is an academic decision. We have recently recruited a Caymanian to head the Careers Office, which works with students and businesses to align them to their interests as well as their academic performance.

The Chairman: Mr. Bush.

Hon. Bernie A. Bush: Through you, Mr. Chair.

During Finance Committee, a question was asked and it was kind of brushed over. In the Sunrise Centre or the Lighthouse School, do you have cameras?

[Pause]

Hon. Bernie A. Bush: Yes, one of them does. Okay.

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: Sorry, sir. The Lighthouse does not, but I am informed that Sunrise has a few.

Hon. Bernie A. Bush: Yes, Sunrise does. Correct.

Being former teachers, at least two of you, I do not know if this inspection regime went on at the time when you ladies were there. When the inspectors come, some of the performances I see for that day are beautiful.

I have taken it upon myself to ask 16 teachers from four different schools: "Would you mind a camera in your room?" Of the 16 teachers, 13 said "No." I asked why and a few of them said, it protects us because we do not feel protected by the law that was passed a few years ago. A few said it protects the children, but almost unanimously they said, "We have nothing to hide." Is there any serious thought on putting cameras in these classrooms for the three purposes that I have just outlined?

I know last year we had a case in West Bay, where a teacher was lied on. The second day after the case started, the Police told me the boys admitted that they told a lie. Yet, for almost two to three weeks, that teacher had to show up at the Education Department and sit down like a last year calf, looking up in everybody's face all day long. She was a good teacher and it affected the children from her class. I became so aware of it because some of the parents reported to me how their children were reacting and behaving. That was one to protect the teacher.

Now, there have been cases where children have been grabbed and people try to cover it up. However, most of all, you can tune in at any time and watch a lesson to see if those teachers are preparing their plans properly, going with a lesson plan and fol-

lowing the curriculum at any time. Is there any serious thought about placing cameras in the classrooms?

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: Mr. Chair, through you.

Some work has gone into looking into cameras for some of our classrooms, but more work has to be done.

In terms of watching lessons and persons putting their best foot forward during an inspection, we are very familiar with that.

When I first started in the role of DCO [Deputy Chief Officer] for Education some time ago, we were getting many complaints from principals who said that they had underperforming staff but the Ministry was not willing to dismiss these people. I asked for all the performance management reports for all of the teachers and I do not think there were any listed that were underperforming. Consequently, we went back to principals and said that it is not possible for us to dismiss a member of staff whom you have rated as good and performing well. If someone is underperforming, then we have to put in a support plan in place to assist them, but we have to be very honest with that person about their performance, because their performance affects up to 28 children in their class.

We have moved to improve the performance management process, so that it does not just include formal observations; it should include walk-throughs as well. For example, principals just walking into classes and observing lessons that are not scheduled because sometimes you see moments of brilliance or weakness, and those need to be captured as well.

In addition, we introduced termly data meetings where the DES team goes into every single school and meets with the principal and their senior management team. They look at the performance data for every single class and compare that with the performance management scores of those teachers and ask questions like: *please explain the rationale to me; this teacher has been given a Grade 4 which is above-average, yet they have ten students who have not made progress or have gone back.*

Those challenges have created a system where under-performing teachers are being scored appropriately and we are able to move to dismissal for under-performance or put in support plans and persons improve. I believe that most of the time people improve their practice once support is provided. That is what we have done instead of just having that one-off, because anybody would put their best foot forward for an evaluation.

Protecting children is our key priority; it is health and safety first, even before our education standards. Over the last few years, we have invested heavily in child protection training for all of our staff. We have an officer in the Ministry and another in DES who are leading that process and that has resulted in

an increase in reports of child protection matters. Not all child protection matters go through formal processing but through law, we have the responsibility to report.

Nevertheless, the cameras are something that we have started to look into; not a lot of work has gone into that, but it is something that we can continue to look into.

Hon. Bernie A. Bush: By any chance, are you able to give a time, for example say, give us two, three, four months that we can possibly make a report that we see where we could go and we have to go; is it six months? Is there some kind of time limit that you think you could give?

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: Yes, sir, Mr. Chair, through you.

I have been told by the beginning of the school year we should have a brief done about the viability of putting cameras in the classrooms.

Hon. Bernie A. Bush: Thank you.

The Chairman: One of the recommendations of the Auditor General concerned the Scholarship Secretariat and you committed to making the progress in January. How are you proposing to link the grant of scholarships to work permits? Because we have the best manpower statistics in the world; it is called a work permit.

Secondly, is there any consideration being given by the government to first offer scholarships for government's needs and return to bonding the people to whom government grants such scholarships to three and five years, as we used to do years and years ago?

When I went away on a government scholarship I knew I had to come back and work for the government for six years to pay off my scholarship, but I also knew that I didn't have to fight for a job. When we moved away from that it seems like a lot of the people who are coming back qualified are having much greater difficulty finding jobs. Is there any consideration being given to linking the scholarships that government grants to specific government needs?

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: Yes, sir.

The Honourable Minister O'Connor-Connolly has tasked the Education Council with a review of the Scholarship Unit as part of their remit. That is being led by Mr. Dan Scott, who has a group working very closely with the Scholarship Secretariat. He will be able to speak to that a bit more later on.

Over the last two years we spent some time re-engineering our staffing, not just in scholarship but across the Ministry and DES to ensure that we have

the right people in the right places. We now have a new scholarship manager who has been doing an excellent job of cleaning the data, simplifying the process and improving communication to stakeholders.

I know that the scholarship secretariat working group has been looking at the scholarship policy and refining that with recommendations that are coming up to the Minister shortly. Mr. Scott would be able to give you additional details on that.

The Chairman: This afternoon?

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: Yes, sir.

The Chairman: In that review process, has the Minister looked at the possibility of capturing all of the scholarships that are legally required?

For instance, every Business Staffing Plan has a complement of scholarships that should be granted. Is the Minister looking at a way to capture and bring those funds into the Secretariat, so that we can readily ascertain whether companies have complied with their Business Staffing Plan by giving money to the Education Council every January to fund scholarships?

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: I want to be very careful not to speak on behalf of my Minister.

I will say she is very keen to nation build and has mentioned in public forums that she would like to see scholarship amounts increase so that students can access universities that have higher ratings. She has also spoken publicly about having a Cayman Scholar Award, which is an unlimited amount so that if a student gets into a very high-performing university—Yale, Harvard, et cetera—there is no cap on the amount of funding they get.

I know these are her thoughts and wishes; however, I am not sure at this time how far the Council has gotten with progressing that.

The Chairman: You will be in a position to answer this: Has the Government provided the level of scholarship funding for 2020 and 2021 that was requested by the Scholarship Secretariat through your Ministry, or was it reduced?

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: The amount for scholarships was reduced for 2020 with the understanding that, based on the number of scholarship applications received that met the criteria and were approved, we could go back to Cabinet and ask for additional funding to cover those students.

Hon. Bernie A. Bush: Through you, Mr. Chair.

This has been going on for years and you just inherited it but it continues, because I know of three students.

We all know when students have to be back in school, so why is it that year after year some students do not receive their scholarship money the first month? It is a major concern for many of our students. What can be done or is anything being done to alleviate this major problem?

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: Mr. Chair, through you.

That is a problem the Ministry and the Education Council identified; the new Scholarship Manager worked very hard with the staff to reduce the amount of paper work required to simplify the checks and balances so that checks can be issued on time. Consequently, we saw improvement last year.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The one area where most of my concern comes from—and the Auditor General briefly mentioned it in her report—is *The Cayman Islands Government's Office of Education Standards Annual Report, 2019* entitled *Every School a Good School*, which was tabled in the Legislation Assembly.

At the end of the day, Mr. Chairman, regardless of what we do, this is pretty much the end result; this is the report card for all the schools. This is a separate department from the Ministry of Education and it evaluates the performance of each school.

As a preamble and just so the listening public can understand where my question is coming from, they basically look at seven standards when they assess a school's performance. They are:

1. **Students' achievement in English, Mathematics and Science**
2. **Students' personal and social development**
3. **Teaching, learning and assessment**
4. **The curriculum**
5. **Health, safety, support and guidance**
6. **Leadership and management; and**
7. **Overall performance.**

This report covered 25 schools in both the public and private sector and they basically developed four grading systems to evaluate the schools, the first one being:

Excellent-	Schools that achieve exceptionally high quality of performance and practice
Good-	Expected level for every school in the Cayman Islands, both public and

- Satisfactory- private
The minimum level of quality required for the Cayman Islands—all key aspects of performance and practice in every school should meet or exceed this level, and;
- Weak- Quality not yet at the level acceptable for schools in the Cayman Islands. Schools would be expected to take urgent measures to improve the quality of any aspect of their performance or practice that is judged at this level

For ease of reference of the listening public, Mr. Chairman, I will read the list. It is not that many, but I guess people who have their children in private schools would also like to know how they are performing.

I must note that Little Trotters Farm and Nursery (a private school), was the only school of the 25 that was rated “Excellent”.

There were five schools rated “Good”:

1. Cayman Prep and High School
2. Island Montessori
3. Starfish Village
4. Lighthouse School; and
5. Montessori By The Sea.

