VERBATIM NOTES OF THE FIFTH MEETING OF THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE APPOINTED TO INQUIRE INTO AND REPORT ON SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, HELD (IN PUBLIC) IN THE J. HAMILTON MAURICE ROOM, MEZZANINE FLOOR, OFFICE OF THE PARLIAMENTTOWER D, THE PORT OF SPAIN INTERNATIONAL WATERFRONT CENTER, #1A WRIGHTSON ROAD, PORT OF SPAIN, ON WEDNESDAY, APRIL 20, 2016.

PRESENT

Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir	Chairman
Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine	Member
Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein	Member
Mr. Hafeez Ali	Member
Mr. Esmond Forde	Member
Miss Nadine Stewart	Member
Miss Khadijah Ameen	Member
Mr. Julien Ogilvie	Secretary
Miss Kimberly Mitchell	Assistant Secretary
Miss Katharina Gokool	Graduate Research Assistant

ABSENT

Miss Shamfa Cudjoe	Member [*Excused*]

11.35 a.m.: *Meeting resumed.*

SECONDARY SCHOOL REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. Faizal Rahaman (Principal)	**ASJA Boys College Charlieville**
Mrs. Sharlene Hicks-Raeburn (Principal) **Mr. Leonardo Brutus (Student)**	**Barataria South Government Secondary**
Mr. Robert Walters (Dean)	**Brazil Secondary**
Mrs. Romeeda Ali (Principal) **Charlene Charles (Student)**	**Chaguanas South Government Secondary**
Mrs. Carolyn Bally-Gosine (Principal) **Ms. Danielle Seunarine (Student)**	**Naparima Girls High School**
Mr. Gary Ribeiro (Principal) **Mr. Tarick Boodoo (Student)**	**Presentation College Chaguanas**
Mrs. Alicia Lucien-Baptiste (Principal) **McKiyah Joseph (Student)**	**Russel Latapy High School**

Mr. Chairman: Once again good morning to our audience in Trinidad and Tobago and good morning to our panellists. We are continuing with the second part of our proceedings and our enquiry this morning into school violence. We dealt with the experience of the primary school system and the primary school students. Now we will focus on the experience of principals and students in the secondary school system.

A list of secondary schools was of course determined based upon data

provided to us by the Ministry of Education, and from that list we have identified and they have accepted the invitation to participate: ASJA Boys' College of Charlieville, Barataria South Government, Brazil Secondary School, Chaguanas South Government, Naparima Girls High School, Presentation College, Chaguanas and the Russell Latapy Secondary School.

I will ask the principals of the schools to introduce themselves, and after introducing themselves the students who are accompanying them are also to introduce themselves first, because we have already introduced ourselves in the panel. So may I ask the principals of the schools, starting with my right, to introduce herself, and the student will introduce himself.

Mrs. Lucien-Baptiste: Pleasant good morning to the Chair and to the Committee, I am Alicia Lucien-Baptiste, the Acting Principal, Russell Latapy Secondary School. We have come a long way in terms of issues as it relates to violence and indiscipline. We have been in existence for only 16 years, so we are a pretty young school, but we have come a long way in terms of how we treat with issues of violence and indiscipline.

We are not a high-risk school; however, we are a school in a high-risk area.

Mr. Chairman: And that was one of the reasons you were invited; so we will come back subsequently. Could your student introduce himself and also the form in which he is in?

Student Joseph: Good morning, Chairman and members, my name is McKiyah Joseph. I am in Form 4 and also the Vice-President of the Student Council.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, yes.

Mr. Rahaman: Mr. Faizal Rahaman, Acting Principal, ASJA Boys' College, Charlieville and I am accompanied by my Form 4 student.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, Form 4 student introduce yourself, please.

Student Kunjah: Good morning everyone, I am accompanied by my principal, Mr. Rahaman. My name is Raoul Kunjah of Form 4.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much.

Mrs. Hicks-Raeburn: Pleasant good morning to all, Chairman, members, my name is Mrs. Sharlene Hicks-Raeburn, Acting Principal of Barataria South Secondary. I believe you said "Government".

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mrs. Hicks-Raeburn: It is Barataria South Secondary—

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Mrs. Hicks-Raeburn:—acting for two years.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, very well, thank you very much. And your student.

Student Brutus: Good morning everyone, Chairman, members, I am Leonardo Brutus from Barataria South Secondary and I am in Form 5. Thank you.

Mr. Walters: Good morning everyone, Chairman and members, I am Robert Walters from Brazil Secondary School. I am not the principal of the school, but I am Dean or Level Manager of the school. Thank you.

11.40 a.m.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Thank you, and could we start from the right? Yes?

Mrs. Bally-Gosine: Good morning everyone, I am Mrs. Carolyn Bally-Gosine, the Principal of Naparima Girls' High School. I am accompanied by my Deputy Head Girl, and she will introduce herself.

Student Seunarine: A pleasant good morning, Mr.Chairman, Sir, members, principals and fellow students. I am Danielle Seunarine, an Upper Six student of the Naparima Girls' High School.

Mrs. Ali: A very pleasure good morning to Chairman Mahabir and other members. I am Romeeda Ali, Acting Principal of the Chaguanas South Secondary School. I

have been there a little over six months. Previously, I was at the Chaguanas North Secondary School; substantive post Dean, but I acted as Vice-Principal and I acted as principal before going across next door to the south. I am accompanied by my student, Ms. Charlene Charles. Charlene?

Ms. Charles: Good morning everyone. My name is Charlene Charles, and I am accompanied by my principal, Mrs. Romeeda Ali. I am a senior prefect and also a Vice-Head Prefect of Chaguanas.

Mr. Chairman: And what Form are you in?

Ms. Charles: Form 5.

Mr. Chairman: Form 5, okay, and finally?

Mr. Ribeiro: Good morning to the Chair and the hon. members of the panel and to my colleagues. My name is Mr. Gary Ribeiro. I am the principal of Presentation College, Chaguanas.

Student Boodoo: Good morning, Chairman, members, principals and fellow students. I am Tarick Boodoo and I am accompanied by my principal, Mr. Gary Ribeiro.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. We are all aware of why we are here. We are here because we are seeing in social media and regular media, this unacceptable behaviour among students. It is unacceptable for the students. It is not comfortable for teachers and administrators, and it is scary to us in the Parliament, because every year we vote billions of dollars in education. The reason we do that, is for the next generation to have an opportunity to compete with the scientists in Asia and North America and in Europe, and to ensure that the talent that we have in Trinidad and Tobago, is given every opportunity to become truly world-class, which is where we are and should be and continue to be. We want our students to be able in high school, to hold their own at international universities, MIT, Cambridge, Yale, McGill

everywhere. We want you to be there, and we want nothing to happen in the school environment, that will cause you to lose that enthusiasm for study.

What we would like to do in this Committee hearing, is simply to hear first from the principals and then in particular from the students, what are the types of problems they experience, and what solutions can they offer to the Committee. So that when we come to write our report and make our recommendations to the Minister of Education, to the Ministry of Education and to other stakeholders, we will be able to offer them solutions.

When we interviewed all stakeholders including primary schools this morning, a number of solutions were offered. We would like to be solutions-oriented. Since the students themselves are in school day in, day out, we think that they have a better understanding than most, of what the problem of school violence is all about, and what are solutions from their angle, they would like to offer to us.

As I said, this again, is a historic day in the Parliament in Trinidad and Tobago. We are seeking the views of the most important stakeholder in the education system, that is the student him or herself. And we would like the students to address the highest lawmaking—well, the only lawmaking body in the land. We make the laws. The Judiciary, of course, interprets the law. We are in a position to amend the law and we would like you to be in a position to influence it.

So I will ask the principals starting from Russell Latapy High School, which is in a high-risk area, to indicate to us what her experience is, and what are some of the solutions she has implemented in her school, to ensure that her school's environment is a peaceful one, that is conducive of the study of trigonometry, geometry, quadratic equations and in which fighting and fear are things which are relatively absent? If you can briefly address us, so we give all principals an opportunity to indicate how they have been addressing this problem. Thank you.

