

**ADDRESS BY  
THE HONOURABLE  
Esther Le Gendre, M.P.  
MINISTER OF EDUCATION  
At the  
*FORMAL HANDING-OVER CEREMONY***

**of the**

**ARIMA WEST GOVERNMENT PRIMARY  
SCHOOL**

Tuesday 15 September, 2009

8:00 a.m.

- **Honourable Neil Parsanlal – Member of Parliament – Lopinot/Bon Air West**
- **Permanent Secretary Angella Jack and other officials of the Ministry of Education**
- **Mr. Moonilal Lalchan – Chairman – EFCL and members of the Board of Directors - EFCL**
- **Mr. Paul Taylor – Chief Executive Officer – EFCL**
- **Mrs. Gilma Phillip-Perez - Principal – Arima West Government Primary School**
- **Mrs. Zina Ramatali - National Parent Teachers Association represented by**
- **Senior officials - Ministry of Finance**
- **Members of the community; Members of the media**
- **Students, parents, teachers**
- **Ladies and gentlemen all other protocols observed**

Good morning to all. I am aware that I am in a Borough that holds great significance, particularly in terms of its cultural richness, its claims to being the oldest Borough and for being the home of the indigenous people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Arima is also known for nurturing excellent sons and daughters that have served the nation such as the incomparable Aldwyn (Lord Kitchener) Roberts, Holly Betaudier, Arnold Thomasos, former Speaker of the House, and Larry Gomes, celebrated cricketer after whom one of our 5 national stadia was named.

No doubt, this new structure which we are opening here today, would provide the environment that would produce a continuing line of proud g'arime.

The Arima West Government Primary school is one of three new schools to open doors to delighted students in the last fifteen days. The others are Sangre Grande SWAHA Hindu, St Mary's AC, Tranquillity Government Primary. At present, 15 primary schools and 12 secondary schools are in various stages of construction. I am pleased to announce that with the successful acquisition of a site, the contractor will soon mobilize to begin construction of the Arima New Government School!

I say this to emphasise the fact that day by day, we at the Ministry of Education in partnership with the EFCL are becoming more efficient in our delivery and staying true to our strategic objective of guaranteeing access and opportunity for every child.

The Arima West Government Primary School was built at a cost of \$34,536,389.82 and outfitted at a cost of \$4 million dollars. Construction commenced on May 01, 2007, and was completed August 05, 2009. I wish to take the opportunity to recognise the work of the design consultant Reynold and Associates Limited, the contractors, Moosai Development Consultant Caribbean Limited and of course the Education Facilities Company Limited.

The school has a capacity of 625 students with a site area of 9511.5m and a playfield area of 6536m.

This model school, apart from classrooms, houses administrative offices, specialist rooms, Science laboratories, an audio visual room, a computer room and a library. A cafeteria with a dining area, a spacious auditorium, and a pan theatre round off this new facility.

This is a foundation on which the Ministry of Education's quest for excellence is laid. It speaks to the creation of effective schools, appropriate infrastructure aligned to a modern curriculum and excellent teachers.

My emphasis on the physical plant and the importance of appropriate infrastructure is meant to draw attention to the holistic approach to a comprehensive reform and modernisation of the Education system as articulated in the Government's Vision 2020 Strategic Plan.

The use of labs and computer rooms is driven by a more comprehensive syllabus which infuses an appreciation of technology in the teaching and learning process at the primary level. In short, this new school is one more step in the journey towards the comprehensive reform of

the education system that will serve to achieve our vision.

The Ministry's policy is to guarantee equal access and opportunity to every child.

At the early childhood level, it means that we expect to seed the entire country, urban and rural with centres of excellence in childhood care and education. It means the implementation of standards to regulate the early childhood sector and the implementation of training and development programmes to ensure that access is accompanied by quality.

At present, more than 98% of all children in Trinidad and Tobago over 5 years can access a primary school. Thus, when the average for Latin America the Caribbean is less than 75% and yet others are challenged to achieve 50%. Our plan envisages 100% attendance and participation in our primary schools by the year 2012. To ensure that access is not denied because parents cannot afford books, lunches or transportation, we provide all of this free of charge to all in need.

