

Statement to the Legislative Assembly
by the
Minister for Education, Training, Employment, Youth
Sports and Culture
Hon. Alden M. McLaughlin JP
November 16th 2007

On

The Cayman Islands Education Standards and Assessment Unit (ESAU)
(Previously known as the Schools' Inspectorate)

Madam Speaker, one year ago I rose in this Honourable House to speak to the implementation of the new governance model for the management of primary and secondary education in our public schools. At that time I indicated that the new governance model would be implemented at the start of the 2007/08 academic school year, which is now underway. I am pleased to stand before you today to confirm that this has indeed taken place and already significant gains are being realised on many levels in the immediate support and provision of services to schools.

Madam Speaker, much effort has gone into ensuring that the work of *every* educational institution is realigned to focus on **servicing the students** and providing necessary support for their learning. In so doing, the ways in which the newly formed Department of Education Services provides service to its schools has been completely transformed and a comprehensive review of the work of the Schools Inspectorate has been undertaken. This review was conducted on the one hand to

reaffirm the independence of the work of this unit as it provides quality assurance reports on the quality of education being provided within all of our public schools, and on the other hand, to examine the scope of the work undertaken thus far by the unit, and to consider its ongoing currency in the context of rapidly changing practices in education.

Madam Speaker, the Cayman Islands Schools' Inspectorate was established in 1996, with the first school inspections conducted a year later. Having provided inspection services to our schools for a decade now, the review considered the scope of responsibilities historically carried out by this unit. This has resulted in changes being made to ensure that its work with public and private sector primary and secondary schools is more focussed, resulting in a reformatting of the evaluation protocols to more closely reflect the country's ongoing developments in education. Taking the new national curriculum as an example, this would mean looking at the extent to which schools are achieving the criteria articulated in the profile of the educated Caymanian contained in the *National Consensus on the Future of Education in the Cayman Islands* document.

Beyond this, the revamped unit will provide a range of similar services to other agencies where their programmes contain an education component.

Today I am pleased to outline how the role of the Inspectorate has been restructured as part of the wider education transformation agenda. The new iteration of the Schools' Inspectorate will continue to sit, as it does now, within the Ministry of Education, Training, Employment, Youth, Sports and culture as an autonomous unit, but will now be known as the Education Standards and Assessment Unit. The head

of this unit will be called the Director of the Education Standards and Assessment Unit.

The mission of the revamped unit is to contribute to the continuous improvement of education in the Cayman Islands through the provision of rigorous independent evaluations. By providing the Ministry with high quality policy advice and research, findings from the Unit will inform and drive many aspects of education policy reform.

Transforming education in the Cayman Islands

Madam Speaker, until September 2007, the Schools' Inspectorate, as the Unit was formerly known, provided support, advice and guidance for public schools through a link inspector role. However, under the new governance model, the responsibility for improving schools clearly falls within the remit of the Department of Education Services. This new clarity enables the functioning of the two units to be more clearly delineated: with the Education Standards and Assessment Unit evaluating and reporting on what the schools do well and what needs improvement; whilst the Department of Education Services supports its schools to move forward by utilising Learning Community Leaders and other services to put support mechanisms in place.

Under this new structure, Officers (formerly known as school inspectors) from the Education Standards and Assessment Unit will continue to have a link role, but with the four Learning Community Leaders rather than with individual schools as was previously the case.

The rigorous, external evaluations carried out by Officers from the Education Standards and Assessment Unit provide the Ministry, the education system, parents and members of our community, with a clear and impartial view of the quality of education as it is being offered within our public school system, including the strengths and opportunities for improvement. Madam Speaker, over the years, tremendous effort has been placed on developing positive and productive relationships with all private schools and the process for evaluating private schools will be the same as for government schools.

Additionally, as an expansion to its role, the Education Standards and Assessment Unit will also evaluate public institutions (other than schools), where programmes being offered contain an educational component.

Profile of the Educated Caymanian

Madam Speaker, going forward, every school evaluation conducted by the Education Standards and Assessment Unit will judge the extent to which that school or setting prepares students to fulfil the 'profile of the educated Caymanian' as described in the *National Consensus on the future of Education in the Cayman Islands* document. That document you will recall Madam Speaker, was unanimously accepted in this honourable house on 13th October, 2005 and for ease of reference I quote:

'An Educated Caymanian will:

- Be enthusiastic and motivated about learning, and will continue to extend his/her knowledge and skills after leaving school
- Be literate, numerate and adept at using information and communication technology
- Be a good communicator
- Be creative and appreciative of the arts
- Have a positive outlook and a high self-esteem
- Be well-rounded, good at finding solutions to problems, flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances and demands
- Have a strong work ethic and willingness to become an honest, reliable and responsible member of the work force
- Be respectful of God, him/herself, others, people from different backgrounds, the environment and property
- Be proud of, and knowledgeable about, our Caymanian culture, whilst respectful of other cultures and beliefs
- Be a good team player, civic-minded and willing to serve
- Have an awareness of global issues affecting aspects of life in the 21st century

Programme of school evaluations

Madam Speaker, in order to ensure that educational standards are met and maintained, it is customary for Government and private schools to typically undergo assessments every four years. Evaluations are based on criteria set out in the *Handbook for the Evaluation of Schools (2008 edition)* using a scale of 1 through 4, where 1 is at the top end. If a school is judged to be 'very good' (ie Grade 1) in terms of its overall effectiveness, then it may not receive another evaluation for five or six years. A school that is judged to be providing an unsatisfactory standard of education (Grade 4) will be visited for a progress review within two years of the initial evaluation, and a full assessment will be conducted again two years later.

Additionally, all schools found to be wanting in terms of the quality of education provided are required to either submit an action plan or modify its existing school improvement plan to show how it will address the weaknesses highlighted by the evaluation.

Thematic reports and surveys

The Unit will continue to undertake a range of surveys that look across schools or other educational provision, to provide a view of the quality of provision across the islands. There will be a programme of surveys each year according to a priority list determined with the Ministry. The Unit will also produce thematic reports based on summarising issues from evaluation reports or from research from all contributors to the development of educational policy.

Madam Speaker, and Members of this Honourable House, it has been my privilege to share with you today details of how the transformation of the Education Standards and Assessment Unit (ESAU) will in turn assist the Ministry in its efforts to bring about the necessary, and long overdue transformation of the education service provided in these Islands.

The transformation of the Standards and Assessment Unit will provide for greater clarity in its work, and more alignment to the findings of the National Consensus on the Future of education in the Cayman Islands document. With the responsibility for school improvement and professional development now resting with the Chief Education Officer, the unit is now better positioned to operate more autonomously in carrying out its primary functions, which are evaluating the quality of teaching and learning (especially with respect to fulfilling the profile of the educated Caymanian) and providing policy advice.

I trust that you will continue to share my enthusiasm as we advance further along the transformation of education process and look forward to your continued support.