Mrs. Lucien-Baptiste: Good morning again to the Chair and to the Committee. Let me first start by stating that our student clientele at the school, we cater for the zero to 30 per cent students, all right?—and that in itself as you would assume will pose its individual challenges, right? Notwithstanding, over the years as I indicated in my introductory statement, we have come a long way, but we have come that far only because of the partnerships that we have established over the years, alright?

One of those relationships include the involvement of the police, the Community Police. They are very active at our school. They are very supportive and we can call on them and they come. They are very—they offer their assistance, you know, even when we do not ask for the assistance, they are there, and that in itself, you know, has been one of our aid over the years.

In addition to that, we have a resident guidance officer. Despite the fact that once or twice he may be called off, he is resident at the school and we also have a social worker at the school at least twice per week, and she is also very active. What has helped us over the years though, is the fact that she makes the house visits, as I said, she is very active. So some of the information that we need to strategically plan, we get that information from the school's social worker.

In addition to which in terms of security, we have a very healthy relationship with MTS, and we meet with the powers that be at head office, MTS head office, on a monthly basis, that is Mr. Steele. We meet with him regularly, so we do not have an issue in terms of security. Once we have our security strength, they are deployed throughout the different buildings of the school. Our Deans are very active. We have two safety officers, and they are very active.

So in terms of indiscipline, as I said, we have come a long way. Notwithstanding as with my colleague, Mr. Mottley before, our major challenge is low parental involvement.

Mr. Chairman: Very well. Thank you very much. We will return to that theme. Mr. Rahaman?

Mr. Rahaman: Good morning, Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee. At ASJA Boys' College, Charlieville, like Russell Latapy High School, we are 16 years old—started at 2000; denominational school run by the ASJA Education Board; the security provided by the ASJA Educational Board. We have regular meetings with the security personnel at the plant, whereby persons who are entering the compound, the protocols are followed. Persons who are to leave the compound, the protocols are via the letter from the principal office, et cetera, that would allow them to be able to leave.

The Deans, the Principal, the Vice-Principal we address situations of indiscipline, all right. Regular meetings are held with the Deans fortnightly. The Deans meet on a weekly basis to strategize, to plan, and as soon as things come up, they act on them immediately.

The involvement of the police, we also have that involvement. We were told that we were supposed to have a liaison officer attached to the school, I do not think that has materialized, but we do have a good relationship with the Chaguanas Police Station, and they respond timely.

All members on the plant including the ancillary, work with us in terms of bringing any incidents forward, so that we may deal with them very quickly.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, and would you say your school is a low-risk school in terms of incidents?

Mr. Rahaman: I would say so.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, and Russell Latapy, would you say that your school too is a low-risk school, with respect to incidents of violence among student?

Mrs. Lucien-Baptiste: As of late, yes.

Mr. Chairman: Very well. Thank you, and may I ask Barataria South Government School?

Mrs. Hicks-Raeburn: Good morning once again. In terms of incidents at our schools, I believe we are classified as a high-risk school. We have over the—within last five years, especially of the last three years or so, we have had numerous suspensions in excess of at least an average per term of—in excess of 100 suspensions.

We have a student population of roughly 830—850. It seems very difficult to pin the number down at times, because it is difficult to. We have some what you would classify as drop-out students, and then I would also classify them as drop ins, because, of course, we are mandated, you cannot turn away a child regardless of how long they may be away, that child is guaranteed five years education.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Very well. Thank you. Before I move on to principal Bally-Gosine, I will just like to ask you one question, and that is, and I will like you to come back to address the Committee on what do you think might be the cause of this large number of suspensions, or this high incidents of students who are really causing trouble in your school?—but you can come back to it consequently.

Mr. Chairman: Brazil Secondary?

Mr. Walters: All right. Good day again. I would speak at the level of the Dean, since I am not the principal of the school. At Brazil Secondary School, it is a low-risk school. The level of violence is not as high as other schools. We have other forms of deviant behaviour at the school, I would say. From the Dean's aspect of it, we have a very strong team working with the students to, at least, lower the risk of any violent behaviours erupting at the school.

And also, we have put in place certain policies, sourcing protocols where we have to call the parents in, and have serious discussions with the parent on a regular

basis. Suspensions are not at our school for actual physical violence, but for other deviant behaviours which is very, very crucial to this matter.

Mr. Chairman: Very well. Thank you very much. I will now ask the Principal of Naparima Girls' to indicate to us what her own experience is?

Mrs. Bally-Gosine: Okay. Good morning everyone. I would like to say that my school is a very low-risk school, and our suspension rate is less than 0.6 per cent. I would like to also let us you know that it is a school which is 104 years old, and rooted in tradition. It is a Presbyterian School, and what has happened is that we believe in preventing indiscipline. So when students come to our school in Form 1, as they enter the school, we have orientation, which is very important and sets the tone and also lets the students know what expectations we have with respect to indiscipline or discipline. We also have a handbook which is given to each child, each parent, and in the handbook there are guidelines and we go through all of that.

Student sign a behaviour contract and their parents also sign that on entry into the school. There is also another document which we recently introduced, because we noticed that students in the upper school tended to stay home frequently, especially coming around to exam time, and the document that we introduced was one in which we stipulated that they must have at least 90 per cent attendance at school; they must not have any infractions with respect to indiscipline; that they must participate in at least two or more extra-curricular activities; that they must have an excellent academic performance; and in order to get a good recommendation from the school, when they leave the school. We have found a reduction in the absenteeism and so on.

With respect to the—we also have, as I said, it is a Presbyterian School. It is a denominational school. We have morning worship, assemblies. The morning worship, various themes are used. We always try to build values among our students.

We involve the church in a lot of our activities. Every term we have, you know, there are Easter services, Christmas services, instillation of prefects and head girl, and so on. So lots of things are done, sorry.

Mr. Chairman: Very well. I may have to interrupt that. I will allow Chaguanas South to come in, but before Chaguanas South comes in, I am seeing a major difference between your school, Principal of Naparima Girls' High School and Russell Latapy High School, because Russell Latapy High School gets, she says the zero to 30 per cent, students who are really under achieving academically, and Naparima Girls' High School would have gotten, of course, obtained girls who I would imagine, would be in the top 1 per cent of the students academically in Trinidad and Tobago. So immediately I am seeing perhaps that the school curriculum itself which is standard between Russell Latapy High School and your school, may be causing some problems in some schools as opposed to others, but that is just jumping the gun. I would just ask the Principal of Chaguanas South Government Secondary to address us.

11.55 a.m.

Mrs. Ali: Pleasant good morning again, Sir. It is Chaguanas South Secondary School, not Chaguanas Government.

Mr. Chairman: South Secondary, sorry.

Mrs Ali: Quite all right.

Mr. Chairman: I think "Government" means "Primary". Chaguanas South, Secondary.

Mrs Ali: Yes, Sir. Administration is certainly challenging, however, there is never a dull moment. At Chaguanas South Secondary our school's vision is to provide students with opportunities which will enhance their holistic development. So I am very proud to say that we have religious instruction, or RI, being taught on a weekly

basis to our students. We are also trying to have our students participate in extra-curricular activities, such as cadets, scouts, netball. We also have students participating in activities, such as Carnival, Christmas. We have sport. We have positive things taking place. As well, where academic performance is concerned, the school regularly gets 100 per cent passes in areas such as agri-science and physical education.

However, nevertheless, the issue of violence and indiscipline is a worrying one. The school is characterized as a high-risk school because of the statistics and, of course, the fact that it is situated in a community where there is a lot of violence taking place. And as we know, schools are microcosms of societies and herein lies the problem and the challenge for us at Chaguanas South, where we have students coming in from impoverished backgrounds, students coming in from homes where there is crime, and you are faced with the challenge of trying to motivate them and keep them focused on the curriculum and, of course, their objective of coming to school and getting an education.

So there is a lot of bullying that takes place, a lot of fighting, a lot of assault. Unfortunately, some of this—because of abuse of technology—has made it to social media and the television which has, of course, you know, hurt the image of the school—unfortunately. So it is a challenge nevertheless.