I am glad to see that Lighthouse School was the only public school that was actually rated “Good”.

There were 12 schools rated “Satisfactory” namely:

1. Prospect Primary School
2. Grace Christian Academy
3. St. George’s Pre-School
4. Creek and Spot Bay Primary School
5. Layman E. Scott High School
6. Tiny Tots Academy
7. West End Primary School
8. First Baptist Christian Academy
9. Discovery Kids
10. Little Cayman Education Service
11. Just for Kids; and
12. John Gray High School

There were seven schools that were actually rated “Weak”:

1. Wesleyan Christian Academy
2. Savannah Primary School
3. Triple C School
4. Miss Nadine’s Pre-School

5. Clifton Hunter High School
6. Tiffany’s Pre-School; and
7. Bright Start

So, there is a mixture of public and private schools, Mr. Chairman. On the report, they mentioned that they did follow-through inspections for some of the schools that were not excellent or good and I could not help but notice the progress that was made:

- Creek and Spot Bay Primary School –satisfactory
- Edna Moyle Primary School – satisfactory
- Prospect Primary School – satisfactory
- Red Bay Primary School – good
- Savannah Primary School – satisfactory
- West End Primary School– good
- Bodden Town Primary School – satisfactory
- George Town Primary School the progress in January, 2018 – weak; they went back to check again in September 2018 and it was still rated weak. They went back in April 2019 and it was rated satisfactory
- Cayman Brac day-care, they went in April 2018 and it was rated weak; they went back in October 2018 and it went up to satisfactory
- East End Primary School was rated satisfactory in March 2018 and again in November 2018
- Clifton Hunter High School’s follow through inspection was done in March 2019 and it was rated weak
- Tiffany’s Pre-School’s progress was rated weak in April, 2019
- Sir John A. Cumber High School, they went in April, 2018 and again in January, 2019 and the progress was rated weak; and
- Bright Start Learning Centre, in May 2019 was rated satisfactory

Mr. Chairman, the one thing that really matters to me—and I am going back to the Auditor General’s report—is that we have all the various inputs but at the end of the day, this is the outcome; this is really what goes in and measures the performance.

I do recognise that ultimately, policy is something that this Committee cannot deal with. There is a policy issue which we will have to deal with at the larger meeting of the Legislative Assembly, to direct those issues to the Minister. That is something that a Chief Officer is not constitutionally required to answer and this Committee, constitutionally, cannot get into policy but rather value for money. I say all of that Mr. Chairman, to ask:

1. When can we (realistically) expect a long-term education strategic plan to be completed; and
2. When can we expect this report?

The results that come in this report have most schools rated at least good or excellent, as opposed to most schools being in the lower rating of satisfactory or weak. Those are the only questions I have for the witnesses here today.

Thank you.

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: Thank you, Mr. Chairman; through you.

If I could be allowed to give just a bit of background information; when I took up the post as Deputy Chief Officer a few years ago, there was no Inspection Unit in place. We worked to reintroduce an Inspection Unit and recruited a Director and a Senior Inspector for it. It was very important for us to have an objective evaluation of schools' performance; I think that is a critical part of our growth. We have to know what our areas of strengths are and have them confirmed so that we can increase them and make them consistent across the system but we also must have a realistic view of what our areas of improvement are, so that we can work towards those. Our ultimate goal is to make decisions in the best interests of the students in our care.

Whilst we were re-establishing the Inspections Unit we recruited—at the time it was Mrs. Mary Bowerman—as a Temporary Inspector to lead a team from the United Kingdom to conduct baseline inspections of all of the government schools, as a number of them had not been inspected at that time. At the end of that 2014/2015 Academic Year, 11 of the 16 government schools that were inspected were rated unsatisfactory—11 of the 16.

When we review the inspection reports to date, only three of our schools are weak; so we have changed from 11 out of 16 unsatisfactory, to only 3 schools being weak. And we changed the leadership of every one of those weak schools and made adjustments to the leadership teams at all of those schools.

The Chairman: Was the 2014 inspection quantitative and qualitative, or was it simply subjective by observation thereof and a snapshot? Because there are people who believe that the lowering of the rates was deliberate so that we could demonstrate this kind of massive improvement, when the results of the children's grades did not match over that same period of time.

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: The baseline inspections were based on qualitative and quantitative data. The team from the UK that were used to doing inspections throughout England looked at the academic data that was available. In terms of falsifying the results so that they would be better later on, it was an independent team.

I can tell you that since those baseline inspections our Office has reviewed and released the Education Law, which was outdated by 30 years, we did the Education Regulations and put those in place for the first time, we created annual plans of action with all of the school principals and that was the first time, to my knowledge, that all principals of every government school were brought into one room and we had a hard look at what the issues were in our system. We narrowed those issues down to three and we built a plan around those and that has continued annually. That has evolved now to principals working with their own teams to do plans of action within their own schools to capture the outcomes of the inspection reports and to have detailed action plans for how we address those recommendations.

Our plans of action were evaluated by Dr. Avis Glaze, a renowned Canadian educator, and she gave us quite a lot of praise—I will not quote what she said—for the quality of those plans and what we aspired to achieve.

As I stated, we reformed our Performance Management System to review student assessment data on a termly basis. That is the entire DES team looking at standards with principals and senior leaders, looking at SEN data, staff performance data, digging deep and asking questions about the type and quality of data provided and student progress across each term. We have changed that this year so that is every six weeks and not every term. During that time, we implemented a series of leadership training as follows:

1. A succession plan so that our leaders took responsibility for the achievement of the children in their school, including those with SEN
2. STEM specialists were hired because that was a core area subject that was not being addressed at the time
3. We introduced a science strategy
4. The PBIS [Positive Behavioural Interventions and Support] intervention was included and it focused on behaviour—low-level disruptive behaviour in the classroom, which had the highest impact on student performance
5. Focused on learning interventions—research shows that learning interventions has one of the highest impacts on student performance
6. Our response to schools was simplified, rather than rolling out 25 different initiatives
7. We use the Visible Learning model which looks at hundreds, if not thousands, of research on education and student performance, and narrows it down to effect size to show what interventions in education have the most impact. This ensured that we were not wasting our time doing things that had very little impact

8. We tracked the top five high-impact initiatives that research has shown and aligned all of our work to them. Like I said, we asked that question: “*So what?*” If we are working hard it has to be for children to achieve, not just for the sake of working hard
9. Principals present on their POA; so it is not just a document that sits in their office. They stand in front of their peers and demonstrate how they have implemented their plan of action, whether it has been successful, what struggles they have had, and they share stories so they can improve
10. Child protection training has been increased
11. Senior Leadership Teams were established in all primary schools so it was not just the principal taking the lead, but there was a Head of Infants and a Head of Juniors who were paid to bring up the standards within their department
12. We established full-time SENCOs [Special Education Needs Coordinators] to target students with SEN needs
13. New community service requirements for graduation was also added
14. We have set the standard higher; schools now have two years to get a ‘good’ in their inspection report—that is our standard, that is our baseline

So, from the time we start with the baseline inspections we have vested so much into schools. Every decision we make has to be for the benefit of the children we serve and there was an expectation that schools improve. We have raised the standard; schools now have two years to get a good in their inspection reports.

That is our standard. That is our baseline. We will continue to implement initiatives that are research-based and proven to raise standards and we will continue to drive those areas, but it is not by accident that they have improved. It is through strategy and hard work.

The Chairman: I can only tell you my personal experience with your inspectors.

They decided to have a meeting for parents in North Side at 6 o’clock on a Friday evening. Now, that could only be for one reason, because they did not want anyone to come. However, two parents attended and they could not demonstrate—to my satisfaction—any quantitative or qualitative analysis that was going on. Everything that they told me and the other parent was totally subjective. That is why I asked the question.

So, you might want to look into giving parents some assurance that there are significant quantitative or qualitative analyses being applied and not just

someone simply coming into a classroom and, by observation, making a subjective judgement of how a teacher is performing.

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: May I ask if that was the recent inspections or the baseline that you are referring to?

The Chairman: About two years ago. I am not referring to the current one.

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: Okay.

The Chairman: I would also tell you that I give you and your Department the credit of saying and ensuring that there are quantitative or qualitative analyses, but I attended that inspectorate [meeting] as a parent and in my mind, all of the questions were asking me to make subjective determinations about the school. Not quantitative or qualitative.

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: The OES [Office of Education Standards] does not fall under our Ministry, but I can certainly have that discussion with the Director to ensure that opportunity is provided when they meet with parents.

