

# **ADDRESS**

**SENATOR THE HONOURABLE HAZEL MANNING**

**MINISTER OF EDUCATION**

*Sod Turning Ceremony*

*Tranquillity Government Primary School*

**Monday October 1<sup>st</sup> 2007**

**3 Stanmore Avenue**

**Port of Spain**

**9.00 a.m**

Today we turn the sod to begin construction of a modern home for Tranquillity Government Primary School. I am particularly pleased to see so many students with us, so most of what I have to say is really to these young citizens among us.

I know that for the past three years you have been having your classes elsewhere and waiting for your new school. To you 3 years seems like a long time, but do you know that for the last 150 years boys and girls your age at Tranquillity may have wished for a primary school to be built here for them?

You see the first Tranquillity school was really a Teacher's Training College located next door on what was formerly Tranquillity Sugar Estate land.

The college had teachers from England who trained many of the first set of local teachers and Head Teachers - as Principals were called then.

There was also a primary school for boys and later a primary school for girls.

These schools were called Model Schools and they set a standard for other primary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. Over time, these schools became known as Tranquillity Intermediate with separate schools for boys and girls who moved from primary to secondary classes in the same school.

Soon other schools copied the intermediate model e.g. Belmont Intermediate, St. Rose's Intermediate, Point Fortin Intermediate and Providence Intermediate.

Following our country's Independence the model for education changed. In 1964, the primary classes at Tranquillity were separated from the secondary and moved to where we are today in what was your former school, part of which used to be a Drill Hall for the army during World War 1 and 11.

However, even as many boys and girls before you and their parents may have longed for a brand new school at Tranquillity, they did not let the conditions prevent them from excelling - Dr. Eric Williams, Sir Vidya Naipaul, Beryl Mc. Burnie and Russell Latapy to name a few outstanding citizens all received their primary education at Tranquillity.

You can find a lot more on the history of your school on the Tranquillity Government Secondary school website. I want to commend Tranquillity Secondary for taking advantage of the resources we are giving to schools and for creating their website.

I want to challenge you to create your very own website. Begin the research now, so that you are ready to launch when your new school is complete.

***Do you know what your new school will be like?***

Your new school is going to be three stories high with facilities you never dreamed of before such as:-

- A Pan Theatre
- Music room
- A multi-purpose hall
- Library
- Computer room

- Audio visual room
- Cafeteria
- Specialist rooms for science and art and craft
- A roof terrace and
- A rooftop playground that will be well fenced

There will also be facilities for staff members, a guard booth and other safety features. Very simply, once again Tranquillity is a model for the new direction for primary schools in Trinidad and Tobago.

You are the citizens of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the Ministry of Education is determined to ensure that all our young citizens get the best opportunities possible and so the government has spent **\$70 million on the construction of primary schools alone to ensure that the Nation's 300,000 students get the best possible learning environments.**

In addition, over \$53.5 million dollars has been spent to repair and upgrade over 250 primary schools **this year alone.**

- Construction has been completed on 20 government and government assisted primary schools
- 10 other primary schools are in progress
- 18 other schools will begin construction shortly and
- Funding has been provided, in the Budget for fiscal year 2008, to replace 37 primary schools.

I hear the cries of parents and students wanting to have their new schools NOW. However, building a school is a process and through the ready communications from the staff of the Education Facilities Management Division, our supervisors and the Education Facilities Company Limited, all our schools are kept abreast as to where they are in the process. This information is soon to be available on our website.

We remain committed to providing all our primary schools designed to cater for the needs of all our students, even having ramps and elevators to help those with physical challenges move easily from one level to another.

We are committed to having all our new primary schools have the facilities to support the new curriculum and since more than three quarters of our primary schools are denominational schools, we must engage those boards.

The negotiation process was long and arduous one, but we are pleased that is more or less complete, paving the way for us to move ahead with all primary schools.

Let us give a hearty round of applause to all those who have worked so hard to make the dream come true for our primary school children and for Tranquillity in particular.

Today the Ministry of Education takes another step in the process of making the

Tranquillity's dream come true. We expect that the Tranquillity school community will in turn make our dream come true.

Our dream is the dream of the Nation – we want our young citizens, our students to embrace the opportunities being provided so that they:

- Learn to read well
- Express themselves clearly
- Engage the new technologies
- Become curious about their world and begin to make a positive difference
- Develop their special gifts and talents and
- Become productive citizens

For the success of our students at the primary school three things are important:-

1. Parents and community must play an active role in the child's life
2. Teachers must love to work with the age group they teach and be trained to do so.
3. All children should have meaningful pre- school experiences

The Ministry of Education has implemented numerous policies in each of these areas.

Firstly with respect to parents and community:-

- The recently expanded Student Support Services Division of the Ministry of Education has a parent education programme that so far has trained 98 community leaders who in turn are working with 3,600 families across the country to improve parenting skills.
- The Division also provides primary schools with psychosocial services as well as services to identify any hearing or sight difficulties
- In 2006-2007, 90% or 30,552 infant pupils in public primary schools were screened for hearing and 34,000 pupils benefited from visual screening through our partnership with the Ministry of Health - Thank you Mr. Minister
- The Ministry of Education also works with the National PTA to establish and support homework centres for students at risk or in need of supervision
- We continue to support families and student learning through school nutrition programmes.
  - This year we will spend \$226.31 million dollars to provide two meals a day to students and
  - \$124.26 million on the provision of textbooks, remedial materials and resources for the challenged child so that all can be included in the learning process

Students, we believe that education is everybody's business. To support this belief and stimulate community involvement in education, we are decentralising and there are

several measures already in place at the secondary level that we are bringing to the primary.