Mr. Chairman: Very well. And we would like to address that challenge by offering solutions. So there may be some solutions that we could recommend or that, as a group, we could come together to determine what might be appropriate for a school such as yours. Because, you see, we do have the Russell Latapy which is, again in a high-risk area with students who are not the most academically adept, but yet the principal seems to be managing the problem, and maybe there might be—so when we come back for the second round we would look at some solutions that we could

implement: short-term solutions, medium-term and long-term, so that Chaguanas South Secondary can become one of the better schools in terms of violence in the country. But let me go to—our last school is a school with which I am very familiar, Presentation College, Chaguanas. The Principal of Presentation College, Chaguanas.

Mr. Ribeiro: Thank you, Chair. Good morning again to all. Presentation College, Chaguanas is a 56-year-old Roman Catholic College in the heart of Chaguanas. We call ourselves a relatively low-risk school. However, boys will be boys wherever they are. We have had, of course, to issue some suspensions over the years. A perusal of our suspension record would show nine suspensions in six years for acts of fighting and other sorts of low-keyed violence; no extended suspensions during that period of time. And I believe our record of discipline, at the school—the self-discipline of the students—our tradition of discipline with the gentlemen of the Presentation would speak for itself as to why we will be considered a low-risk school in terms of violence. There is bullying taking place and we are very concerned about the rising level of cyberbullying in the community as well.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, very well. Thank you very much. And we will go to the second round. I would like to hear from the students themselves briefly before we open up the questions to the committee.

Student from the Russell Latapy and all students, we simply would like to get information from you, and the information similar to the information we sought from the primary school is: from your experience in your school environment, what seems to be the most common form of bullying which occurs?

Student Joseph: Well, good morning, Chairman and Members. In my school and as from experience to being bullied myself, I would say that the bullying metre has dropped. Reason why, because, yes, a bully is a bad person, yes, but, to me, you

have to look at the bully from their point of view.

Mr. Chairman: Before that, could you give us examples of the type of bullying which you experienced, which other students experience?

Student Joseph: Well, in the school that I attend, there is not really physical bullying. There is more mental where a child would tell another child something so drastic that they would take it to heart. So from my experience, there is more mental bullying than physical bullying.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. And the student from ASJA?

Student Kunjah: Well, as Mr. Joseph said, there is not much physical bullying, more mental, where students say things to other students and—hurtful things about themselves, family and other things. But with physical bullying, there is stuff like students taxing other students. But other than that there is not much hitting or anything like that because teachers usually sort out those things pretty quickly when they see them happening. But other than that, it "doh" really have much bullying.

Mr. Chairman: What about cyberbullying, computer bullying, smearing your character on those social sites and so on? Is that a problem?

Student Kunjah: It is not too big of a problem yet, but I have seen it happen before to a few students-- -- a few friends of mine-- where other students had said bad things or given them a bad image from social media and said things to other students in different schools as well, about them.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Thank you very much. Our student from Barataria Secondary.

Student Brutus: Mr. Chairman, Members. I would say one of the problems that we face in the sense of bullying is fights, and what mostly leads to the fights is the lack of—as a student—having respect for ourselves, or even having respect for our own peers. So someone may say, "Yuh stupid", or even more hurtful words, and it

leads to a big fight. So that is one of the problems we face at Barataria South Secondary.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Thank you very much. Just out of curiosity, do you think that students ought to be taught about conflicts and how to control their anger and so on, and how not to use injurious words, hurtful phrases? Do you think that students should be taught that as part of their school curriculum?

Student Brutus: Yes, I think that they should be taught that, but most important I think that the relationship at home should be stretched on because everything starts at home, and home, as what the primary schools principals and students said, home is where the problem lies.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Thank you very much. Naparima Girls?

Student Seunarine: Pleasant good morning once more, Mr. Chairman and Members. Speaking from the perspective of a Naps girl, I can distinctly say that violence is not necessarily a characteristic feature of life at Naps. And I believe that, as Mrs. Gosine was expounding on, that is because of the culture that has been instilled. However, Naps culture is not void of its flaws and there are instances of physical altercations, however minor they may be. They are few and minor. And I would have to say that our battlefield has moved from the actual school ground to the cyber world now where, in my school, I can say that cyberbullying is the main form of violence that is ongoing. So instances are like framing, online degradation of one's character, impersonation, rumour-spreading and gossiping, and in particular among the lower school, that is Forms 1 to 3, there is a prominent name-calling, heckling. We are a girls' school so we do not necessarily take the physical approach. We would rather use our words to hurt one another, and that is what my perspective on it is.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. And, therefore, as a solution, you think that there should be

laws regulating that kind of behaviour associated with penalties for someone who is injuring someone's character, using the various social media that we have?

Student Seunarine: I do agree on that, and that is a project that the Form 3s of my school have undertaken. It is called the Three C's Project: cyberbullying, cyber-stalking and cat-fishing, where we were trying to see if we could propose to this Committee to implement legislation to specifically tackle these things, because we see they can eventually propagate and lead to further infractions.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. We will return to that when we come to solutions. Chaguanas Secondary?

Student Charles: Good morning again everyone. Due to Chaguanas South Secondary bullying, it comes with taxing. Mostly it is to do with taxing the lower students, and the bigger students usually go for the smaller students, and, you know, they mostly get shoved and all that stuff. We would not say that they were like—they will mostly get shoved, but they would not lash them, just shoving—mostly shoving, and they use obscenities and they will throw really bad words—as all the fellow students have said—to them, and it makes them feel more hurt and makes them very emotional.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, all right. So would you recommend then that certain words be outlawed in the schools, certain injurious words? We know that there are some unacceptable words that we cannot use anywhere and that you think in the school environment that these students should be taught from Form 1 that these words are simply not to be used? Do you think that will help a little bit?

Student Charles: Yes, it will definitely help.

Mr. Chairman: Very well. Thank you. Presentation College?

Student Boodoo: Good morning again everyone. Bullying, to me, is an ongoing epidemic worldwide. In Presentation College we do have minor incidents—sorry,

few incidents—and these stem mostly from taxation, cyberbullying and mental bullying. Physical bullying itself is not as prominent, I would say, in Presentation College, Chaguanas.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. And the both students from Presentation and Chaguanas Secondary indicated this notion of taxing. Could you give me a concrete example of what taxing involves?

Student Boodoo: Okay, I am just going to use a scenario at, let us say, a cafeteria. There would be an older student and they would particularly choose a younger student to take advantage of. Let us say they cannot afford something, or if they need to go home and they do not have enough money to travel home, these usually target the younger students to either buy something or to go home, or just for the sake of having money. I "doh" know if it is something they feel—sometimes they feel superior to the younger students, but I would say it is a form of dominance over them, a form of control.

Mr. Chairman: Any other example of taxing? Because I have heard the term and I really did not understand it, since many years ago I, too, was at Presentation College, Chaguanas, and no one taxed. The only taxation I understand is the Minister of Finance who has the authority to levy a tax, and it must be approved by Parliament. We have taxation with representation. So you are saying that students are taking upon themselves the role of replicating the Minister of Finance in the school environment. Chaguanas Secondary, just an example, before we open up—an example of taxing with which you are familiar?

Student Charles: Well, the students who come from, like different homes, they usually come to school just to tax—just definitely to tax. They do not go to classes. They just sit outside. That is what they do. That is all they do.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. I need to get this clear. There are students who come to

represent the Board of Inland Revenue [*Laughter*] and they collect it for themselves. Now, okay, this is curious. Where do they sit? Where do they stand, so that they can collect their toll—they can collect their tax? How do they do it?

Student Charles: They mostly go to the lower—you could say a student from Form 3. They will go to, like the students that just came in the schools, that they do not know anything about taxing until a teacher says, "Okay, when they say, 'gimme ah dollar and all that stuff, do not give them anything. Do not give them anything at all'." But yet, then, the students are so small that they will push them around for the money and would use all these big words—these very, big, big words, and all that stuff—until they get their money. And they actually just walk through the classes. When a teacher is not in sight, they just walk through the classes and ask for the money.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. And as I open the floor—yes, we do have one intervention from Russell Latapy student. But I would like the students invited here today, if they could give us some kind of a solution on how we could eliminate taxation in schools. Think about it. We will come back in closing, because it seems to be a pervasive problem. So, Russell Latapy, you can make your statement and then I will come to ask our Joint Select Committee for their questions.