The Chairman: We need Mr. Saunders’ question answered, as to when the strategic plan will be finalised and available for public scrutiny.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Looking back at the Auditor General’s report, under the key messages it reads: “**MEYSAL and DES engage extensively with staff in public schools, holding a range of regular meetings to ensure systematic communication, share good practices and identify and mitigate potential problems. However, there is no overall strategy for parental engagement. We found that a recent policy was developed and implemented without sufficient parental engagement or consultation with teachers.**

“**The Government also has a strategic priority to ensure full employment for Caymanians. However, we found that there is no clear link between the vision and priorities for education and the Government’s economic priorities. The Government has highlighted the importance of vocational trades in the Cayman Islands and the importance of encouraging young Caymanians to take up these trades, but there is no national strategy for technical and vocational education and training (TVET). There is no clear link between scholarship funding awarded and economic priorities as data on the type of industry for locally funded scholarships are not tracked.**”

It continues, further down on page [3], “...neither MEYSAL nor DES collects or monitors other performance measures - for example, cost per student, a good efficiency measure. Our analysis shows variations in the cost per student across the public schools. We also compared the average cost per student in the Cayman Islands public schools with the average cost per student in private schools in the Cayman Islands and other countries. This comparison showed that the average cost per student in public schools is 66 per cent higher than the average cost per student in private schools; and was the second-highest cost per student in 2015 when compared to 33 OECD countries.”

So, Mr. Chairman, I understand that there are major challenges in education, we get that and the report is clear. What I am really looking for ultimately goes back to the issue of vision and priorities. When can we expect the long-term strategic plan to be completed? I suspect that once that exercise is completed, some of the deficiencies and inefficiencies raised in the Auditor General's report will be, I guess, dealt with or solutions found to those issues. So realistically, what timeline are we working with in regards to getting this plan completed? I am really looking for a date.

Thank you.

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: We have to work in collaboration with our Minister to set the date. We have started the ground work for the strategic plan; however, I am not able to give you a date at this time.

The Chairman: We are not looking to go beyond this budget cycle without an overall strategic plan, are we?

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: I need to collaborate with my Minister. I am not able to say at this time.

The Chairman: A strategic plan or at least an implementation strategic plan should not have to rely so much on a Minister because the overall policy would have been set already, if you already started a plan. I think what we are looking for is, all things being equal, and the Minister not changing the policy directive, when will this strategic plan be?

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: We have a number of strategies in place that touch on the various subject areas. We would hope to have a consultation process started this year.

The Chairman: What is being done to reduce truancy in schools?

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: We have created a dashboard—I believe that

was last year—that looks at all of the data for all schools and pulls up that information on one kind of easy screen. We are able to identify issues with truancy a lot faster through that dashboard.

Truancy is an area, as I stated earlier, where we have done things historically and we have just continued to do them. Through the audit report this was highlighted as an issue for us and since that, we have had one of the Senior School Improvement Officers working with the truancy team to create a new Truancy Policy. I believe that was completed in December 2019; it is being implemented currently and there are monitoring mechanisms in place, so we will be watching the data.

The Chairman: Okay.

I notice that in the report card lateness and absenteeism are tracked. I know that all parents are given the opportunity to come and talk to their children's teacher and have that interaction to discuss the report; but, is there any overall strategy to improve parental involvement as a part of reducing truancy, and to improve the relationship of the home into the education strategy?

Tammy Banks-Dacosta, Acting Director, Department of Education Services: Mr. Chairman, Ms. Cacho mentioned the development of the Truancy Policy. We have a strategic plan and one of the first key actions was to identify the students within a certain percentage of truancy and lateness. We have spelled out in that strategic approach what the schools are responsible for and then taking on board what the Truancy Officers are doing. Monthly updates are then given to the SSIOs [Senior School Improvement Officers] and me and we have been addressing it. We are in its infancy, but we have also gone out to Parent/Teacher Associations (PTAs) and made ourselves available for Truancy to go out and address them.

There are certain steps to take at the school level, then at the Department level and then a referral to the Courts.

The Chairman: In developing the strategy, what is the strategy for parental involvement?

For instance, we changed the school time last September from 8:30 to 8 o'clock. I do not recall any publicity or any notice to parents coming out with the children's report card at the end of term that school was now going to start half hour earlier.

Tammy Banks-Dacosta, Acting Director, Department of Education Services: Mr. Chairman, at the end of the school year when we did our consultations with the schools, and based on the new curriculum implementation, the decision was taken to increase.

A letter did go out informing parents in June, 2019 as the key changes and one of them was the 8 o'clock start.

The Chairman: Just out of interest, how was that letter distributed?

Tammy Banks-Dacosta, Acting Director, Department of Education Services: Disseminated through the principals, sir.

The Chairman: Okay, because I do not recall getting such a letter. I am not saying that I did not, but certainly not as it related to the time.

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: I just want to add a comment to that. Several of the private schools that received good ratings during the inspections actually start school at 8 o'clock. By starting at 8:30, our students were losing out on over three weeks of additional instructional time and that was one of the reasons for that change. I just wanted to share that.

The Chairman: I can tell you that coming from North Side in traffic, if you had gone to 9 o'clock until 4 o'clock, I believe the traffic situation would have been substantially different; but anyway, that is for another day.

Hon. Bernie A. Bush: Mr. Chair, through you.

I have three or four messages on my phone from parents. Do you have any type of cultural training when you bring in these teachers, especially, from the United Kingdom?

Perfect example: There was one particular individual who passed some parents standing and talking to a teacher about their children's report. The individual walked in, said nothing to the parents, and they say she is ill-mannered. I do not have any problem showing you what was said, but this happens regularly.

I have been told the individual is half-decent at the job, but definitely needs a lesson in local manners and it is aggravating. These are the parents who are showing up. When you have parents who are showing up—and as you all know the parents who do not show up are our main problem—we want to work with them and make them feel that we care or something is right. It is something that has to be done, and done quickly, with these situations.

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: Mr. Chair, through you.

During the induction period at the beginning of the year, when we bring in most of our new staff—I say most, because some we hire throughout the year as needed—there is a cultural sensitivity workshop

that is held, but it is only done once. Perhaps the team can look at whether we need to do a refresher in the middle of the year to capture those people who did not start at the beginning of an academic year, and just kind of drive home that cultural aspect. We can certainly look into that.

The Chairman: Some of your SEN provisions for schools are limited by resources because you did not get the funding that was asked for. Schools are sharing SENs and often-times there may be a chance when the day that they actually need the SEN intervention, is the day the particular qualified person is at another school.

Is it because of resources being allocated to you or are you making a judgement call that that is an adequate provision, to have certain schools sharing SEN—even PE [Physical Education] teachers?

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: Yes, sir.

We have recruited a new Senior School Improvement Officer for SEN, Mr. Elroy Bryan, who you may know was at the Lighthouse School. He brought the Lighthouse School to the point where they could have a good inspection. They also have a gold star rating from ASDAN. A very brilliant individual you would be familiar with. He is the new SSIO for SEN.

He is currently working on cleaning our SEN data, like I mentioned earlier. Previously, we had student services which housed all of the SEN specialists in one building. We have dismantled that, if you will, and put those services directly in schools. We have done the same with the coaches; we have taken them out of DES and put them in the schools.

One of the measures that we do not have and that he is looking at is a SEN strategy, but he has to clean the data first (we build on the data). He is looking at:

1. Whether or not we are using the resources we have effectively, in the right space. So, it is not just about adding additional money if we can kind of move things around
2. Looking at the needs for every child who has been diagnosed with having SEN; and
3. Looking at the services they receive in respect to those needs. He is using something called "Clinic Source", which is an electronic monitoring system that all of our clinicians have to enter data in so that we can see specifically the therapy that is being provided to SEN students.

We need to cross-reference that data. At that point, we will be able to see where the gaps are and why they exist; whether we need additional funding or we are not making the best use of the funding that we have now. I am a strong believer that just throwing

more money at things does not always improve them. We have to look internally at our own systems.

The Chairman: I am also a firm believer, that if it is one person, you need the person. You need at least the same amount of resources, if it is one or five.

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: He is looking at that.

The Chairman: When we look at it and say, *because there is only five, well maybe the person only needs to be here one half-day a week*, you are then leaving yourself exposed for nine other half-days for the week; and that is probably when that SEN intervention is needed, but the person is not there.

I think we may need to get to where people are actually available at the school level. I certainly support taking them out of DES and putting them in the schools.

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: I would just say that we have shifted from a model where staff was allocated based on numbers, to a model based on need. Cleaning that data is a critical part of that process but yes, sir, we are on the same page.

The Chairman: When you say cleaning the data, are you also talking about cleaning up the diagnostic process?

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: That is a part of his review process; yes, sir.

The Chairman: Seems you got your get out of jail card early today.

Thank you all very much for coming.

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: I just want to thank the Audit Office for the Performance Audit. It provides us with a different perspective for the way that we work, and it is a valuable tool for us within Education.

We are all educators—we have been teachers, principals, administrators—and we are doing the same thing day to day. It helps to have community members and other professionals take a look at our work and tell us, again, what is working really well so that we can spread that across the system; but help us to identify gaps, so that we can grow and improve our services. So, I would like to thank them for this process.

The Chairman: I think one of our jobs as the Public Accounts Committee is that we try to shift from the earlier confrontational approach to a more collaborative approach, because the process here is the out-

come not the output because we know, that if Mr. Jefferson gives you money to spend as an input and the output is to spend it, you are going to spend it.

We want to know what the outcome was and it is refreshing to hear that we are moving in that direction.

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: I appreciate the PAC for giving us an opportunity to speak to the public who may not read the Audit Report, but will listen in and hear some of the things that we are doing and some of the plans that we have. So, we thank you for this opportunity.

