



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Education Towers, No.5 St. Vincent Street, Port of Spain, Trinidad

Ministerial Response
to the
Fourteenth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Human
Rights, Equality and Diversity
on
the Sexual Harassment in the Education Sector



4. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS (pgs. 37-40)

Objective 1: To understand the Prevalence of Ministerial Response to the Recommendations Report of the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity on the Sexual Harassment in the Education Sector and Educational Institutions (pg.37).

Recommendations

- 4.9. The Committee recommends that the MOE develop a standardised mechanism by March 2020 to categorise and record certain types of child behaviours that fall within the definition of sexual harassment in the National School Code of Conduct 2018.**

The MOE acknowledges and accepts this recommendation to develop a standardised mechanism to categorise and record certain types of child behaviours that fall within the definition of sexual harassment, as outlined on Page 41, of the *Revised National School Code of Conduct*. Preliminary discussions have commenced internally between the Student Support Services Division (SSSD) and the School Supervision and Management Division (SSMD) to formulate such a mechanism for recording and reporting this issue. This is expected to be completed by the end of March 2020.

- 4.10. The Committee recommends that the MOE create a mechanism to track complaints of sexual harassment received and submitted to the TSC in order to maintain an accurate record of data and ensure reconciliation of data transmitted between both MOE and TSC.**

The Industrial Relations Unit (IRU) of the MOE has a mechanism in place to track complaints of sexual harassment received and submitted to the Discipline Unit of the TSC. It was agreed that representatives from the MOE (IRU) and the TSC (Discipline Unit) will meet quarterly to reconcile records regarding the number of complaints received.

- 4.11. The Committee recommends that MOE collaborate with tertiary institutions to develop a mechanism to monitor the prevalence of sexual harassment in tertiary educational institutions by December 2019.**

The Ministry recognises that while all the tertiary institutions have individual policies regarding sexual harassment, except for two (2) institutions. Accordingly, discussions are being held with the tertiary institutions to establish a suitable mechanism to monitor the prevalence of sexual harassment. The mechanism will include a system for reporting incidents to the Ministry on a regular basis.

Objective 2: To Examine and make Recommendations on:

- a) The current policy to guide the treatment of sexual harassment in educational institutions;**
- b) The level of awareness of students and staff on the complaints mechanism that are open to them, principally:**
 - i. their rights;**
 - ii. the duties of educational providers regarding these guidelines (pg. 42).**

Recommendations

4.21. The Committee recommends the following measures be implemented by the MOE so as to facilitate student sensitisation on sexual harassment in schools:

- a. The creation of a student handbook (or inclusion in the instance that a handbook already exists) containing age appropriate information by level (primary or secondary) to be discussed during student orientation sessions conducted upon entry to primary and secondary school. Copies of the student handbook should be accessible in the school's library;**

The MOE supports this recommendation and is working with the Office of the Prime Minister, Gender and Child Affairs on the possibility of creating a specific handbook to sensitise students on the wide areas covered by sexual harassment. In the interim, schools are guided by measures outlined on Page 41, of the *Revised National School Code of Conduct* and a handbook developed by the Office of the Prime Minister in 2018 on child abuse.

- b. The formulation of a standardised structure for the frequency and delivery of sensitisation sessions in order to educate and reinforce the topic of sexual harassment to students and staff.**

The MOE notes this recommendation, however, through its HFLE curriculum and Guidance programme, students will continue to be sensitised about the issue of sexual harassment in schools, particularly at the secondary level.

The theme of sexual harassment is covered within the HFLE curriculum for four (4) lessons in Term III, Form 3. Sensitisation sessions are further complemented by the Guidance programme which delivers targeted and universal programmes at both primary and secondary levels.

These programmes include:

- *Orientation Programme:* This programme is offered between July-September for students in Infant Year I, Form 1 and Lower 6. It varies from school to school and based on school needs;
- *Post-SEA Transition:* These are sessions to prepare students who wrote SEA examination on life skills which include issues of sexual harassment. Parents and teachers are also sensitised on the possible risks that may impact students on entry into secondary schools;
- *Transition to the next Level of Education:* During the Terms I and III, sessions are conducted on a weekly basis for students at Infant Year I, Standards 1 and 4, Forms 1 and 4 and Lower 6;
- *Pre-Carnival Safety and Awareness:* A programme is conducted during Term II at both the primary and secondary levels; and
- Sexual harassment information sessions which are organised at least once per term within a general school assembly.

The MOE will however, review the current arrangement to standardise the frequency and delivery of the sessions to educate and reinforce the topic of sexual harassment to students, including the teaching staff.