Mr. Joseph: Well, my statement is, on the whole factor of taxing, the children does not always, you know, walk up to a younger student and, you know, threaten them to give them their money. Some of them, they would just push their hand in your pocket and, like, just pull out "yuh" money and, like, walk away with it. So it does not really have to, you know, be in contact. However, from experience, the children would, like, wait—they would be on the corridor and they would be, like, on the both sides, so you will be the younger child walking through the middle and they would stop "yuh and take yuh" money.

Mr. Chairman: Very well. Thank you very much. Obviously, we need to find a solution, and at the end of today's sitting we are going to find a solution to taxing in schools. No one should have the authority to tax, I tell you, except the Minister of Finance in Trinidad and Tobago.

We have a number of questions now, coming from—and I will start on my right. So, Sen. Hafeez Ali, would you like to start? And then we will come to MP Newallo-Hosein and I come around this way.

Mr. Ali: Yes. This is really for the students first. Again, as the primary school principals and students were stating, the low parental involvement, again, seems to be creeping up again in this whole scenario. So would you agree that the low parental involvement in the schools and in the children's lives is one of the main attributes to the problem? And how do you think that we can hold the parents accountable for these issues? I would like to hear from several students, if possible.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, Russell Latapy, Mr. Joseph?

Mr. Joseph: I agree with the fact that, you know, we lack parental guidance, or whatever, but I agree to that to a point, because parents can be there, you know, guiding the child and the child can still do, you know, rebellious things. And the reason why I agree to that is because in certain schools children lack, you know, time-consuming activities, whereas the fact that they have nothing to do, they would use their time—they would seek something that is negative that interest them and they would use their time that, you know, could be portrayed for something positive onto that itself.

Mr. Chairman: Any other response from a student on that question? Okay. Yes, MP Newallo-Hosein?

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Chair. Mr. Joseph, you had indicated earlier that they do not even have to ask you for money because they reach into your pocket

and retrieve whatever is there. What if you do not have any money on you? Are there any consequences to you for not having any form of—anything to pay for your tax?

Mr. Joseph: Well, if you do not have any money on you, they would seek to, you know, try to take something else. Whereas they would—let us say you do not have "no" money, they would say, "Okay, where is your"—they would seek your book-bag and, like, take simple things, like, okay, your pencil, your pen, probably your calculator.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Would there be any other forms of violence that would be taken on you as a result of not having anything to offer?

Mr. Joseph: Well, not really, because one thing that I have noticed is that a child would try and try—well, in my school, that a child would try and try and when they see that they cannot break or get through, they would, like, move on to someone else. So there would not be "no" physical attraction there.

Mr. Chairman: Yes. MP Forde?

Mr. Forde: Just coming back to the taxing. You spoke about no taxing in your days at Presentation. But I remember my days at Hillview College, one form of taxing back then was that in those days you had the sweet drink bottles, you know, like Solo or the Cannings, and you had to leave a 25 cents deposit at the cafeteria. So one form of bullying was that the bullies used to collect the cases—the sweet drink cases—and have it outside their door—their classroom door—and the smaller ones would come and bring their bottles. Right? And then, well, the so-called bully will then go to the cafeteria and redeem the 25 cents. So that was a form of taxation back then. But, again, we more have disposable bottles now.

But the point that I want to really come on is with regards to the level of extra-curricular activities at some of these secondary schools, you know, whether

vocational, or whether sporting. Right? I think we need to have a great emphasis. I remember at one time in the days of Barataria Senior Comprehensive, they were heavy in terms of sporting activities. I do not hear much of them now.

With regards to the behavioural contract that Naparima Girls' talked about, that is constitutional, I presume?

Mrs. Bally-Gosine: When you say—

Mr. Forde: Well, in terms of the Ministry of Education guidelines and so on, where the parent and students can sign this behavioural contract.

Mrs. Bally-Gosine: When I became Principal, the contract was already in place as one of the items that was given to the parents at the time of entry into the school. So I did not check to see, currently, if the Ministry—but I did consult with my supervisor concerning the second document in which we were asking the students and their parents to sign off with respect to the 90 per cent attendance at school and the type of recommendation that they would get.

Mr. Forde: Now, Mr. Chairman, I am not highlighting it in terms of a negative aspect, I am looking at it from the positive nature, because she talked about, you know, the violence at her school is down; so whether it is now that the other schools can be utilized from the Ministry of Education's standpoint in order to put it at other schools.

The other point I want to talk about is reference to Russell Latapy in terms of the educational level and not having much violence versus, again, the Presentation and the Naparima which we so want to quote "prestige" or "not prestige" school as the case may be, and, you know, what co-relation can we draw there in terms of, you know, why Russell Latapy, coming out of a bad community, for want of a better word, versus, you know, where the other schools are situated where the community may not be as bad, but yet still, she has a low violence intake at the school. So it is

a good co-relation that—

Mr. Chairman: What we will have—and, again a positive recommendation is coming out. I think already we are seeing—and I would suggest to you a solution that is in my mind for taxing. But what MP Forde has indicated is that I think there is value in principals from across the education community in Trinidad and Tobago meeting on a regular basis—maybe once a term—to exchange notes with each other on what they have been doing to address the problems. Does that happen? Is there like a once a term meeting among principals in your education district so that you could trade stories and learn from each other?

Mrs. Hicks-Raeburn: Permit me to answer. Definitely, that does happen. Barataria South, we belong to the Caroni district and we have fraternity meetings once a month. We have one coming up next Tuesday. So we do have regular meetings with our school supervisor, where we trade best practices and see how much we can incorporate some of the ideas in our various institutions.

Mr. Chairman: Very well. Thank you very much. But do you see merit in maybe a once a year annual convention sponsored by the Ministry of Education for all secondary schools principals—

Mrs. Hicks-Raeburn: That also.

Mr. Chairman:—to come together so that you will have a symposium on how you all deal with violence and you obtain some common solutions and you implement them, once a year?

Mrs. Hicks-Raeburn: By all means, but we also have the Association of Principals where we do have an annual conference, again, inviting—having stakeholders voice some of their concerns, sharing ideas and giving us, you know, even greater knowledge. But there has been, and there is, a great need, I believe as well. The Ministry has been speaking most currently about leadership conferences,

particularly, for—

Mr. Chairman: Right. So you think that there is then a scope for principals and teachers to be exposed to dealing with difficult situations—

Mrs. Hicks-Raeburn: Definitely.

Mr. Chairman:—and that some of your teachers, perhaps, should be trained to handle some of the problem in a classroom.

Mrs. Hicks-Raeburn: By all means. The middle managers, particularly, of the schools, which would encompass your Deans, your heads of department, administrators. That is your team, and your team needs to—you need that expertise, you need that training to empower. Because we have a staff of 84 teachers and empowering the staff—because what you recognize is, among the staff, there is a lot of resources and you have to be able to bring out from that staff that will also go out there and do what is necessary.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Very well. Thank you. Just out of curiosity, before I move on to Sen. Stewart, do you in your school, Barataria Secondary, have a Dean of Discipline, who is someone all teachers could refer a difficult student to and that Dean instils fear in the minds of the students, so that the moment they see him or her, they are immediately going to be disciplined? It happened in Presentation College, Chaguanas, between 1971 and 1978 when I was there. His name was Mr. Brooks. He is a legend. As soon as you mention Mr. Brooks, we immediately were disciplined. And with respect to MP Forde, [I*nterruption*] Presentation College, Chaguanas, Mr. Brooks, yes, he was the man—his name. And then there was no taxing in college, Chaguanas, in those days because we were so poor, we had nothing to pay. But, really, do you have a Dean of Discipline like that?