In 2008 some \$192 million was spent to repair 498 primary schools. For the financial year 2009/ 2010 some \$118.5 million has been earmarked for construction.

In 2008 \$19million was spent to provide textbooks to students of primary schools alone. That figure has increased to \$27.5 million for 2009

The learning process does not happen in isolation, the capacity to learn depends on the reduction of the impediments to learning such as hunger and access. In recognising this, the government provides 115,000 lunches and more than 54,000 breakfast meals every day at a yearly cost of \$215 million dollars.

In 2008 the Ministry spent \$49 million dollars in school transportation and an estimated expenditure of \$50 million is expected in 2009. Ladies and gentlemen, if your child benefits from these services, books, meals and transport, the average cost per child in primary school is \$4,382.40.

In support of inclusive education, \$7.5 million was spent on special education grants in 2008-2009, while a further \$4.9 million was spent by the Student Support Services Division for training, professional specialised services for students with needs.

The Ministry of Education recognises that apart from an enabling environment, state of the art technology, spacious buildings and unlimited access, the quality of our education system the quality of our teachers is paramount.

In pursuit of excellence, the Ministry of Education has embraced the Centre of Excellence for Teacher Training (CETT), which is an initiative of the Ministry to meet the literacy challenge and to raise levels of literacy in Trinidad and Tobago. CETT's goals are to:

- strengthen the teachers use of diagnostic and performance assessment tools, so as to enable student learning,

- improve the quality of teacher delivery effective programme and lesson planning,
- develop innovative approaches to the teaching of reading,
- apply best practices from research and
- disseminate schools.

The Ministry is pursuing the development of a policy on Teaching and Teacher Education in Trinidad and Tobago that will address the development of our teachers at all levels. This includes pre-service training of teachers; teacher recruitment and selection; teacher certification and licensing; teacher induction and mentoring; performance appraisal; continuous professional development; and quality assurance.

These are the steps we take towards professionalising the teaching service. Persons choosing teaching as a vocation, must therefore not only possess academic qualifications in the relevant subject area, but must also have qualifications in teaching. The Ministry has therefore collaborated with the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) and other stakeholders, to develop and implemented pre-service undergraduate programmes in education for teachers and educators. To this end, the Ministry has provided scholarships for over 400 teachers to pursue the Bachelor of Education at the UTT.

In the year 2009 the Ministry paid out a little over \$957 million dollars in salaries to primary school teaching staff. For the year 2010 that figure is estimated to be \$977,525,000 million. 2007 survey indicated that while our teachers were generally proud of their profession and agreed that they were well compensated, their working conditions (the school environment for some could be improved) we hope that today we have met expectations.

We at the Ministry of Education have not been lulled into a false sense of security as a result of our own successes. We are cognisant of the fact that no system of education can be sustained without the inclusion of family and community. We recognise the need for increased participation and communication as well as an enhanced relationship between the school and the community. In placing greater emphasis on parental involvement in the business of education we support the establishment of PTA's in every school. There is need for greater linkages between the school and the world of work. To achieve this we intend to forge a closer relationship between the major stakeholders in the community. In pursuit of these objectives, the Ministry of Education has developed a programme/schedule of consultations with our various stakeholders. We meet on a monthly basis and hold meaningful dialogue.

In closing, let me say that notwithstanding the state of the art buildings, the enormous investment in technology and training, the nation of Trinidad and Tobago cannot achieve its vision 2020 Plan without the commitment of the people who are charged with the critical responsibility of education our nations children.

Achieving developed country status requires not only a reform in our systems but also a reform of our thought processes and the values which guide us. Excellence in Education is not for its own sake. It is a foundation upon which every institution in our society must be laid.

Let us use this occasion to re-dedicate ourselves, administration, teachers, students, parents,

to the serious task of making our education system second to none.

I thank you.