



The Government Minute

The Government's Responses to the Reports of the Standing Public Accounts
Committee on the Reports of the Auditor General

SCHOOL EDUCATION IN THE CAYMAN ISLANDS

24th July, 2020

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BACKGROUND

Section 77(7) of the Legislative Assembly Standing Orders (2006 Revision) states that the Government Minute shall be laid on the Table of the House within three months of laying of the report of the Standing Public Accounts Committee and of the report of the Auditor General to which it relates.

The Government Minute constitutes the Government's response to the Reports of the Standing Public Accounts Committee tabled in the Legislative Assembly on 1 July 2020 on the following Reports prepared by the Auditor General:

1. School Education (October 2019)

EDUCATION IN THE CAYMAN ISLANDS – SEPTEMBER, 2019

The Public Accounts Committee (“the Committee”) noted that Education is fundamental in shaping a child’s adult life. A good education is associated not only with a higher income but also with better health and longer life expectancy. The social and economic costs of poor education are high and take many different forms, including increased criminality, lower rates of economic growth, higher unemployment, and lower participation in civic and political activities. Achieving “the best education opportunities for all our children” is one of the eight strategic outcomes of the Cayman Islands Government (the Government). The objective of the Office of the Auditor General’s audit was to determine how efficiently and effectively the Ministry of Education is using its resources to maximize student achievement.

In their report, the Committee endorsed the 18 recommendations of the Office of the Auditor General (“OAG”) report and encourages the Government to implement these as soon as possible:

OAG Recommendation 1

The Ministry of Education should monitor and publicly report, at least annually, progress against the broad outcomes and priorities set out in the Strategic Policy Statements.

Responsibility – The Ministry of Education

Government Update:

Recommendation accepted. Currently, the Ministry monitors progress of the Broad Outcomes and priorities/objectives through monthly reporting from each of the Departments under the Ministry. Heads of Departments (HoD) outline progress towards accomplishing each of the Strategic Objectives. The Annual Report for the Ministry will be amended to include this format of reporting which will be made available on the Ministry website.

OAG Recommendation 2

The Ministry of Education should publish the Education Data Report on a timely basis, ideally by December of the same year of sitting exams.

Responsibility – Director of the Department of Education Services

Government Update:

Recommendation accepted. The Education Data Report was published by the end of December in 2019 and it will continue to be published by December on an annual basis for government schools.

OAG Recommendation 3

The Ministry of Education should develop a new medium- to long-term education strategy. The Ministry should regularly assess and publicly report progress against the strategy.

Responsibility – The Ministry of Education

Government Update:

Recommendation accepted. The Ministry sees the importance of a strategic plan for education and previously drafted the process for developing a new strategic plan for the start of 2018. The Ministry has focused on the initiatives that will have the biggest impact on student performance. These have

included, but not been limited to:

- Development and implementation of a Science Strategy
- Development and implementation of a Literacy Strategy
- Development of a Draft Family Learning Strategy
- Development of a Draft Early Childhood Care and Education Strategy

Progress on this recommendation was stopped due to the pandemic. The Ministry focused on developing policy and guidance for distance learning, safety protocols, free school meals, care packets, etc. as a response to the pandemic. Focus was also placed on developing guidance on the safe return to schools in August 2020 as well as on strategies for overcoming learning loss. The Ministry will liaise with the Minister for Education and Education Council on the development of a medium to long term strategy. It is anticipated that work to progress new medium to long term education will restart in 2021.

OAG Recommendation 4

The Ministry of Education should include private school student numbers in its student projection planning. The projection planning should be used to inform other medium- to long-term plans.

Responsibility – The Ministry of Education

Government Update:

Recommendation accepted. Currently the Ministry collects and analyses data from private schools through the grant process. This includes data on enrolment, gender, age, nationality to name a few. The Ministry will review its processes for private school data collection and analysis to strengthen student projection planning. This data will then be utilised to inform overall medium to long term planning.