Mrs. Hicks-Raeburn: Chairman, I believe the days of where a child cowers in the face of anyone, those days are almost behind us. But we have—each Dean—each

Form level has a Dean, so each Dean is responsible for discipline.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Very well. Thank you. Sen. Stewart?

Miss Stewart: I have had listened to the introduction of the students and I think, for me, I can safely conclude that appearing before this Committee are a bunch of esteemed students who have great responsibility at your particular schools. We have deputy head girls, we have prefects. So now my question is, in your capacity, what interventions do you make in addressing instances of violence or bullying at your individual schools?

12.25 p.m.

Student Brutus: Yes, you mentioned prefect. In our school, we do not only just have prefects, but a prefect, or two, is assigned to every class, and that gives us the opportunity that when a student is disrespectful or gives trouble we, as students, could talk to that student, student-to-student and, you know, let him or her know, what you are doing is wrong, what you are doing is not right.

If, in other words, the student starts to react and get out of hand, we then inform the form teacher, and well the form teacher will inform the dean, but the majority of the times, being prefect for a particular class, you are then able to manage the class, and you are then able to relate better, a more better relationship and a more better understanding, because the "student-to-student" is being carried out. So that is what we do at Barataria.

Miss Stewart: I just want a response from another school. Thank you.

Student Boodoo: At Presentation College Chaguanas, we decided to form an initiative and it is called "The Make the Difference Anti-bullying Campaign". This, itself, we wanted to create a shift in the way people think about bullying. We wanted to make the public, the general public meaning the school and also the community, aware of the issue. The campaign itself encourages people to stand up and speak

out.

There must be an enforcement of confidence through empowerment of the individual to stand up towards a bully. There is a constant fear of a child. So if we have, let us say for example, a student would not want to approach a teacher. Why is it that that student has a fear of approaching the teacher? Is that person afraid of later experiences with the bully? How is it that we can implement forms of dealing with that? What can we do to break that mentality to tell the student it is okay to go up to a teacher? So we went around to different schools, in addition to launching the anti-bullying campaign in our school. We thought them about bullying itself. We had interactive sessions where we asked student-to-student, mostly in primary schools, about their experiences and what they say is mainly to them it is name calling, but we see a gradual increase in the severity going on to high schools, and we wanted to acknowledge the school on a large scale and not just have, you know, just a normal talk, bullying is wrong. We wanted to have a cultural shift where we can inform everyone and involve everyone to say. "Bullying is wrong, let us do something. Let us stand up and let us speak out against it."

Mr. Chairman: Very well. Thank you very much. MP Antoine has been waiting for a while.

Brig. Gen. Antoine: The Ministry of Education, the National Parent Teacher Association and TTUTA, all mentioned School Code of Conduct. My question is to the students. Is this school code of conduct adequate to deal with the current realities in the school environment? How can this school of conduct be improved? I am also looking at the consequences of violations of this code of conduct or ill-discipline. The consequences, are they effective? Are the consequences of the violations the same across the school environment? What pertains in your school if somebody violates the code of conduct, if somebody is ill-disciplined? Do you believe that the

measures available is adequate for violations of the code of conduct?

Student Seunarine: Thank you. Perusing through the code of conduct myself and also discussing it with my principal, we have realized that while it is structurally sound in the basis of it and everything, in the majority it does work basically, there is an element lacking in terms of addressing the cyber aspect of it, the cybercrimes and cyberstalking, cyberbullying aspects of it. In the sense of, we have evolved in terms of technology. It is no longer a cell phone a student is bringing to school, it is now the tablet, it is the iPad, and even these devices pose a potential threat to the harmony of the very environment, because the same thing you can do on a cell phone you can do on a tablet while the code of conduct, it does not address these other devices such as a tablet. It outlaws the use of camera phones, however, a tablet also has a camera and even a better camera quality on top of that. So I think it needs to make some more structural adjustments in terms of fully covering all the devices and activities allowed on such devices, and so, further monitoring of the use of these devices.

Addressing the question concerning the consequences, I realize with the discussion with the primary schools, suspension was one of the major means of punishment or discipline that they took, but a student who is bullying, a deviant student, their mind is not necessarily on education most of the times. So suspending them from a week of school is not in their eyes a punishment, it is a mini vacation. Right. So, in my opinion, suspension is not the most efficient method and so other methods should be such as the implementation of suspension centres where they actually have constructive things to do while they are suspended rather than being sent home to chillax.

Student Charles: May I add to her statement? In Chaguanas South according to what you did, we do extended suspensions, but it seems not to work because they

come back the same way and even worse. If somebody tells them. "Aye this happen in school and all that stuff", they come back and say "Aye I have something for this person." That same day the person comes back, the same day it gets worse and worse. So we try to find a solution to resolve that kind of problem to those types of students that just come back for fights and all that.

Mr. Chairman: And we would be thinking about solutions. And there is Russell Latapy, yes.

Student Joseph: Okay, just to add to what Chaguanas South said about the suspending thing, I really do not like the fact that you are suspending a child, because sending a child home is not really doing nothing, because on top of that the area they are living in. Sending them home you are just having them more involved in what the area is doing. In our school what we have done is that we brought—well I am a peer resolution volunteer—where instead of suspending the children, we would take it from a different approach where, okay, you did something wrong, you help the cleaners clean the school; you straighten the classrooms and, you know, you are taking into consideration the punishment, but you are giving them a second chance and helping them to understand, okay what they did was wrong, so at the end they would not do it again.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much for that recommendation, Russell Latapy.

Miss Ameen: Mr. Chairman, the last student actually touched on a matter I wanted to raise. The whole issue of peer counselling and the issue of alternative forms of discipline which really is community service, when you think about adult punishment. Mr. Chairman, the reality is one of the biggest pieces of advice given around bullying is to tell an adult, but culturally there is a stigma against at the preschool level being "ah tell tell baby" and later on being "an informer". So it contradicts and it is about changing the culture and the way we perceive going to an

adult.

Presentation College, you mentioned an anti-bullying programme that seeks to change the culture in terms of how bullies are viewed and how being an informer is viewed as well. I want to get from the students if there are initiatives in your school that are either of peer counselling nature, mediation, anti-bullying and so on geared toward changing that whole culture in terms of how we view bullies, because bullies are sometimes bullies because they have rank, whether you give them rank or they take it onto themselves. All of those cultural things behind being a bully, being an informer and so on. The approach with discipline, in terms of community service, you mentioned—Mr. Joseph, from Russell Latapy, you mentioned doing chores in school: cleaning up an area, picking up stuff, straightening classrooms. Presentation mentioned an anti-bullying programme in the school where you talk to the students, and I want to hear from other students if you have examples and if you feel that those are effective in terms of changing how we culturally look at victims of bullying as well as bullies themselves.

Mr. Chairman: Any student for Sen. Ameen's question?

Student Seunarine: Well at Naps we also have an anti-bullying campaign. In particular, we have addressed the aspects of cyberbullying, because we realize that is most prominent for us—the culture of our school that is most prominent for us. We also have a peer-helper system going on, because we strongly believe that in some instances peer-to-peer counselling is way more effective because students are more reluctant to disclose certain information to teachers, or even the guidance counsellor who is assigned to our school, because the relationship is not as strong. They may not feel necessarily comfortable to go and disclose something of such a sensitive nature with the guidance counsellor.

In the peer-helping body now, we are trained to mitigate situations such as

bullying and also other issues, personal issues that students may face in their everyday lives, because we also believe that not only the victim of bullying a person, but the bully is also a person, and that individual is also going through stresses. Personally, I do not believe someone would just wake up one day and decide to bully another student. I think that individual would have also been hurt in some way or another, and the root of that problem has to be tackled and that is what we do in peer helpers. We are trained to tackle the root of the issue. So we not only address issues of the victim, we address issues of the bully.

There is another system we have implemented called the "Big Sister Programme" where a student of upper school is peered with a student or two of lower school and they foster an open relationship where that student of lower school is free to tell that Big Sister anything, any issues you may be facing, and they in turn provide guidance.