The Chairman: Thank you very much.

The Committee is now suspended until 1:00 pm.

Proceedings suspended at 11:34 am

Proceedings resumed at 1:10 pm

EDUCATION COUNCIL

The Chairman: The Public Accounts Committee is back in session.

ADMINISTRATION OF OATH OR AFFIRMATION

Mr. Dan Scott, Chairman, Education Council: I swear by Almighty God that the evidence I shall give to this honourable Legislative Assembly, shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

[Pause]

The Chairman: Mr. Scott, we want to thank you for taking time out. We know you are a busy man and we know that your time is highly costly but we are not going to employ you this afternoon as an auditor, we are here to ask you a few questions about your volunteerism as Chairman of the Education Council.

The only rule is that when you answer the first question, you say your full name and position. That is just for the record.

So, thank you very much for coming, we really appreciate it and this is a very friendly Committee.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Thank you, very much Mr. Chairman and through you.

For the record, I just want to thank the witness for his sterling public service. Like you've said, he does get paid by the hour but he does spend a lot of time giving back to the country so we want the record to show that we recognise that.

Through you, Mr. Chairman to the witness: One of the things we are stuck on going through the

Auditor General's report is the long term strategic plan for the Ministry, as a whole. Under the Constitution, the Public Accounts Committee can't get into issues of policy; that is something reserved for the Ministry.

Unfortunately, during the last Government Budget there was no debate on the Throne Speech therefore, we have no idea of the direction the Minister and the Ministry is going in that regard; and when the question was posed to the Chief Officer earlier, she basically deflected to the Minister.

Now, I understand from my own research that the Minister has empowered the Education Council in some regard. So today I am hoping that we can have an idea of where the Council sees the Education going. Right now, we are trying to understand the vision for Education and then ultimately, the plan to support that vision. Unfortunately, it has been a standard where there seems to be a lot of things going on but we are trying to see what the big picture or vision looks like and where we are.

In the Auditor General's Report she highlighted the fact that the cost per student in public school compared to private school was 66 per cent higher. Also, within the OECD [Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development] countries—of 33 countries, excepting one—Cayman was the second highest per cost. So, we don't see it as an issue of resources but more an issue of priority, vision, et cetera. So, the resources are available and that is what we are trying to determine today for this Committee and for the listening public.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Dan Scott, Chairman, Education Council: Thank you, sir. Dan Scott, Chairman of the Education Council.

I will respond through the Chair. Like you, the Education Council and the Minister has asked us to consider a number of these things. Our role as Education Council is to give advice as it relates to strategic matters such as that.

We are doing a number of projects and we have a number of work streams that we have been undertaking. One such example is around TVET (Technical Vocational Education and Training). That is something that we have undertaken and have engaged with the Minister on. We are looking to be able to provide recommendations from a sub-committee of Council, up through Council and ultimately to the Minister. When we looked at this, in consultation with the Minister, the idea that we are embarking on is opposed to ideas of the past, where we sat in silos and drafted a strategy. The approach that we are looking to undertake is one that we would term "demand-led".

A part of this is going out and understanding what we need, what the demands are and what we are looking for coming out of our children. In this, I am just using TVET as an example, but indeed more

broadly. The idea here is that we are moving from simply putting a process in place, to trying to talk about the life cycle of a student coming through and understanding what the end game is, as opposed to leaving them to say, *okay, well you have graduated, then what?* So, it is trying to produce students where there is a demand to employ them.

We are also operating under the basis that when you think about Cayman, we are a knowledge based economy; we don't manufacture anything. Therefore, it is critically important our talent and our people—being our most valuable natural resource—are able to compete on a global basis.

I do accept and we realise that there has not been a comprehensive plan as to where we get to. Like you, sir, I agree that as we sit here today and as we have looked at it, it is not a question of this honourable House and the Members voting the funds. It is figuring out how we best deliver what we need to deliver with the funds that we have; and the Minister has been very supportive on this. This is a work in progress and I used TVET as an example.

We are also looking more broadly at what it means within the schools; how we are going to deliver and how the improvement continues. Something I have been very pleased with is following the recommendations. We have seen tremendous support from the Ministry.

The Chief Officer and her team have done an outstanding job in implementing significant change. When you think about what it has taken—in many respects—to start to turn this ship, there is much work to be done. I think we would all like to see it faster, I for one and them as well, but they are working through it. I am pleased, as is my Council, with the way that they have managed that. For example, the change in curriculum; I think it was Mark Twain who said, **"The only person who enjoys change is a baby with a wet diaper."** So, one understands the resistance and the challenges that they have had.

I wanted to note and thank the members of the Education Council because not only do they meet regularly, but we have established a number of work-streams through sub-committees that we are working at pace and these folks are putting in many hours for free. With the Minister's permission, we are also bringing in folks from outside, leaders in industry and others to consult, to be able to come up with what makes sense.

The plan is to bring all that together, deliver recommendations to the Minister, through the Ministry, and utilising that to develop this overarching strategic plan. As I have said to people, I am not an educator but I do understand process and I understand that coming through this, we have to develop talent that we in the business community would not only like to employ but are anxious to employ. That is the objective we are working on.

Mr. Austin O. Harris Jr., Elected Member for Prospect: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, through you.

I want to echo the sentiments of my colleagues in welcoming the witness and thanking him for his time. I am certainly hoping to be brief.

I am glad that you raised the subject of TVET. I am very pleased to see TVET coming together. Though the report indicates, we still have a lot of work to do, I am particularly pleased with the enthusiasm that the Education Council has embraced specific to TVET.

I want to thank you, Mr. Woody Foster, the Education Council and the sub-committees for the work in this regard, particularly against the backdrop that we don't have a purpose-built facility which would otherwise suggest to those in the public that we are serious about TVET. I have always said that we can get it done using the existing mechanisms; it is the will to move forward and you clearly understand this.

I think my focus is two-fold; partly as a member of this Committee but also in my capacity as Councillor of Employment. How can we utilise this programme to get more Caymanians placed in jobs that would otherwise go to work permit holders? What has been the reaction to the TVET programme from some of the local business merchants and partners that the Education Council seeks to partner with in this endeavour? Equally important, understanding the importance of training a local workforce so that they can compete—I think you said—globally, but also locally to minimise the need for additional work permits; is there any assistance your Council might need from us, as representatives, in achieving your desired outcomes?

Mr. Dan Scott, Chairman, Education Council: Thank you for the question.

Yes, indeed. We always welcome the support and I do want to comment on that from the standpoint of Education Council. It has been outstanding on both sides of this honourable House and we thank you for your support.

Where we are at now is that we have embarked on this. The response has been tremendous and as you referred to Mr. Foster who is leading the sub-committee for us, we also went and reached out to key individuals in the private sector. These are folks who operate businesses. In particular, we looked at businesses where large groups of people being employed; whether it was a hospitality industry or restaurant industry. Indeed, we had another area where we wanted to make sure there were construction, and all those things.

The other area that we are focused on where we have seen a real demand when you look at the work permits has been in the area of beauticians, nail technicians, et cetera. So, sitting on this committee giving advice, we have someone who operates a very

successful business in that space. For us, our view was that those are the people who have to tell us what they are looking to employ.

You are absolutely right. The reason I referred that they have to compete globally is because of our work permit process, we are competing globally. They would say that if I am looking to employ someone who is skilled in hairdressing or otherwise, there are qualifications that go with that and that is what their customers are going to demand. So, we are focused on that and the support to date has been outstanding, as far as working together.

Our view has been—and which we have said to them—we *want your engagement, but understand the end game is not just to create another programme. These are the people who you will be employing.* If we have done it, whether it is City and Guilds qualification, or whatever it is, if that is ultimately agreed and supported by the Minister and the Government, when these are delivered to you, don't tell me that they are not qualified. So, they fully understand that, and quite honestly they have embraced it.

Again, over in the cosmetology industry, the individual we have sitting on that sub-committee, as well as the other industries have been nothing but supportive and excited about it. But, the reality is—and we have been clear on that—this is our end game. It is not just to say that a student has gone through and done a course; that course needs to lead to employment and real opportunity. That is our objective as we go through this and the life cycle of students being able to make it into the workforce and be productive.

Mr. Austin O. Harris Jr.: Thank you for that response.

Mr. Chairman, I have other questions not connected to TVET. Therefore, I will certainly yield to any other member if they have a question specific to TVET before I move on.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: During the last Finance Committee a separate funding was brought for the Superior Auto Programme as one of the TVET programmes. I know that wasn't in the initial budget but it is something that Members felt was needed. I think the Government allocated \$150,000 for each of the next two years. Has there been any update or progress with regards to where the Superior Auto training programme is?

Mr. Dan Scott, Chairman, Education Council: Yes, sir.

Through you, Mr. Chair, on that, we did have our last Council meeting on the last Thursday in January; we do them every Thursday in January. At the request of the Minister we invited them to join us and they spoke with Council. The process right now is that

they need to apply to be licensed as an institution and, like we do with other learning institutions, they are working closely with them to gather the necessary information. Based on the law, they have to go through that process. So, what we have committed to them is to get the information in and Council has committed that if they need to have especial meetings for this as we do with others to expedite it, we will. So that is in process and I am just waiting for that information to be delivered through the secretary.

