



ADDRESS BY

HON. ESTHER LE GENDRE

MINISTER OF EDUCATION

At the

FORMAL HANDING-OVER CEREMONY

of the

Tacarigua Government Early Childhood Care and

Education (ECCE) Centre

At 17 Back Street off Bally Trace

Tacarigua

**Saturday 9th February 2008
10:00 a.m.**

It is indeed a pleasure for me to be here today to receive the keys and to unveil a plaque at the handing-over ceremony of this Tacarigua Government Early Childhood Care and Education Centre, constructed in partnership with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

This is the twelfth ECCE Centre to be handed over to the Ministry of Education by the Education Facilities Company Limited and the first set of keys that I will receive as Minister of Education. I am honoured to take forward this valuable initiative of my predecessor Senator Hazel Manning for fulfilling the vision of the PNM Government. I am happy as well to see to this happy conclusion work begun by Mr. Eddie hart. What you see here is seamless government policy on the heels of seamless education.

When I unveil the plaque to complete the 'Handing over' process, it will indeed be a special occasion not only for me, as Minister of Education, but for all of those who toiled to make this happen and for this Tacarigua Community which adjoins my own Constituency of Tunapuna.

The construction of this ECCE Centre has been long awaited in this community. You have heard of the changes in accommodation and the many challenges faced by those who have cared for our preschoolers. You have also been made aware through the work of this government, of the importance of early childhood care and education in laying the foundation on which the education system is built. Early Childhood Education, along with good parenting and supportive social and religious structures undoubtedly form the pillars of our nation.

I take this opportunity to extend congratulations to all persons and agencies associated with this project. The Education Facilities Company Limited - which is assigned to construct these centres, - has assured me that eleven other ECCE Centres will be completed in 2008 and thirty-nine additional Centres are at varying stages of completion in every geographical area of Trinidad and Tobago.

The drive is on to continue the thrust to provide universal access to quality ECCE services in Trinidad and Tobago.

Our presence here today and the very existence of this wonderful Early Childhood Care and Education Centre, bear testimony of our commitment to provide high quality learning

experiences, support, care and services for all our nation's children. No matter the economic status, social or demographic profile, ethnicity, physical or emotional challenges of our children, my government's policy of education for all ensures equality of access, a level playing field surrounding quality educational opportunity.

The Ministry of Education, cognizant of Government's National Development Plan, has put in place policies and strategies to develop our human resources, sustain national development and ensure that we achieve "developed country status by 2020." Qualifications, relevant competencies and training are paramount in our quest to develop our human capital. The early childhood care and education sector is now one vehicle through which this is being achieved.

Research has demonstrated that Early Education and improved services for young children have a direct and positive impact on later school performance and ultimately the quality of their later life. For this reason, our ECCE Curriculum Guide propels the educator to provide rich experiences for our children. These children of Tacarigua will benefit from experiences geared towards creating their holistic development. We have taken steps to ensure that in the final analysis all our citizens can demonstrate the attributes of ideal Caribbean people as envisaged by the drafters of the Caribbean Education for all Plan of Action. We want innovative people and our Corporate Plan 2008 – 2012 reflects programmes aimed at achieving this goal.

The young children of Tacarigua and environs who enroll at this ultra-modern facility, will benefit from a seamless education system, beginning from Early Childhood Care and Education right through to tertiary education. Through this we provide a means for all our citizens to:-

- Be emotionally secure
- Demonstrate strong work ethics
- Have respect for human life
- Demonstrate respect for property
- Be environmentally aware
- Be spiritually aware
- Be responsible

- Be accountable to family and community
- Be entrepreneurial
- Be creative and
- Be central to the development process

Quality staff is needed to move the ECCE Sector forward and we are doing it right from the very beginning. Parents and teachers present here today, we implore you to point our young scholars towards a career in ECCE. When we do so, we will ensure that our trained, quality personnel are present at the very critical beginning, where they are needed most, to mould the desired innovative citizen of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Ministry of Education is also pursuing the option of providing scholarships for those wishing to specialize in the field of early childhood education, especially those persons who have been labouring in the field for many years and who have experience, but do not possess the prerequisite training and qualifications required.