Mr. Chairman: Further, a follow up. Is there any training, formal training offered to the Big Sister or the Big Brother from a social worker or a psychologist so that they will be able to use that training to socialize or re-socialize the errant students at lower forms?

Student Seunarine: Well, there is a committee that screens these individuals and ensures that they would have had a positive school reputation before they are selected, and in terms of peer helpers there is formal training for them.

Mr. Chairman: From whom?

Student Seunarine: Families in Action.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, very well. Thank you very much.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Chair. I just wanted to ask the Principals and Dean, of course, two questions. One: are teachers being bullied in your schools at this present time? Secondly, is there an established protocol to deal with instances

of bullying in your school on the compound? So are there teachers who are being bullied? Because we are hearing from the students, we know it is a reality—we hear it, we see it—and, of course, the students are testament of the act being perpetrated against students, but we want to know in your school, are teachers being bullied and, secondly, what are the established protocols in place to deal with bullying?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, anyone wishing to examine incidence of teacher abuse?

Mrs. Lucien-Baptiste: Good morning again to the Chair and the Committee. We do not have that problem at the school in terms of teachers being bullied. In terms of the established protocol, we do have a disciplined matrix that comes out from the *National School Code of Conduct*. Usually there is an incident report form, both parties have to full out that form. Upon completion, there is intervention, re the teacher or the dean and the parent, and there is also referral to the school social worker. All right. That is how we deal with it.

12.40 p.m.

What I want to say though in terms of the incidents being reported, as Miss Ameen mentioned, in terms of persons being viewed as informers, it hinders the amount of incidents being reported, and it is all the more reason that as a school you have to be more proactive, because if you were to wait on incidents being reported, particularly in some of the communities where the children come from, especially like in my school, you will not get as many incidents being reported. So you have to be proactive in your approach to dealing with it.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Could I get a response from Barataria Secondary, and then Chaguanas Secondary, with respect to the experience of your teachers who may have been the victims of violent confrontations with students, any at all?

Mrs. Hicks-Raeburn: We do not have teachers being bullied at school. There would be isolated incidents with disrespect to teachers by a student, very little in

terms of a teacher-student violent confrontation. It is primarily verbal, okay, but you will have some instances where a teacher, in trying to do his or her duty, or even going beyond his or her duty, maybe trying to break up a gamble that they stumbled upon, and being active because you are trying to empower teachers to be more, you know, willing to come forward. Because, unfortunately, some teachers may feel a little intimidated at times depending on the scenario, and we have a very large compound. So you have those teachers, when they are brave enough, as well as with our dean, but we have some unofficial deans, I call them, who, trying to break up a gamble, come up on something and they may be pushed by a student, okay, and that is classified as assault, but to say a teacher being bullied, not at all.

Mr. Chairman: Chaguanas Secondary.

Mrs. Ali: Yes, similar to my colleague, Mrs. Raeburn, my experience with the teaching staff was also very similar. Teachers, in the course of their duties, would try to discipline students, the students may feel that, you know, the teacher does not need to do so and they would react. They may steups, you know, give them body language, negative body language, challenge them, so you find that there is a level of intimidation and concern, and, you know, collectively, when teachers go back to the staffroom and they talk, you know, it spreads, and there is a level of concern by the teachers. I would not say teachers are being bullied, but there are some students that are challenging and when you try to bring them in line, they of course respond negatively. Okay.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Before I go on to the second round of questions, Russell Latapy, the student, Mr. Joseph, raised a very interesting suggestion with respect to alternatives to suspension, which is a mini holiday, so did the Naparima Girls' representatives. Could you articulate for us whether you think that a programme where a certified bully, someone who has been accused of being

a bully and has been verified to be a bully, will be responsible now for things like cleaning the school, ensuring that he has Saturday duties on the compound, sweeping, painting, maintaining, and actually doing something productive that will help him. So I am looking at a community service for the bully, but really school service as a form of restitution, do you think that such a programme, supervised maybe by administrators in the school or the community police, will assist in reforming the bully and also contributing meaningfully to the school compound?

Student Joseph: Yes, I strongly believe that it will reform the person because minutes in cleaning a school like that I doubt you would want to ever bully somebody again.

Mr. Chairman: Very well. And could we get a response from other students, because, you see, it has come, time and time again, that when students are suspended they are suspended in an environment which is doing nothing for the community, for the school, or for the student, and I am simply wondering whether in fact we have overlooked the fact that every school compound has to be painted, cleaned, maintained; classrooms have to be refurbished, and there is a potential then for service to the community of students in a school. Before I raise it to the principals, I would like to ask other students what they think about that kind of remedial restitution action, do you think it will contribute to the welfare and well-being of the students as a whole?

Student Charles: Yes, because no student wants to clean a school. Well, recently, I hear that—well, when somebody throw something on the ground, I say, "Aye, why yuh don't pick it up"; they say, "And the cleaners and them here to do that". I say, "That is disrespectful", but when I was in school during the vacation I see all the work that these cleaners put into the school before everyone comes back, so I think that that statement that my fellow student here, in front of me, made, it will work.

Mr. Chairman: Presentation Chaguanas.

Student Boodoo: I would just like to add something. In addition to just community service, I believe that it should be done with both the perpetrator and the victim. So in that situation you kill two birds with one stone. You make them bond, you make them ignore what previous altercations they may have had, and you also help the school, and both benefit, both situations benefit.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. And now to any principal, do you have the flexibility in producing such a programme for your school where a student who has been deemed to be a bully will perform service for your school? Do you have the ability to do that?

Mrs. Lucien-Baptiste: Yes, we do within our constraints as principals. However, whatever we do we must get the parental involvement, one, and we must also liaise with our school supervisor, re: these are the initiatives that will be taken.

Mr. Chairman: Excellent. And do you think that there is a scope for the community police to be involved?—because it may involve weekend duties with supervision, and you may not want to take teachers time, but do you think there is scope then for involvement with the community police to simply supervise the work that you think the school ought to get done?

Mrs. Lucien-Baptiste: Well, it can definitely be done over—for the weekend, definitely yes.

Mr. Chairman: Very well. And I see the Principal of Naparima College would like to get in.

Mrs. Bally-Gosine: Naparima Girls'. What is happening though is that any form of community service in school, I think once you have parental permission, and, of course, the Ministry's permission, there should also be counselling for the child, or the children involved. The bully needs to understand why he or she is getting that

sort of punishment, and, you know, to understand. So there must be some sort of counselling ongoing.

Mr. Chairman: All right. So we really have then the opportunity for the principal formulating such a programme, in conjunction with a community police and also the school guidance officers offering the—so students must know what they are doing, why they are doing it, and what kind of changes we expect to see in their behaviour as a consequence. Russell Latapy, and I will get to Brazil Government, which has been silent for quite a while. Russell Latapy and then Brazil.

Student Joseph: I just want to follow up on what the last principal just said on why, the students should know why they are doing it, and I understand that because, I mean, at the end of the day we want the child to apologize, and we do not want the child to apologize and just say, sorry We want them to understand that, okay, this what I have done is wrong, and, you know, the apology would come sincerely from their heart, understanding what they did.

Mr. Chairman: Brazil Government.

Mr. Walters: We have a number of students in our school system that come from various backgrounds, as you would know. Some come from very supportive backgrounds, others not so very supportive. I am all for restorative justice within the school system, but parents must be notified and on board with this whole programme, that is one. Two, the students, that problem, that deviant behaviour, that violence is very deep within our students, very, very deep, so giving them school chores to do—let us call it that—school chores around the school, to maintain the school, or clean up litter, and whatnot, that is just one aspect of it. It has to be done in a method where it does not lower, or further lower the self-esteem of that child.

So, yes, I have given, or we have instituted that sort of justice with the students. They walk around the school and they are jeered by other members of the

school, their peers. Now that can do two things, one, it can, one, yes, eliminate that incidence of misbehaviour or disruption; two, it can also encourage the student to even infuriate him more, to behave in a very, very irrational, a very bad, if you want to put that word, in a situation. So, yes, I fully agree with, to some extent, the restorative justice within the school, and I support it, but it has to be done in a manner where it does not cause more harm to our students in the long run.