The Chairman: I have a question with the TVET. I understand that you are taking care of the education side of it. However, I think that the licensing of plumbers and electricians, specifically, is a big impediment on getting jobs. We have this ridiculous thing that a plumber—although he is certified under City and Guilds—has to go and work for another plumber digging trenches for two years and the same thing for an electrician. When you certify someone as an electrician, that certification should allow them to go and be employed as a wire-man. For instance, if you certify someone as a plumber, they should be able to go and get a job as a journeyman plumber, not a master plumber, because that's a different certification.

I think a part of the impediment, particularly for Caymanians, is that even after they get the qualifications, they are then expected to work for someone else for two years, which is ridiculous.

I think you need to see if you can influence the Ministries that are doing the licence to change that, so that when Education gives the people... because obviously, if you are doing City and Guilds, that is going to involve a certain amount of practical experience as a part of it.

Mr. Dan Scott, Chairman, Education Council: [I will take that back and take it on board](#), Mr. Chair.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Hon. Bernie A. Bush: Through you, Mr. Chair.

Scholarships are a complete topic but for young people in the public who are out of school and are not able to afford [to go back to school]; is there anything in place for these people?

As you know, I started an electrical school in West Bay with Master Electrician, Burns Rankin, we are on our second year and it's all free, we supply everything. Is there anything in the works that you can see as a type of scholarship to help young Caymanians who want to but just cannot afford to go?

Mr. Dan Scott, Chairman, Education Council: Through the Chair, you are absolutely right sir, that is one of the challenges that a number of people have.

As we are considering this through our scholarship sub-committee, this is for young people but

also for mature students; folks who are looking to change careers or upskill. A part of what we are working on now will also be a project to better understand what is out there. As you have referred, in due course—in the not too distant future—we will make some recommendations around potential scholarships in those spaces, understanding that the current criteria for academic scholarship is not fit for purpose for this.

That is one of the things that the Council and a scholarship sub-committee are looking at. Again, this committee is an extremely busy one, but they have been doing outstanding work.

Mr. Austin O. Harris Jr.: Mr. Chairman, I am grateful for the member raising scholarships as it relates to my second question.

I wonder if the witness can expand a little on how the Education Council is using the merit versus means testing method in the consideration of scholarship applications. Are these tests mutually exclusive or are both factors being considered when—to my colleagues point—you decide who would and would not be approved?

Through you, Mr. Chairman, the reason I asked this question is whilst the objective, as I understand it, is certainly to assist young talented Caymanians who would not otherwise have the means to access tertiary education, I think along the lines of our previous conversation on TVET, we must also be cognisant of fortifying our main industries with the right local talent. This would assist in ensuring that Caymanians aren't just placed with employment, but more importantly, have an opportunity to start developing careers and as we all agree, those careers begin with education.

Are merits versus means testing mutually exclusive or are they both considered factors when considering scholarship applications?

Mr. Dan Scott, Chairman, Education Council: Through you, Mr. Chair, thank you sir.

The answer is when we look at it and the scholarship programmes, as it is now, there are academic criteria which have been established, and we looked at those criteria across all the academic scholarships. So, it is a merit based from that standpoint.

As we considered it, we made recommendations to the Minister to approve that we did need to implement, in our view, a means test. The reason for that, quite honestly, is that while I think the government and everyone in this honourable House supports scholarship every year, there is still a limited amount. So, for the Council, as you go down the list, the reality is: How do you prioritise who should be granted it? If there is loads left over then everyone can get it, but if not, the reality is that Dan Scott's kids will go to school because he can afford it.

What we were concerned about was, using my kids for example, they are going to the best schools, they are going to be guaranteed the best support and get the best tutors. Now compare them to a child coming from a family of modest means; folks with minimum wages, and if all we are doing is establishing a criteria on basis of academics, my kid should be able to have all the tools to do better. So, if they are scoring a 3.75, 3.8 or 4.0 GPA and there are other students—because of demand versus supply—who are getting 3.5 GPA and we are strictly grading it based on academics, then my kids would get a scholarship instead of some other child who has no other means to get that scholarship.

Quite honestly, what it becomes is the worst form of regressive taxation possible because my family goes to the store and buys the same groceries that this family has to. That money is then gathered through import duties, which ultimately, they are then turning around giving it back to me and quite honestly, I can afford it.

Coming from the background we did, I have been blessed and very fortunate to have the opportunities that I have had. So, for me to say now that I should just continue to do that and ignore everybody else, that again, is the overarching policy that we have put in place and why the means test has been adopted. Clearly, if there is excessive, then it goes down and if one of my kids were to apply, then they would be considered. They haven't applied and I don't think they will.

[Laughter]

Mr. Dan Scott, Chairman, Education Council: Nonetheless that is the context. So, it is really academics but not strictly academic. You have to balance that with the means.

The Chairman: In terms of resources, there are some of us who believe that there is a whole pile of money languishing out there in the private sector, through business staffing plans, to which Caymanians who need scholarships are being denied access because no one seem to be monitoring it. In your restructuring of the scholarship secretariat, is any consideration being given to change that requirement under the business staffing plan of just saying, *I am going to give a scholarship to saying, listen, you will write a check on the first of January for 10 people at \$20,000 per person and the education secretariat will allocate the scholarship.*

I know of instances where people have gone to businesses in the private sector that they know are supposed to provide X number of scholarships based on a number of work permits, (there are some formulas that is used in business staffing plan). However, there is no one in the Immigration Department who

can tell you whether or not the scholarships are granted. People are saying they just don't exist.

Mr. Dan Scott, Chairman, Education Council: We would actually welcome the opportunity to, if there were scholarships money out there. I certainly think we would welcome the opportunity to assist with that. Any additional funding would be great.

The other side of that which, as I wear my hat as my firm and the way we operate is, we would not want to hand our scholarships over because we do spend them and we view the granting of scholarship as investing in talent. We jealously guard our talent and we fight hard for it so, we use that because we view them not simply as ticking a box to pass the test but quite the contrary. We are going to go out there, we are looking for this talent, we are growing it, and they are the next generation because it is for business.

When we make those investments, it is what we need. It is no different from people prying bricks and mortar if that's their business. Our business is about talent and people so, if folks have additional that they are not spending, that would be tremendous.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Thank you, Mr. Chairman; through you.

That actually scares me now because this House passed a motion unanimously, that all of those companies that had the requirement for scholarships in their business staffing plan and weren't paying or doing anything, were supposed to go out and create an education fund for those monies to pass into. It was a motion that I brought and the Government accepted and appears that nothing has been done on that for almost two years now. Again, this is money that we could have collected over the past two years—at least one year—in terms of implementation, but this is a basic requirement.

This came out when I served as member of the Business Staffing Plan Board and we realised that many companies had these scholarships and a lot of them weren't being used. So, they have made a commitment to educate Caymanians and they are not keeping that commitment based on getting the business staffing plan approved. Now, all of a sudden, they have been getting away with murder for the last 10-15 years and that is a lot of money we are talking about.

I would really appreciate it if the witness can at least follow-up with the Ministry to see where they are, in terms of that implementation, but that was something that was approved unanimously in this honourable House.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Also, when you try to FOI [Freedom of Information] from Immigration about how many scholarships are out there, no one knows.

I would ask you to consider one other criteria because one of the problems we have is when Caymanians come back having completed their education and cannot get a job. So, if company A offers a scholarship to John Brown as a part of their legal requirement to the government, I would like to see a stipulation put on that they have to employ the person for at least three years. At least give them the opportunity. If the person goes in and messes up, then they get no sympathy from me, but we need to somehow ensure that these Caymanians get their foot in the door and it is up to them to prove themselves.

So, if we could at least get the Scholarship Secretariat to put that write-up on the scholarships that the private sector is issuing to Caymanians stating: If you give a person a scholarship and the person completes the scholarship to your grade level, you are duly bound to employ them for a specific period of time to get them over that hump where they become marketable, because they now have three to five years' experience.

Mr. Dan Scott, Chairman, Education Council: Mr. Chair, as it currently sits, Education Council doesn't have the oversight of any private sector scholarship but frankly sir, I don't disagree with you.

I can tell you that with our firm, when we give someone a scholarship, not only are they getting a scholarship but it is guaranteed that they are getting internships. As I have said, we jealously guard them; when they are back here for summers we have them, and these young people are guaranteed a job when they graduate. They are going to be working with us. I struggle to understand why that is not important to other organisations because, not only are we investing in the scholarship, but we are investing in mentoring, growth and guidance. Frankly, the reason why I sit where I sit today is because someone did it for me.

The Chairman: Yeah, unfortunately Mr. Scott, I think that your firm, and to a large extent the accounting firms, are exceptions to the rule. Quite frankly—

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: They would save if they are not paying pension and health insurance because they have employed someone else on a work permit and not doing that, would pay the scholarship back in three or four years.

