

**SENATOR THE HONOURABLE HAZEL MANNING**

**MINISTER OF EDUCATION**

**FEATURE ADDRESS**

*Formal Bricklaying Ceremony of the Prima West  
Government Primary School*

**October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007**

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has articulated “Vision 2020” -- a programme for the economic, political and social development of the country – whereby Trinidad and Tobago will attain developed country status by the Year 2020. In this programme, Government’s mandate to the Ministry of Education is the development of innovative people i.e. a highly skilled, well-educated people aspiring to a local culture of excellence that is driven by equal access to learning opportunities.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we are committed to the development of caring, innovative, productive and patriotic citizens. This is the only way we will be able to achieve and sustain a better quality of life for all our people.

We are doing this at the primary level of the education system by revising the curriculum and ensuring that the physical facilities and resources necessary for our children’s learning are in place.

Arima West Government is one of sixty new schools to be built. Thirty modern primary schools have been built or rebuilt to date. This year our construction programme includes 227 primary schools at an estimated cost of \$281M.

You can now look forward to a modern primary school with facilities designed with the curriculum and the needs of our students, teachers, and the Arima community in mind.

This state-of-the-art primary school will feature spacious classrooms, resource rooms, a library, computer room and a science laboratory. As you anticipate its completion you can also look forward to not only a modern structure but also a future-oriented high quality educational experience for your children.

Along with this school construction programme a number of parallel initiatives are being carried out to enable our schools to provide quality educational experiences for students.

We are committed to placing a professionally trained teacher in every classroom. We began to work towards the achievement of this goal, when we partnered with UTT to initiate a pre-service preparation programme for our teachers. A comprehensive plan for continuing in-service professional development for all teachers is being developed. This will provide opportunities for teachers to enhance their skills and knowledge base, and improve their teaching competence.

In addition, the performance management and appraisal system for the teaching service is currently being reviewed for implementation. We are also working on policies related to licensing and professional registration of teachers and other education professionals. All these measures are to ensure that quality standards are monitored and maintained.

Programmes are being introduced at our primary schools to ensure that all our children have a solid foundation in reading and literacy.

The nurturing and development of creative and cultural talent is essential for building our national identity and our confidence as a people. We have realized the importance of this aspect of development and so the school curriculum has also been expanded to include the visual and performing arts, Physical Education, Technology Education – Computer Labs in 340 schools.

We are also making the curriculum and our schools fully inclusive, catering to the diversity that exists in our student population. In so doing we are ensuring equity not only of access but more importantly with respect to provision for functional needs of all our students.

We will continue to provide assistance to the home and community in order that children derive the maximum benefit from what we provide at the schools.

[Our focus is on a robust system of support for students, teachers and parents.](#)

The Ministry of Education has partnered with the Ministry of Health to conduct audiological testing and vision screening for all the children at the infant level. More than forty-one thousand have already been screened. The result of the screening has directed some students to further testing and over 100 have been fitted with glasses and one with hearing aids. We believe that all children must be given the opportunity to learn and when they have poor vision or hearing they are at a disadvantage. [Early screening helps us to provide equity in our education system.](#)

Research conducted at our schools showed us that many children need psychosocial support. We are providing this at all our schools and paying particular attention to children at the primary level since this is where the foundation for future learning is built. Your school will have a special room where students can be assisted by school social workers, school psychologists, special education teachers and school nurses.

Free textbooks, school meals and transport will continue to be provided to Arima West Gov't and all other schools in Trinidad and Tobago.

As we continue to make the school system more efficient, we have developed a new administration and staff structure for the operations of the Ministry of Education as well as for schools. This new structure speaks to a decentralised Ministry of Education in which the Central Office of the Ministry of Education will assume the role of macro planning, research and policy formulation. The District Offices will be responsible for overseeing the implementation of the policies and the schools will be the centres where all the transactions of teaching and learning will take place.

Ladies and gentlemen, in this scenario true school based management is essential. Each school will be required to have a school management team. This School Management Team will be responsible for the development and implementation of a School Plan. Already secondary school principals are being provided with sums of approximately \$1m. [Soon Primary schools will also be able to access funds based on their school development plans.](#)

But even as we seek to operate more efficiently to provide quality education, we are challenged to ensure that it is relevant for meeting our needs, not only the present ones, but more significantly those that we anticipate for our children.

[Ladies and gentlemen, the world is getting smaller!](#) We can now sit in our living rooms at the computer and speak to persons in the USA, Canada, China, India, Argentina at very little cost. With one button pressed on the TV remote we can find out in real time what is happening in Iraq and other countries that we have never been to.

We are living in a globalized world and we know how close we are to Latin America so if we are to benefit from trade with those large countries with growing economies we should be able to speak their language. You must have noticed that they have been coming to Trinidad in significant numbers to learn to speak English.

Our children are watching Spanish shows on TV and some are even beginning to learn the Spanish language on their own. The Ministry of Education is mindful of the mandate to make Spanish the first foreign language in Trinidad and Tobago. We are now finalizing plans to introduce Spanish with the help of native Spanish speakers and computer aided instruction in our primary schools.

Our children are becoming very proficient on the computer and other digital equipment. They do not need to read the instructions to use your mobile phones and they can make the phones do what you never thought was possible. Mobile phone technology in education is being continually researched and implemented in many countries in the

world. We are also investigating how this very valuable resource can be put to even greater use in the education system.

We have started the exercise of equipping every school with computer labs, and the ICT technologies for establishing integrated collaborative classrooms. Our teachers are being re-skilled to fully incorporate ICT'S in their instruction and to include computer aided instruction in their repertoire of strategies.

As the Ministry continues in reform mode, it is anticipated that student and parental expectations will be satisfied and the economy will benefit from the firm resource base (our children) that is equipped for a competitive and complex environment of the twenty-first century.

The Ministry of Education is living up to its promise of EXCELLENCE in Education.

Congratulations on the start of your new school.

Thank                    you                    ladies                    and                    gentlemen.