Mr. Chairman: Very well. Thank you very much, that is accepted, and I think, clearly, the programme seems to be something that we should consider, how you organize the programme then is going to be important. Principal of ASJA.

Mr. Rahaman: Yes, and although we are looking for solutions here, there are some instances where suspension, while we are trying to outlaw suspensions it seems, but we are told possession of weapons, drugs, et cetera, okay; fighting, okay, where there is serious bodily harm, all right, where the student needs to be removed from the environment for some point in time, all right, so as to protect the others, because the first line of the principal is what? Safety to the students. All right? We are currently, principals are currently, around the country, working on revamping their own school code of conduct, okay, their discipline matrix, their action plan towards these thing, and I believe the—is Friday our deadline?

Member: Yes.

Mr. Rahaman: For handing in those to our SSIIIs.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. And a proposal will be placed to you with respect to dealing with these really, really, really extremely violent students, but that is for you to consider subsequently. Could I ask Sen. Stewart to come in?

Miss Stewart: Okay, my question is, how do students relate to each other in a competitive environment? For example, let us say in a football game, any competition. And do you believe that any negative relations may fester and lead to

a later confrontation?

Mrs. Hicks-Raeburn: You are asking how students relate in a competitive environment, let us say if it is there is a game and they are being taught how to lose as well, is it that we have to teach students how to play fairly, right. Of course there are incidents because you may have a cricket match, you may have a football—more so a football match, and students are very passionate about their football, and at times there are some incidents at the end of the match, okay. And these things are an ongoing concern, but it is also something which we have tried to work with through—we have a co-curricular policy which we have been working feverishly at, clearly specifying guidelines for students who take part in any co-curricular activity, what their responsibilities are and what are the consequences if they negate to follow those guidelines, because they hold it very closely, especially being pulled from a match, or so. That says a lot, and it really affects them a lot; we have found that.

So perhaps you have less success after the football season, but we have found that in order to keep some of our players in line, that policy has worked tremendously, right. So there are key things which you look at, but, ultimately, built into the curricula, one of the things that we recognized overall that students need to do, there are certain skills that we have to use throughout the curricula teaching students how to make better decisions. So we have, at Barataria, personal development; we have a period that is allocated to personal development. For the Form 1s and 2s, we are unable to put it within the entire syllabus, or—

Mr. Chairman: One intervention, who does this? Is this the guidance counsellor or a teacher?

Mrs. Hicks-Raeburn: These are teachers.

Mr. Chairman: And are they trained for it?

Mrs. Hicks-Raeburn: There are certain—remember there is an HFLE component.

There are aspects of the HFLE, Health and Family Life Education, which we have used to set up this programme, which we recognize helps with regard to certain skills, decision-making, behaviour, and so on.

12.55 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. MP Hosein would like to come in and then Mr. Hafeez Ali and then of course, Mr. Esmond Forde. We do want to finish at 1.00, but I can stretch it up to 1.05. So please if you can make your questions pointed we will be able to get what we want.

Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein: I just have three questions, and the first one is going to be very pointed.

Mr. Chairman: One question.

Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein: You were speaking about teachers and so forth. I just want to ask, do you know if your teachers have undergone psychometric testing, evaluation and assessment?

Mr. Chairman: Quickly, are teachers assessed with respect to the aptitude for teaching in psychometric phenomenon?

Mrs. Hicks-Raeburn: Not that I am aware.

Mr. Chairman: One question, Mr. Ali; we are running out of time. I implore you.

Mr. Ali: This question really is for the principal of Presentation as well as the principal of the Russel Latapy School, as they are from two different spectrums. We all agree that the police intervention and peer resolution and social work and guidance officer intervention work in all the schools. But what is different in Presentation and Russel Latapy that is different from all the other schools, being able to create that level of success in reducing the level of bullying. We could start with Presentation.

Mr. Chairman: Very short, because I think that is a critical question. We would

like to know what is there in common which would allow a Presentation Chaguanas and a Russell Latapy student to display the kinds of behaviour among the students that we find is to be emulated?

Mr. Ribeiro: The short answer lies in the self-discipline of my students. It comes preformed from primary school focused on their work, focus on their sports, and they have little time for violence in school or on the field of play.

Mr. Chairman: And **Russel Latapy principal?**

Mrs. **Lucien-Baptiste:** For us it is systems that we have put in place together with the small student population size that we have.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, very well. I hope you will be able to inform the committee about what the systems are so that we would want to look at those systems to see whether they can be recommended to schools across the country. Could we request those systems in writing, at your convenience? We could give you a timeline to send it to us.

Mr. Forde: Mr. Chairman, I know we have some denominational schools represented here today. We have Presbyterian, we have the ASJA, which is Muslim-based, Catholic; that is about it. But in terms of being denominational, the Catholic, the Anglicans and so on, the role of the church within your community with regard to offering assistance in terms of counselling with regard to violence that is taking place, and then we could also utilize—back in my days also in school we had religious instructions. We had Interschool Christian Fellowship, ISCF. I think somewhere along the line those things fell away. But in terms of now, presently, are principals able to tap into the churches within their community in order to offer some assistance?

Mr. Chairman: A short answer from Naparima Girls' College.

Mrs. Bally-Gosine: Certainly we can do that and we do that very often.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, very well; thank you. Miss Nadine Stewart and then MP Antoine.

Miss Stewart: I just wanted to find out from any of the schools, are there any student gangs at your school, and if yes how do these gangs behave or relate to each other?

Mr. Chairman: Any school with a gang problem? Chaguanas Secondary.

Mrs. Ali: Yes, our school has a few gangs, mostly boys and they mostly abuse the school. Not the students, but mostly the property of the school.

Mr. Chairman: So they could help repair the school that they have vandalized? Very well.

Mr. Antoine: My question is both to the students and the principals. There is a programme in the military called a resettlement programme; this allows soldiers, sailors, et cetera, sponsored by the Government, to go into a programme to resettle them after they leave the military, because they retire early. They have never targeted the education system in schools, but would it be acceptable, would it be more to the students if soldiers, sailors, et cetera, would be allowed to come into the schools and then carry on their career within the school system?

They are highly trained some of them. It means to say that during their career then they can get their BSc in Education, or Diploma in Education, as the case may be and then transition into the school system. It is something that would have to be turned to the military so that they would become involved or point themselves in that direction.

Mr. Chairman: Yes. Any principal to respond to that suggestion?

Student Joseph: I agree with what you are saying where the soldiers and the force should be implemented into education, because when you go into the force there is a form of discipline that you have to have. You are trained in a disciplined manner.

So when the force comes into the education system, they could use some form of method that they went through to kind of discipline the students. I know in some schools there are some teachers who are really soft, and they would say something but students would not listen. You know, we have teachers like that. Well, not at our school, but there are teachers like that that do exist. But bringing the force into the education system, the voices are being heard and they are getting—well I would say trained by a very tough point of view.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much.

Miss Ameen: If there are other students that want to answer—

Mr. Chairman: They would come in the wrap-up because we are over time, so I am giving you, Miss Ameen, an opportunity to speak.

Miss Ameen: Chairman, my issue had to do with something that came up in a previous meeting, where both TTUTA and previous guests indicated that teacher absenteeism in the class—teachers may be present in the school but not going to class in some cases because they are frustrated, they cannot handle the class, the children are out of control. They are soft as one student mentioned. Is this happening in your school and how does that affect discipline in education and so on? Is it happening? TTUTA is saying that absenteeism is not really an issue, but the National PTA has indicated that that is a cause of the indiscipline in schools. I just want to get from a couple of the schools your thoughts on class absenteeism by the teachers.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, briefly yes, absenteeism, absentee teachers and the effect of that on misbehaviour in the classroom.

Mrs. Lucien-Baptiste: Again it is the systems that you have in place. For example, at our school we have daily supervision of classes, so even if teachers are not there, the heads of department are mandated to arrange for supervision of the classes. In

addition to which once you have deans on patrol—we have deans on patrol regularly. We have the safety officers who are on patrol, and in terms of the heads of department they are also mandated to do clinical supervision and spot checks, so they are always walking.