OAG Recommendation 5

The Ministry of Education should develop a long-term financial plan that is underpinned by the Capital Projects Master Plan, student population projects and workforce plans, and that supports the delivery of the education strategy.

Responsibility – The Ministry of Education

Government Update:

Recommendation accepted. The Ministry views this as an essential foundation for the development of a strategic plan for education. Whilst much of this data is currently collated and analysed by the Ministry, a more comprehensive data collection and analysis process can be developed for financial planning.

OAG Recommendation 6

The Ministry of Education and Department of Education Services should ensure that there is effective engagement with all stakeholders in the development of strategies, and that policies and changes are communicated well in advance of implementation dates.

Responsibility – The Ministry of Education and the Department of Education Services

Government Update:

Recommendation accepted. The Ministry will continue to prioritise stakeholder engagement and effective communication. There is currently a process for consultation/communication that is utilised in the Ministry when new initiatives are introduced.

OAG Recommendation 7

The Scholarships Secretariat should start to collect, analyse and report information on all scholarships annually to better demonstrate how scholarship funding is achieving its intended purpose and contributing to economic priorities. The data collected should include the subjects and courses funded and the destinations of scholarship recipients.

Responsibility – Scholarship Secretariat

Government Update:

Recommendation accepted. Currently, the scholarships database includes information on all scholarships awarded annually, majors and destinations/countries and institutions of study. This information is provided to ESO and other interested parties upon request. What is currently not available is the follow-up post qualifications. It is the plan for the Scholarship Secretariat to improve student tracking upon their completion of their studies, to determine if they are finding employment in the areas of their major, if the education received compliments the professional requirements, and also to record feedback on the experiences at the various institutions of learning.

OAG Recommendation 8

The Government should identify and implement strategies to encourage beneficiaries to undertake courses that are aligned to current and projected work permit needs.

Responsibility – Scholarship Secretariat

Government Update:

Recommendation accepted. This recommendation requires collaboration/information from a range of agencies including, but not limited to, WORC, the Education Council and Immigration. Currently a post 16 Education Strategy is being developed and is due to be completed by the end of 2020.

OAG Recommendation 9

The Ministry of Education should develop a national strategy for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) that takes into account the Government's economic priorities and the current and future needs of employers.

Responsibility – The Ministry of Education

Government Update:

Recommendation accepted. The Ministry and the Department of Education Services currently plans for TVET as outlined in the annual Plan of Action documents prepared by each school. The high schools and CIFEC also offer a range of TVET programmes including curricular subjects, apprenticeships and internships. The Education Council currently has a working group that is developing a draft TVET Strategy.

OAG Recommendation 10

The Ministry of Education should develop and document a clear rationale for the provision of funding to private schools that clearly specifies the purpose of the funding and the outcomes the Ministry expects to be delivered.

Responsibility – The Ministry of Education

Government Update:

Recommendation accepted. The funding model has been changed to a grant programme for all schools.

This approach was supported at the last Finance Committee in 2019. The previous, historical funding model provided funding for schools that were only a part of the private school association and did not differentiate between non-profit and for-profit schools. The new grant model is open to all schools (private and public). Schools can apply for funding for specific projects (e.g. those linked to school improvement).

OAG Recommendation 11

The Ministry of Education should ensure that it takes corrective action, where monitoring identifies a lack of compliance by private schools against the terms and conditions specified in the Purchase Agreements.

Responsibility – The Ministry of Education

Government Update:

This process was already in place and was strengthened. Schools that were not in compliance with the requirements did not receive their funding. This will no longer be an issue with the new funding model for grants.

OAG Recommendation 12

The Government should specify clear outcomes and success measures for education as part of the budgeting process and should ensure that performance against these is monitored and publicly reported.

Responsibility – The Ministry of Education

Government Update:

Recommendation accepted. The Ministry currently collects a range of data and can work to strengthen the collation and analysis process in order to better ascertain value for money for both public and private schools. This process should include collation and analysis of data including, but not limited to, cost per student, student/teacher ratios, number of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), cost of provision/resources for students with SEND, before and after-school school care, transportation, and medical/therapeutic costs. The analysis will also include links to student performance where applicable. From this process outcomes and success measures can be developed, monitored and publicly reported.