We agree; and I know from others' information that your firm is doing a fantastic job on it. We would like to say that that was the standard but unfortunately it is not, by far.

Mr. Dan Scott, Chairman, Education Council: Sir, if there is anything that we can do in engaging and giving the mandate to help support that, we would certainly welcome it. I certainly have a very committed group and Education Council who understand the critical importance of educating our people.

The Chairman: Is there active consideration of raising the sum from the \$20,000 ceiling to some something that is more appropriate today, like \$50,000?

Mr. Dan Scott, Chairman, Education Council: There is. It is one of the things that the Minister has tasked us with and there is a recommendation which will be going to the Minister, probably as soon as this afternoon. So, she has raised that with us already.

You are right, sir; time has gone on and she has noted that this has been for a while and in many cases, it is simply not enough to cover students. The unfortunate thing is that some students with the best will in the world do not have additional means so they are losing opportunities.

That is one that the Minister has been very focused on and council has reviewed it and have what, we think, are appropriate recommendations going forward.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Thank you.

Through you, Mr. Chairman, to Mr. Scott; as a part of the Council's remit, in terms of making decisions, do they get a list of the numbers and categories of work permits? I ask because, looking at the breakdown of some of the different jobs on page 99 of the Compendium of Statistics, I couldn't help but notice what's under the section of Professionals, Technicians and Associate Professionals.

At the end of 2018 there were 14,144 positions and 51 per cent of those were Caymanians, which is 7,234 but the remaining 6,910 or 49 per cent was actually non-Caymanians. It was also predominantly non-Caymanian in the skilled agriculture and fisheries and service and sales workers and I recognise that those are the jobs that we would want our people to push towards.

I raise this issue because—in my opinion—there has been disconnect between what students are sometimes going off to school to study versus what the market calls for. I think that is one of the things that for the government, it is not an expense; it is an investment in the future productivity of the country. Now, we see some students coming back from schools with degrees and sometimes you have to ask them *where they were planning to work with that degree when they return home*.

I am curious to ask if there is a list of that and if that goes into consideration? I know they used to do it in yesteryears; that's how I end up being an accountant versus wanting to fly planes. They were like,

is this what you are going to do? If you want to do that, then we will not give you any money for that. So, I just want to understand if that is something being done now.

Mr. Dan Scott, Chairman, Education Council: Through the Chair, yes sir, it is actually one of the other things that the Minister has asked us to look at. We have also had conversations with Mrs. McField-Nixon to understand.

Again, as we look at this, we want to make sure that what is happening on scholarships is also prioritised. We do not have the data as yet but it is one that I can assure you that subcommittee and the scholarship secretary is going to be very focused on. It probably won't be for this round of scholarships but by the time we hit the next round later in the year, because we are going to work to see what is already out there, what the demand is, and then prioritise it on that basis.

You are absolutely right, sir. When you look at it, we are trying to fill the jobs that exist. There are jobs that are here, so we shouldn't be chasing something imaginary.

Again, it is gathering the data and there are also efforts ongoing to be able to have better data on scholarships, including what happens—and you would have seen from the Auditor General's report—in the aftermath. When someone finishes school, do they get the job, what's happening there and having the ability to track the students.

Our undertaking is—and as we have asked—that there needs to be time effort but also systems put in place to be able to gather this data which better informs the decision we are making. That is one that later in the year we expect to be in a much better position to be able to say that these are priorities. Ultimately, it is for the government to say, *we are good with that* but it would be those recommendations coming forward.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: May I make a suggestion also? There used to be a salary survey that was conducted by the Chamber of Commerce and it was quite extensive. They stopped it after 2006 and brought it back in 2016 when Yohan Moxam was president, which was exactly a 10 year gap.

I did an analysis between the salaries in 2006 and 2016 and I was quite surprised. It surveyed both employers and employees; employers said that they are paying *this*, but employees said they are receiving *that*, so there was kind of an idea in terms of what the true salary was. I was a little shocked as some of the jobs we thought were low paying were actually much higher than expected. I think I could probably find that spreadsheet and email it to you.

It would also be good to take a look at that so that you can say to students, *the mechanics and*

plumbers, et cetera are making money hand over fist, especially in a strong developing economy because for whatever reason, people have a view that some of these jobs don't pay. I think that is one of the misconceptions that we need to put out there so people can understand that there is money in these professions.

Mr. Dan Scott, Chairman, Education Council: That would be great.

I do agree with you; I think that is one of the misunderstandings. Quite honestly, we have created it in the environment, in the things that we have done. Even when we look at the physical plan that we have these student work in, compared to those who we say are more academic, the reality for this is, when I look in my own family with my siblings, we have chosen to go different ways but when you look at the businesses that my brother runs, for example, they can do very well, right?

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Dan Scott, Chairman, Education Council: Exactly. I look in my case and if you asked me to fix an engine, you are going to walk because I don't know how to do it but I always admire it. The reality for those, if folks get it in their exams for people who are out there, they do it and do it well. It is in high demand; they get to be entrepreneurs, build businesses that become generational and pass it on.

Again, I look at my brother, his son is now in the business with him and that becomes the dream, because entrepreneurs, business owners, small business ultimately make up the background. There are folks with the skills in technical and vocational. There are so many examples in other countries and then some here but it is for us as well to make sure that it is clear when our children or young people choose to do those things, they can do extremely well. Frankly, in many cases, do much better than people who choose to do accounting.

Mr. Austin O. Harris Jr.: Mr. Chairman, through you. Before I change gears a little bit, I want to respond a remark made by Mr. Saunders on the subject of priorities.

The reason why his father—the wise man that he was—said to him, *go get your accounting degree first*, was so that if he wanted to, afterwards, he could learn to fly, as others have in your profession. So, your father clearly understood priorities.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Actually, just to set the record straight, his view was: *When that engine cuts off up there, the wings don't flap*. That was his view.

[Laughter]

Mr. Austin O. Harris Jr.: Just a little bit of levity, Mr. Chairman.

I want to change gears a little and turn my attention to a subject that rarely gets discussed at this level but by no means, is any less important in the overall education continuum. Certainly, to the Office of the Auditor General's credit, they didn't allow it to escape their focus; in particular, recommendation number 18 found on page 56 of your report. It notes that there is no national strategy for Special Education Needs [SEN] in the Cayman Islands. According to the report, students with Special Education Needs attend either mainstream public school or the Lighthouse School. Statistics show that the number of students with SEN in mainstream public schools increased by 24 per cent from 396 in 2013 to 493 in 2017.

I wonder if you could clarify something for me, though: The report states the majority—which tends to suggest not all—attend either mainstream public school or the Lighthouse School. I have received representation from my own constituents who are parents of Special Education Needs children who, perhaps as a primary education, they are either in public school or the Lighthouse. However, as we see across the community, many parents choose to further supplement Special Education Needs children through one of the various SEN tutoring centres.

My question is: How does the Education Council assess these smaller, usually privately-owned special education centres to ensure that the curriculum they are using to teach our SEN children is suitable for them?

Mr. Dan Scott, Chairman, Education Council: Thank you, sir and through the Chair.

The whole topic of Special Education—and you can see it from the statistics—has been one that has a huge growth in the numbers and the numbers identify the special education. The challenge that brings is that as we are looking at it, one has to ask what is driving the statistics. Is it because there are now more informed parents or students? Is it in some cases a misdiagnosis because the child is acting up and teachers want them to go a different route and not disturb the classroom? It could be any number of things that we think everybody is wrestling with and trying to get their arms around.

One of the things that is noteworthy, however, is that in order to try and achieve this and provide support, I think everybody goes: *How do we best support it?* Through the experts within the Ministry and the folks that have been appointed, the councillors and otherwise, we look to them to give advice on where they think these students are best placed. Even as we are going through to licence particular centres, (the tutoring or otherwise) the criteria around the qualifications of the teachers, et cetera, is scrutinised.

What I would say to you is that there is much work to be done around that.

I had the opportunity to join the Minister and her team on a trip to the United Kingdom where we visited schools (it is also noteworthy that my firm paid for me to go; just for the record) and I had the opportunity to join them and visit some of the schools in the UK. It was interesting because even as we looked at student/teacher ratios and what not—these were large classrooms—what was telling for me, as it relates to this specific point, was that the teachers in the classrooms did not exclude SEN students; even those who had some of the more noticeable and extreme cases were meant to be a part of the mainstream and those teachers were skilled with how to deal with that.

It is an interesting transition as to where we ultimately go with it. I know it is one that the Ministry has been working on. Even as they implemented new curriculum, they moved things like councillors out of sitting at DES back into the schools. There is much work to be done on it, but all those things continue to work together. An overall SEN policy is one that we clearly need to have input, work on it and develop for the country at large, because there are more and more students and they are not only coming out of the public schools. We are going to gather data but I would tell you they are coming out of private schools as well.

One of the other aspects to this, which I will put out there, is the whole concept of SEN kids. In some cases, it is as simple as kids who are finding themselves in an environment that they are being bullied and they simply are not able to manage that. That is another issue that I think needs to be dealt with.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Mr. Chairman, through you.