- Firstly - The Local School Board Unit has completed the establishment of Local School Boards in all government secondary schools. The Unit is now in the process of establishing Local School Boards in the government primary schools and early childhood centres
- Secondly, we have begun placement of 233 Heads of Departments and 350 senior teachers in primary schools with a view to strengthening the administration within the primary school level.
- Thirdly, the Performance Management Appraisal Process PMAP for all employees is being introduced and complements our other initiatives for ensuring quality in the education system.

I pointed out earlier that the role of the teacher is crucial. Consequently, the Ministry of Education has:

- Increased by 200% its expenditure for the professional development of teachers and the improvement of school leadership
- Started the journey towards a fully pre-trained teaching service by:-
  - The transfer of the Teacher's Colleges to the University of Trinidad and Tobago
  - The development of programmes leading to:-
    - The M.Sc in Reading
    - The M.Ed in School Leadership and
    - The B.Sc in Physical Education
    - Certification in the Visual and Performing Arts

A fully trained teaching service is absolutely essential for the delivery of the curriculum at all levels. At the primary level, some of the new features of the curriculum include:-

- Increased emphasis on reading and literacy skills
- Revised Science and Social Studies curriculum guides
- Introduction of Spanish as the first foreign language
- Renewed emphasis on teaching of the history of our people as a dedicated subject as well as ensuring that it is embedded in all subjects
- A new Health and Family Life curriculum
- Emphasis on Physical Education and Sport for a healthy lifestyle and
- Enhanced support for the Visual and Performing Arts through partnerships with interest groups

We are also integrating information and communication technology into teaching and learning activities at the primary level. The provision of computers through the primary

schools computerisation programme is in progress:-

- The infrastructural work on the computer laboratories has been completed at 340 primary schools and 11 special schools
- Computer labs in over 120 primary schools have already been equipped
- Training in technology facilitation was conducted at some 13 venues during the July-August period 2007 and over a thousand primary and secondary school teachers benefited
- Free Internet access is now available at 180 primary and secondary schools
- Teachers have been trained in the use of curriculum courseware: *Classworks* to enhance teaching/learning in Mathematics and Language Arts in pilot schools.
- There are teachers, at the *coach* and *expert* levels in our primary schools who act as mentor teachers in ICT integration at their schools and
- There is increased use of technology in lesson preparation and delivery. As a result of Primary School Sensitisation workshops, teachers are now preparing excellent lessons using productivity tools and authoring ware such as Hyper Studio.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Students, while we are helping teachers and school administration to be more effective, supporting parents, involving the community and shaping exciting learning opportunities for the child we do stop there.

We recognise that if we want all our children to have an equal chance at success then we must make available sound pre-school experiences.

And so for the first time in the history of our education system, early childhood care and education is now part of the formal schooling. It is our plan that by 2010, thirty thousand three and 4 year olds will be attending 600 State or State Assisted Early Childhood Care and Education Centres. So far:-

- 300 sites have been identified
- Eight centres have been formally opened

We expect that within a short period of time the 5yr olds of this country will be better prepared to enter and take advantage of primary schooling.

Teachers, parents, school supervisors the road ahead is in your hands. A brand new building for Tranquillity Primary means **little**, unless the 720 students who will use it together with their teachers and parents, approach its use with brand new attitudes of excitement, commitment, dedication and diligence.

Tranquillity Primary is being built at a cost of over \$33 million dollars, VAT exclusive. We should all be driven to see that we get **value for money**. The Ministry of Education will do so by continuing to support and monitor both student and teacher performance through:-

- The continuation of National Testing at Standards 1 and 3 in Mathematics and Language Arts and

- The introduction of National Testing in Science and Social Studies at Standards 2 and 4. The results of these national tests enable us to take the necessary steps to help schools improve student performance
- We continue International benchmarking through participation in PIRLS the international reading literacy study and more and
- more will be our Performance Management System - PMAP be used to improve and guide teacher performance

Ladies and Gentlemen, Students, Tranquility's new school is symbolic of the schools being built across this country and we make no apologies for wanting our Nation's children to enjoy physical learning environments that meet international standards

Over the past five years, the many policies we have implemented now give our country a new model of education and set us on a path to a quality seamless education system from early childhood to primary to secondary and beyond. We are making our education system:-

- Research driven
- Guided by standards and
- Focused on improving the learner's all round development

It is really up to each and every one of us to continue to do our part so that:-

- ***We secure the holistic development of our children*** as healthy and emotionally well adjusted people who are empowered, literate and articulate and
- ***The social fabric of this society is healed and strengthened*** as we foster in our young a sense of national pride, strong moral and spiritual values and a desire to be innovative, creative and entrepreneurial.

Ladies and gentlemen students, teachers, parents, in closing I wish to state that never before has there been such a comprehensive plan to address change at the primary level not only through school construction and upgrade but also through:

- Curriculum revision
- Teacher development
- School management and above all
- Support Services for students.

Your school is expected to be completed in **2008**. I ask you to come on board; work with us so that together we can achieve relatively smooth completion of this school.

***It is now my privilege to turn the sod and symbolically start the construction of Tranquillity Government Primary.***

October 01, 2007.