Progress on this recommendation was stopped due to the pandemic. The Ministry focused on developing policy and guidance for distance learning, safety protocols, free school meals, care packets, etc. as a response to the pandemic. Focus was also placed on developing guidance on the safe return to schools in August 2020 as well as on strategies for overcoming learning loss. It is anticipated that work to progress this recommendation will restart in 2021.

OAG Recommendation 13

The Ministry of Education should calculate, analyse and review the cost per student across all public schools on a regular basis. It should benchmark these costs with the private schools and with comparable countries regionally or internationally in order to inform decision making.

Responsibility – The Ministry of Education

Government Update:

Recommendation accepted. Management response as above (#12) with comparison to regional and

international costs.

The Ministry views this as particularly important as the cost per student for Government students is higher than that of private school students. This analysis will be able to identify the reasons for the difference in costs which will include the fact that public schools have the majority of students with special education needs and/or disabilities (not only in Lighthouse school but in all schools) and therefore spends a significant amount on provision and resources to meet these needs. Government also spends considerably more on therapeutic/medical services for students, transportation and before/after school care to name a few.

If possible, broader impacts of Government funding should be analysed for example, the Government provides bus transport for approximately 5,000+ students in public schools, whilst the majority of private schools do not utilise bus services for the 4,000+ students. The cost of additional traffic, impact on the environment, etc. should be considered.

Progress on this recommendation was stopped due to the pandemic. The Ministry focused on developing policy and guidance for distance learning, safety protocols, free school meals, care packets, etc. as a response to the pandemic. Focus was also placed on developing guidance on the safe return to schools in August 2020 as well as on strategies for overcoming learning loss. It is anticipated that work to progress recommendation will restart in 2021.

OAG Recommendation 14

The Ministry of Education and Department of Education Services should develop strategies to improve education attainment at all levels. These should include closing gaps in attainment and between genders by improving the attainment of lower-performing students while continuing to motivate higher-performing students to do even better.

Responsibility – The Ministry of Education and Department of Education Services

Government Update:

Recommendation accepted. One of the main focuses of the Ministry of Education and the Department of Education Services has been to improve student performance (progress & achievement) including our most vulnerable students as well as our higher-performing students. Strategies utilised thus far include but are not limited to:

- Standardizing assessment types and procedures across all government schools
- Developing, in collaboration with school principals and staff, plan of actions that focus on literacy, numeracy, science, SEND, data, and TVET
- Reviewing data with each individual school, each term to identify issues with performance and implement strategies for student improvement – this includes a cross analysis of teachers' performance management scores and class performance
- Regular monitoring of the plan of action for each school
- Introduction of literacy interventions e.g. Reading Recovery
- Introduction of numeracy interventions e.g. Mathematics Recovery
- Increasing specialist and support staff to assist students with SEND
- Ensuring all primary schools have a Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCo)
- Ensuring students have access to a range of enrichment programmes to help support the development of the whole child, such as, flight clubs, robotic clubs, culinary programmes, music programmes, sports programmes, and cultural programmes

The Department of Education Services, in consultation with the Ministry and Schools, have drafted an Attainment Strategy which will be implemented in the 2020-2021 academic year. The Ministry will continue to build on the initiatives implemented to improve student progress and achievement and will seek to provide further research-based initiatives that target the specific needs to students in public schools.

OAG Recommendation 15

The Ministry of Education and Department of Education Services should systematically benchmark student performance internationally and publicly report the results.

Responsibility – The Ministry of Education and Department of Education Services

Government Update:

Recommendation accepted. The Ministry has introduced the National Curriculum for England (with slight modifications) in all government primary schools in September 2019. New assessments and data tracking systems have been utilized that make comparisons more accurate. There were interruptions to the end of year assessments for 2020 due to the pandemic. It is anticipated that end of year assessments will resume in the 2020-2021 academic year.