I am a bit curious because I guess in my background I have been taught to approach so many things with professional scepticism. I have always had concerns with this SEN issue. I know of a couple cases within the public schools where children were diagnosed as SEN children and the parents refused to accept it. Then, the children went to the private schools, didn't say anything to them and doing extremely well.

When they had Y2K going around I have seen where people went out and created a cottage industry from Y2K. I have seen it in the compliance industry where they went out and created another cottage industry within the industry, where more money is spent on compliance now than even business development.

What is the assessment done and what are the factors to determine a SEN student? Like I said, this is my personal opinion. I have seen where a child was misdiagnosed and it turned out that the child was just bored and ahead of something else. I understand that people are SEN qualified and in some cases they

need to justify all of this but I have always been a little wary when they are just behavioural issues. If you look at Einstein, the first day he went to school the teacher said that he should be driving a short yellow bus and look at who he turned out to be. So I have always been wary about this.

The backdrop for me is that there was a survey done where they looked at children up to year five or year six and most of them were borderline genius, like 80 per cent of them. Then, they evaluated these people again four or five years later at the end of the primary term and it showed that the actual school system, to some extent, dulled some of their creativity and geniuses, et cetera. So, I have always been a little curious in terms of the assessments being done to diagnose a child with special needs as opposed to the child being rude or bored.

Mr. Dan Scott, Chairman, Education Council:

Through the Chair, you are absolutely right, sir. It is one of the things that I think there is now more rigour being added around. Clearly, one wants to make sure that you do not dismiss someone who truly needs it; that is a very careful balance. However, I will tell you—and certainly the Chief Officer and some of the policies that they are rolling out—there is indeed more rigour when these request come for special funding to Education Council. We are continuing to add around it, ask questions, bring the experts in and challenge it.

I share your views. A part of it is when you get back to *what is the difference? What are we able to do within the classroom?* I think as that comes back and you would have seen from the report and the inspections, there is work to be done around getting teachers to the level they need to be to deliver. Some of that is delivering for these kids. I always say to people that back then you didn't have those labels but in school you talk ADD [Attention Deficit Disorder] and you don't find more ADD than me. I can't walk and chew gum, but somehow it has managed to get you through. We all have things that we are good at and not.

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Mr. Dan Scott, Chairman, Education Council: Absolutely, but where are we today? So, there is more rigour around it, because we want to make sure that the limited resources are being appropriately used for those who do need it. There are clearly some children who absolutely need it, but you are right, I can assure you there is rigour being added both in the Ministry, through DES, within the school and certainly at Education Council.

Mr. Austin O. Harris Jr., Elected Member for Prospect: Mr. Chairman, certainly, I want to thank the witness for those answers.

I don't have a question, just a comment. Acknowledging that this Committee usually focus its energy scrutinising government and public accounts, and that means addressing areas that are missing, I believe that in this discussion, specific to Special Education Needs, there is a silver lining or some positive news worth mentioning directly from the Auditor General's report. Interestingly, directly above where the Auditor General begins the discussion that there is no national strategy for special education or broader education, they also went on to highlight the positive interventions that have happened specifically on SEN, over a five year period (2013-2017) and, to borrow a word from the witness, certainly we can see where more "rigour" has been applied to SEN.

As a Member of the Government, I felt it was important to note, for the record, that students in SEN, as according to paragraph 137, found on page 50 of the report:

- **"Students with SEN are now identified much earlier than previously..."**
- **The Early Intervention Program covers children at pre-compulsory school age and compulsory school age, leading to earlier identification and intervention for SEN students**
- **Staff in schools have had SEN-specific professional development...**
- **There is greater public awareness of children with SEN...**
- **Parents are more proactive in seeking educational assessments and evaluations in order to receive formal diagnoses so that their children can access SEN funding to attend private schools, or overseas facilities where appropriate."**

Whilst in all of these areas of education we acknowledge that there is a great deal of work to be done, I also believe that it is appropriate to acknowledge that in a short window of time they have also achieved a great deal.

We will eventually get there to please the Public Accounts Committee, but in the meantime, I want to thank the member as Chair of the Education Council, the Minister and the Ministry of Education for working towards getting it right more often than they get it wrong.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[Pause]

Hon. Bernie A. Bush: Through you, Mr. Chair.

Seeing that your background is accounting, and knowing what I know about you, you have always held everyone around you accountable, your staff, family and friends, et cetera.

I will be honest to say that I didn't really think about it until I went to my granddaughter's school and there is a camera in every classroom. The parents are actually given a code that they can use to look in on the class. During Finance Committee, I asked the question and it was kind of rushed over and I asked it again today. Since then, I have surveyed 16 teachers at four different schools; 12 of the teachers are good teachers, and surprisingly, all 12 of them said yes, they would like cameras in their classrooms. The four who said *No*, after doing my homework, I found out that their record wasn't that good but my thing to the Chief Officer were:

1. Protection of the child; and
2. Protection of the teacher

Some of the teachers have said that the last Education Law that came in, in their opinion, is not really in favour of teachers. Being someone who goes into the schools almost every day, I have seen how certain teachers step their game up to try to impress someone just for that day when inspectors come around and other days, it leaves a lot to be desired. I asked and they said they would undertake to have the survey done, may I ask you, as the Chairman of the Council, to look into this? It would be a good thing for our classrooms in many ways.

We can see through the records that a teacher did a good lesson plan but [with cameras] they have an example. We can show the teachers what was done. I am not so sure that you want to show a bad one, but in the dismissal of bad teachers we can say, *here we have the evidence*—because some teachers would say, *oh, I got the worst class*.

When we went to school you know it was Top Set, Second and Third Set. The Chairman asked them about the report cards, which have become a puzzle on itself, not A, B, C, D, E, F; effort, behaviour and your grade. We all went through it and we turned out reasonably well—you all turned out pretty well. I leave a lot to be desired but...

[Laughter]

Hon. Bernie A. Bush: Things have gotten really complicated but if you have it in front of you, I can only see it being a tool to help improve what we have to improve because there is no doubt in anyone's mind that everything has moved along and left us behind. What is your opinion and do you think this can be done quickly?

Mr. Dan Scott, Chairman, Education Council: Through the Chair; thank you sir, for the question.

I am of the view that transparency is good; it is the world that we live in, is what we talk about and everything that we do. In particular, I think it brings with it the confidence to the public, parents and oth-

erwise. With that as the headline, I do think one of the things we talked about, and the Auditor General's report pointed to it, is parental engagement and I sort of pull this under that more broadly.

Indeed, sir I will take this back particularly as a note for consideration as Council, for us to talk about it. However, I think it falls under that broad approach of *what does that mean* because, as we go through these discussions there is the question of the right to privacy, not only for the teacher but for the students.

I think more and more we are seeing cameras. Everywhere you walk today there is a *Ring* camera. As you noted, whether it is law enforcement, you see it all the time, that they are wearing bodycams not only protecting potentially the person they are dealing with but also protecting themselves to show what behaviour they exhibited.

Personally, I have not thought about it but as a parent when our kids were small and we had nannies at home, we put cameras in. We told them they were there but we did have cameras so we could check in on what was happening or it got recorded. I do think it is something that should be considered. In particular, as you said, some private schools are certainly doing it.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Thank you very much.

Through you, Mr. Chairman, to the Chairman of the Education Council: Maybe this is more something for your council to consider but it is something that puzzles me a bit.

Looking at the government statistics (Compendium of Statistics) with regards to government schools, when I totalled the number of children in primary and secondary schools in 2012 there was a total of 4,956 children. By the end of 2018, the number reduced to 4,623; a decrease of seven per cent or 333 children. However, one of the things that jumped at me was that on the same report, when I looked at the 2010 census, children aged 0-14, there were a total of 7,671 Caymanian children on Island, and by the end of 2018 that number increased to 8,599; roughly 11 per cent or 928 children.

I am trying to understand why the number of children in those age-group brackets—which would technically still be in school between the 2010 and 2018 census—went up by 928, but the enrolment within the public schools by the end of 2018 actually dropped by seven per cent. I couldn't help but notice that during the same period of time, enrolment in the private sector schools moved from 2,787 in 2012 to 3,618; an increase of roughly 30 per cent. So, we are seeing where despite the age group of Caymanian children increasing, the actual population in the public schools is decreasing but the private sector schools are increasing.

Forgive me, I am a part of the blame too, because my children attend private schools, and I have held the belief that if you can afford to put your children someplace, why put strain on the resources of the country? I am curious, are these analyses that you are looking at in terms of planning schools, because I looked at the number of people with Permanent Residencies [PR] whose children are forced to go to private school; in terms of the government's long-term planning, in the next five years or so, when the PR holders become status holders, their children are then entitled to go to public schools. However, looking at these numbers it appears as if the trend is going the other way so, I was worried about the school's population, et cetera.

Also, when you look in the same report and you see the amount of children at a certain age group who are coming behind, we realise that the fertility rate problem that we have is actually coming to roost because there are not enough children coming to replace the children who are there. In other words, we are not making enough Caymanian children to maintain the infrastructure that we have.