We hope that more male teachers would come forward to access this opportunity. There is a dearth of men in the early childhood care and education field and in the teaching profession of Trinidad and Tobago, in general. Our children need male role models as well.

You are fortunate at Tacarigua Community ECCE Centre to have had a male teaching assistant here in the person of Mr. Marcel Anthony Rogers. We have only one other male who is at the Valsayn Government ECCE Centre, but as scholarships are rolled out and career paths are mapped, it is hoped that more males will be attracted to provide the father figure that is so lacking in many of our centres of learning.

Ladies and gentlemen, construction of this Tacarigua Government ECCE Centre began on July 10, 2006. The Centre was built to accommodate fifty children at a cost of \$1,952,134.80 by Tripple Bique Company Limited under the astute executing agency of the Education Facilities Company Limited.

Noteworthy of mention on this project are:

- Design Consultants: Cheryl Adams of Reynald and Associates
- Civil/Structural Engineer: Planning Associates International limited
- Quantity Surveyors: Hart and Leonard (1987) Ltd.
- And not forgetting the Directors and employees of the Education Facilities Company led by Mrs. Kathleen Thomas, Chief Executive Officer.

This community of Tacarigua is an agricultural area that has been a cane-farming area not withstanding the fact that many people planted on the hills as well—not cane, but produce like tomatoes and especially pigeon peas. The original inhabitants originated from indentured labourers of East Indian descent. Children of the indentured people were kept at the orphan home while the workers were kept in barracks at the then Orange Grove Estate.

Today, the inhabitants, comprising the new generation are offspring's of the original inhabitants, as well as those who have moved into various housing developments here. They have found employment in various fields of endeavours – professional and otherwise. Unquestionably, we can now boast of a mixed population of people of diverse occupations. It is expected their children will form the bulk of enrolment at this new facility.

This Centre will provide more than the traditional child-care service. In fact, support teams comprising community members with a good track record and parent representatives, organized by the National Parent Teacher body in collaboration with the Ministry of Education's Local School Board will arrange for child care services **before** and **after** the stipulated times of the start and dismissal of the ECCE Centres. This would cater for those working parents who may not be able to be here immediately at the start and dismissal of the ECCE Centre. However, this is a long term plan and will only be instituted when the required legislation is in place to facilitate this.

No school fees are charged at government and government assisted centres and nutritious meals are provided for our children. However parents, you too have your role to play in partnering with us, therefore your teachers will advise you on the supportive roles expected of you.

We have already designed a Governance Framework for the ECCE Sector to ensure that:-

- ⇒ All ECCE Centres are **adequately staffed** with fully qualified teachers and caregivers capable of implementing the new curriculum.
- ⇒ There is an appropriate **administrative structure** to be put in place to manage the ECCE Sector.
- ⇒ In addition, a **Quality Assurance** system is being developed to continuously monitor and evaluate the operations of the entire ECCE Sector.

Ladies and gentlemen, the children of your Tacarigua Government ECCE Centre would be well cared for by a competent staff. Permit me therefore to introduce them to you.

Mrs Petal Knox- Thomas, the mainstay of this ECCE Centre will continue to deliver quality service, in the education of your children.

Mr. Marcel Anthony Rogers will also continue as a member of the teaching staff at this Centre.

Mrs Knott-Thomas and Mr. Rogers will be joined by an Administrator/Teacher who will be appointed in consultation with the Community Board, Village Council and the Ministry of Education. We have recommended Ms Cynthia Celestine and will have further consultation with the Community Board with respect to this. Eventually, two additional teachers will join this staff, while discussions will be held with **Ms. Annmarie Skeete** to continue serving at this establishment. Rest assured also, that your Centre will be provided with a 24 hour security service.

Ladies and gentlemen, together, I trust that the teaching and administrative staff will be supported in their work and that all of us will assist in providing a higher quality education for the children and their parents of this community.

It is with great pleasure then, that I offer my regards to all at this 'Handing Over ceremony' of the Tacarigua Community, ECCE Centre. May God richly bless you all.

9th February 2008