OAG Recommendation 16

The Department of Education Services should develop and implement a policy on reducing truancy rates. The policy should specify strategies for targeting the efforts of truancy officers to schools with the highest truancy rates; and ensure that sufficient resources are available to effectively manage and reduce truancy levels.

Responsibility – Department of Education Services

Government Update:

Recommendation accepted. Student attendance data for government schools is currently monitored by the Ministry and the Department of Education Services. A truancy policy has been developed by the Department of Education Services and has been implemented for Government schools.

OAG Recommendation 17

The Ministry of Education should develop clear strategies and policies for focusing on the areas that are known to positively affect student attainment, including teacher quality, the use of data and parental engagement.

Responsibility – The Ministry of Education

Government Update:

Recommendation accepted. One of the main focuses of the Ministry of Education and the Department of Education Services has been to improve student performance (progress & achievement), especially for our most vulnerable students.

The Ministry has provided a range of professional development training opportunities (mandatory and optional) for education staff (including principals, teachers and support staff) that is specifically focused on improving teacher pedagogy and raising student attainment.

The Ministry has also focused on strategies linked to the 2008 meta-study by John Hattie (Visible Learning) which looks at the effect size of a range of factors that influence learning outcomes in schools. The Ministry and the Department of Education Services have focused on strategies that have the most impact on student progress and achievement.

Termly reviews of individual student data, class data, school data and performance management score have led to the implementation of a range of improvement measures in schools, by the Department and Ministry.

The Ministry recognises that more work needs to be done to document all the improvement strategies that are in place whilst considering the balance between being inundated with paperwork and providing sufficient evidence of the strategies.

The Ministry will continue to build on the initiatives implemented to improve student progress and achievement and will seek to provide further research-based initiatives that target the specific needs of students in public schools.

OAG Recommendation 18

The Ministry of Education should develop a national strategy for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) that clearly sets out what it trying to achieve. The strategy should include a framework for measuring, assessing and reporting how the investment in SEN is contributing to improved outcomes such as the attainment performance of SEN students; and determining how SEN funding is targeted at primary and secondary levels.

Responsibility – The Ministry of Education

Government Update:

Recommendation accepted. The Ministry and the Department of Education Services currently plans for SEND provision as outlined in the annual Plan of Action documents prepared by each school.

The Ministry would include SEND as a focus area in the broader education strategy. A specific SEND strategy will also be developed. This is of particular importance as public schools have higher numbers of students with SEND than private schools and over the past few years there has been an increase in resources and provision to support students with SEND.

The Committee made further recommendations as follows:

PAC Recommendation 2

The Committee acknowledges that all teachers receive training on Caymanian culture as part of their induction but express concerns that teaching staff do not always appear to fully appreciate the national culture. The Committee recommends that the Ministry of Education should ensure that all teachers receive regular cultural sensitivity training.

Responsibility – The Ministry of Education

Government Response:

Recommendation accepted. Currently, the Ministry provides cultural sensitivity training for all new overseas recruits. Reminders and additional guidance can be provided throughout the academic year. An annual cultural sensitivity session can be arranged.

PAC Recommendation 3

The Committee acknowledges that measures have been taken to protect the safety of students and teachers but is concerned that more could be done in this area. The Committee recommends that the Ministry of Education should formally consider the use of cameras in schools to further protect students and teachers.

Responsibility – The Ministry of Education

Government Response:

The Ministry of Education and the Department of Education Services recognise that this is a critical area of concern. Work has commenced to research the logistics and implications for instituting cameras in schools. The Ministry and Department commit to engaging in the necessary stakeholder engagement; and risk, budgetary, data protection and child protection analysis to move this matter forward.

PAC Recommendation 4

The Committee is concerned that private sector employers may not be investing in Caymanian talent or providing Caymanian staff with adequate access to scholarships. The Committee recommends that the role of the Education Council should be extended to cover the private sector and the scholarships they provide.

Responsibility – The Ministry of Education

Government Response:

Recommendation accepted. This is an issue being explored by the Education Council.