So, in terms of the long-term planning, is there something that the Council is looking at or considering as a part of the plan for future schools? A school may be full today, but based on demographics and demographic shifts, some schools may become emptier in some areas, depending on where people are moving to or moving from.

I don't know if these are the kinds of analyses that the Council is looking at but it is something to consider as you put together the long-term strategic plan for the country.

Mr. Dan Scott, Chairman, Education Council: Through the chair, thank you, sir.

With your training, you know numbers but you are absolutely right. You have seen the drop and you have seen the drop in Caymanian children and the demand for government schools. I can only suspect that a big part of the driver there is parents choosing private schools because they took a view that they weren't getting the level of education that they needed in the government schools.

We are undertaking to change that and it has been one of the things that the Minister has been clear on. We have to create an environment in schools that are the most competitive; not only just within the Cayman Islands or the region but internationally. Quality; that is a goal that we have as Education Council and it has been embarked upon as:

1. We look to ensure that there is independent inspection of schools (both public and private) so that it is transparent. So parents, as the buyers, get to see what is good; and

2. The change in the movement with curriculum and providing the resources that people need to be able to teach the children.

The other thing I think the Minister has done is talk about the compensation changes. There have been debates around that but now one can't question whether you can indeed attract the best talent globally because you certainly can pay for it. I think all those things come together to make sure that the public schools have to be able to be good at what they do, be extremely competitive, and deliver outstanding product.

The other question that you talked about was the idea of public and private schools and folks growing up differently. When I came up through the government school system we all went to one school. The truth is that that is the best way for us to operate as a country. The challenge that we clearly had—which I understand—was that it wasn't out of trying to segregate, but more out of, *we only have a certain amount of physical space and budget to educate*. Therefore, we prioritised Caymanians, which I think is absolutely right, and other folks had to go to private schools. What it has meant is that young people in different schools are not getting to work together, learn about each other and break down those barriers that are otherwise created because we simply do not know each other. I long for a time that we can get back to that.

One of the things that we will be talking about is whether there are projects that we can do which allows for more of that; whether it is the private sector building schools and government saying we will give coupons for children to go these schools or guarantee a certain amount, or you can do so the other way with the government schools. Nevertheless, I think the starting point is that we have to focus and make sure that our government schools are delivering high-quality education.

I am keen, and I think most people are, to see that as we continue to grow—and our population is growing quite rapidly—it is important that you put kids together so they can learn about each other. We are working on ideas for that, early stages.

To your question, with regards to the growth, I think that is the other point because it simply cannot be limited to one or the other. The demographics continue to change, even district by district, so that is a project and I think all of those things would have to be considered.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Thank you very much for that, Mr. Scott. I am glad that the Council is looking at that.

One of things that I would also suggest is to take a look at the gate keeper within the Human Resources system. I say that because I have known in-

stances where people were dismissed from the private schools for non-performance, contracts not renewed, et cetera, then they just appear in the public system. So I wonder, *if you were not good for the private school children, what did you say or do in an interview to get a job within the public system?* If you are a failure here, you are a failure there.

Sometimes I sit back and some of the people that we end up with boggles my mind; and in some cases, some of the human resources that are made, with regards to teachers and principals and how it is done. It begs a lot of questions and I would really implore the Council to seriously take a look at that.

Hon. Bernie A. Bush: To reinforce what Mr. Saunders just said and tie it in with something Mr. Harris said: There was a case at one of our schools, up in that side of the Island. It was said that a little boy was autistic so they sent the child to another school.

The child ended up with this particular teacher (I am getting the story from the parents); the father has a pretty high-ranking job in government and the mother has a good job in the financial industry, so they are people who know what is happening. The father promised that teacher that she will get the first pay-cheque his child brings home, because she proved his child is not autistic. The child graduated valedictorian a year later from the class, made the graduation speech and everything.

That teacher applied to our system and could not even be considered yet, on a daily basis I see teachers who are not as good as that lady. We do not know what it is, but the HR needs looking into.

Once again, I know the instance that the Member for Bodden Town West spoke of because I know one of the parents who sat on the board that dismissed the individual. They also asked me about it and this is not the only case, but like I always say, where you come from helps a lot in getting a job in this government.

Mr. Dan Scott, Chairman, Education Council: Through the Chair.

As I am sure members appreciate, the role of Council, we do not deal directly with HR matters, but we do have conversations, engage and make recommendations that are at the strategic level more broadly. One of the things I would say is that I think it is fairly clear that the most impactful part of an education is the teacher.

I can think back to the people who taught me and remember those teachers who cared and quite honestly, we would say and recommend that, that is where we have to put systems in place to reward those people and indeed for the other ones. I think we are starting to see that with the performance management, there is ways to go, but we must aspire to get the very best teachers.

Also, I have seen it up close and personal with my father who is an educator and many nights at our dining room table, he would bring students in and tell them, *you have to do more, you have to do better, so let me help you.* There is a quote which says, **"The best thing about being a teacher is that it matters. The hardest thing about being a teacher is that it matters every day."** I think those are the teachers we need to look for.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: I just want to close off on one issue, Mr. Scott. Through you, Mr. Chairman to the witness: This morning I was trying to get an answer to a question but I was unable to get it, other than hearing that the Chief Officer would go to the Minister about it. It was coming from the Office of Education Standards Annual Report 2019; Every School, a Good School. Of the 25 schools that had their performances evaluated, only one was rated excellent, five were rated good, twelve were satisfactory and seven were rated weak.

When we looked at the follow through inspections that came out as a result of the report, we noticed that with some of the schools that were rated weak, the progress itself was still rated as being weak, so I am glad to see that this is at least being done. However, one of the things that we wanted was a timeline as to when we could expect to see this turning a different route.

As you and the Auditor General identified and recognised, we do spend a lot of money in terms of cost per student in the public school, versus the private sector, compared to other developed countries. The ultimate purpose of this Committee and what we are looking for is to find the value for money. Based on the reports from this result, we can't have a public school system that is 66 per cent higher than the private school system and probably ranked number two in terms of cost per student, compared to developed countries and have these kinds of results.

We believe that this is something that requires urgent need and I am happy that the Minister appointed someone like you, especially with your background, considering who your father was and what you have done. We want to at least put that there for the Council to see what we can do to move this forward. This is one issue that is about the future of the Cayman Islands and we are all concerned about it.

Thanks.

Mr. Dan Scott, Chairman, Education Council: Through the Chair.

That is one of the items that the Council and the Ministry are working on to determine what the consequence management is for these things to ensure change is taking place. Again, that is a work stream that is happening within the Ministry, that we have asked for and we are seeing. We have seen a

first cut of it and had some comments because part of this is that, within government schools as well as private schools we cannot continue, let me I underscore, we cannot continue to have weak schools and weak performances.

There has to be consequences and changes to that, and it is one that is of an urgent nature. The good thing that we have now is that we do have a robust inspection system and it is transparent and published. Earlier on, I was asked by someone in the private schools and they said they were concerned about their results being published. I asked why and they said, *well, parents may decide that if we get a bad result, they don't want to send their kids there*. So I said to them, *and your point is what?* That is the objective; to put control back into the hands of the parents to make decisions.

Ultimately, there are other things that the Minister has asked us to look at and that the Education Council is considering and in short order will be making recommendations on to try and achieve a similar thing within the public school system. There will be more governance—and you would have seen comments around that—boards, et cetera, to make sure that we are doing that and that there is more control at the school level because that is where the rubber hits the road; it is that teacher in the classroom delivering for the child.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders, Elected Member for Bodden Town West: Just one last point to close off with. One of the things I noticed throughout my travels in the Caribbean, particularly Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad, is that many of their leaders have come back over the years looking at their country post-independence and they have created one common theme: That despite all the money spent on primary, secondary and tertiary education, looking back through the lens of time, they wish they had invested more money in basic education the first seven years of a child's life. They figure that is where they failed the most.

I am glad to see that the Government brought back Reception classes to start the early childhood. However, as we are looking through and creating this long-term strategic plan, I would just encourage that we take a look at that Reception/basic education, where the foundation for a child is, the first seven years. As old people say, *you bend the tree when it is young*, to ensure that they are firmly planted, not even foundation but “groundation”. That has basically been one of the biggest differences according to many of them: they wish they had put more emphasis on education but time, of course, answer every question.

I just want to say thank you, Mr. Scott and keep doing a good job. I hope your presence here serves as an example to many people that you do well and give back to the community free of cost.

Thank you much.

Mr. Dan Scott, Chairman, Education Council: Thank you sir, that is very kind.

If I may, one more thing Mr. Chair, I also want to thank the Auditor General and her team. I think it was a good and comprehensive report. As I say to people, sometimes I go to do my physicals when I am in the worse shape, but we know where we need to be going but they did a great job and I thank them for that.

The Chairman: We certainly want to thank you for the job that you are doing and the time you are giving up and we are so concerned about that that we actually give you back 35 minutes out of what we asked for.

Please convey to the whole Education Council our gratitude and appreciation for the hard work that is being put in. We really appreciate the effort that is being made.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Dan Scott, Chairman, Education Council: Thank you, sir.

The Chairman: The meeting is adjourned sine die.

At 3:27pm the meeting adjourned sine die.