Miss Ameen: But doing you have instances of teachers being present in the school but unwilling or reluctant to go to a class because of bad behaviour of the students?

Mrs. Lucien-Baptiste: We do not have that problem at the school, no.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. I will give members of the JSC to pose maybe one last burning question. But thus far, if I may sum up, I think there is general agreement, a consensus that there is a need for school service, and that if a programme of providing service to the school is properly articulated and implemented, involving the administration of the school, the bully himself, if the school supervisor, the Ministry of Education, community service and maybe some of the military personnel, advanced by my colleague MP Antoine, that service to the school might really go some way to ensuring that the bully can be rehabilitated.

Secondly, Mr. Faizal Rahaman, principal of ASJA, raised a very important point; that is, there are some students who are really extremely violent. I want to raise with principals, the possibility that where school service fails, that community service, perhaps in the same military that MP Antoine who is very familiar with military discipline, community service within the military, where the military can simply, instead of suspending these students into their communities, the military can absorb these students in a one-week programme or so, so that they would be taught military discipline in their schools, and their adverse behaviour can somehow be tempered.

I would like to get principals to contemplate both solutions, and while they do that I think MP Newallo-Hosein has one last question that she would like to raise—

one absolutely final question.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Chair. Going back to restorative justice. Do you suggest that parents take an active role in restorative justice, understanding that the child himself or herself would have to return to the home where there may be issues and, as such, it can be put together where both parent and child can be a part of that entire system? Do you suggest that and where do we go from here?

Mr. Chairman: There are no more questions from the committee. They have agreed that they shall ask no more. I see Mr. Ali is looking. Mr. Ali, do you have one more? Mr. Ali, if it is really critical—okay, Mr. Ali has assured me that it is okay, he will suppress that question and he will pose it at the next final committee meeting.

What I would now like to do is to really obtain from those appearing before us, students and principals, tell us with respect to solutions anything that you think we need to know that was not covered so far in the hearings. The dean of Brazil High School.

Mr. Walters: This is a burning issue that I have personally, and I think by extension the principals of the other schools. We have to look at the kindergarten and the primary schools and see if the students are really achieving. We look at Presentation College, we look at Naparima Girls', we look at Russel Latapy, we look at Brazil Secondary, and you see a gap between the achievements of the students. In my view, this has a connection between the indiscipline and the violence in some of our schools.

A child who sees himself or herself as a non-achiever would find other means to get attention, by doing these violent acts.

Mr. Chairman: Therefore as a solution you are thinking that students across the academic spectrum, regardless of their IQ, should be given an opportunity to star in

some area?

Mr. Walters: Yes. We have to focus more on students' achievements and building their self-esteem. I think that is one of the solution that we can look at in really strengthening our primary school, kindergarten, early childhood systems, so that when they come to us at secondary school we have something to work with. I think that that is part of the success story of some of the Presentation College, the Queen's Royal College, the Naparima Girls'. These are successful students, most of them are very successful and they come with a level of discipline. So we have to allow all students across the board to achieve some level of success.

Mr. Chairman: That is an excellent suggestion. It has appeared before, and so we would be looking in our recommendations at other areas within a school. For example, everyone should be thought taught culinary arts. Someone should be able who has a talent in it to be able to ice a cake that looks more attractive than most. So I think we would be looking at allowing in the school system every single student to find his ability.

Because I would imagine in many of the instances, bullies may not be too good at physics. Mechanical physics can be very difficult, but he may be able to star in some other area. So that is a valuable suggestion coming out. Any other burning issue from Chaguanas South Secondary?

1.10 p.m.

Mrs. Ali: Yes, Sir. Very quickly, we have a Life Skills Programme. I am suggesting that part of the secondary school curriculum at my school include a Life Skills Programme from Form 1 to Form 5 that is mandatory. HFLE has been incorporated at the Form 1 syllabus with social studies, but I believe that all students should be involved and be exposed to life skills from Form 1 to Form 5.

Secondly, a programme of remediation. Unfortunately, at Chaguanas South

Secondary the classes are very large. Teachers teach a minimum of 40 students and when you have students of varying abilities, especially those that come in with literacy challenges and numeracy challenges, it is really a struggle for teachers. So a structured programme of remediation as well, literacy and numeracy, because that fuels the frustration of the children, they cannot read and write and they look for activities outside the school.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, very well, thank you. So the solutions are two, Life Skills Programme starting from Form 1, and second we are going to have a literacy programme where there is a programme that will assist students who are having difficulty with reading and so on to really cope with the rest of the class.

Mrs. Ali: One very quick solution again, Form 3 students, promotion should not be automatic in a secondary school. There comes a point where children need to seek alternative schools and promotion—children cannot just be going through the system, going through the motions.

Mr. Chairman: Very well. Thank you. So we have three excellent suggestions coming up on how we could control the violent behavior in school—yes, the Russell Latapy Principal, yes.

Mrs. Lucien-Baptiste: Before I state the two suggestions, quickly, in terms of partnering with stakeholders, the Heroes Foundation, the ARROW Foundation, they have assisted us for some time in terms of literacy at the school.

Quickly, one, parental involvement: we need to effect into policy, and that is by law, mandating employers to give parents at least a day off or some time off to attend meetings. Many times when we call parents they say they are not given the time off to attend meetings.

Mr. Chairman: Yes. Very well.

Mrs. Lucien-Baptiste: And for our school most of our parents are like daily paid

workers, et cetera, right? So that is critically important—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Chairman: Yes, thank you, so that a recommendation can be as soon as a note from the principal is handed to an employer the employer should respect that note and give the parent the time off.

Mrs. Lucien-Baptiste: Precisely. And even if the employer may not be willing to pay there should be something within NIS, because people are paying NIS so that they will be able to be refunded, and secondly—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Chairman: Very well. Thank you. Any more burning suggestions.

Mrs. Lucien-Baptiste: In terms of the colourful curriculum, while at our school it is mandated for students to do one skill area, which is a CVQ, the reality is, it is very limited and therefore it does not cater for our male population. So there is a level of frustration there and that in itself lends to the drop-out rate.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. And now finally, finally, for those who matter the most, the students in Trinidad and Tobago, the representatives of whom are here today, any final suggestions you would like to make to the Committee? Yes.

Student Brutus: I would say, there is one thing with giving community service or even introducing army or police to enter into the school to inflict discipline, but there is another thing with that child's mind. In other words, you can make a child but you cannot control his mind. So I believe that the Ministry needs to look into that seriously by having counsellors and social workers at every school, primary and secondary, permanent, because that child's mind is strong.

Mr. Chairman: Excellent suggestion because it was indicated to us earlier that it is not so. I thought it was so. So we would like to ensure that this at least is implemented. Any other student who would like to leave us with something that has not been covered? Naparima Girls' you have the final word. And you have the final word because you were kind enough to give us a submission very early when we

started our enquiry. Final word to Naparima Girls' High School.

Student Seunarine: Okay, so in addition to what my fellow student said, not only implement permanent social workers, but social workers with whom the students can identify with, because students these days they do not respect credential, they respect experience and testimony. So thus, give them somebody they could identify with and with whom they can share experiences and thus learn from that person, that is, give them a role model more than just a social worker.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much and we have stretched the time to 1.15 p.m. These proceedings have come to an end. However, let me thank all of the panelists, all the representatives, the Principals and their students from the various high schools across the country. I want to thank the media as well, but the principals and the students I wish to thank you for taking a half-day off from your school duties and this was an important enquiry. You all have offered us solutions which are implementable in the very short term, in the medium term and in the long term. You could be sure that our report will include all of these and there will be certain suggestions for ministerial action.

So I thank you for your presence and you have done the national community great service by imparting your own experience to the members of the community. I wish to thank the members of the media who are here with us covering the proceedings, also our listening and viewing audience I am sure who have taken an active interest in today's proceedings I wish to thank them for their participation and I wish to remind them they can send in their comments to the Parliament. So anything that we may have missed will be then covered in our subsequent meeting.

So this meeting has come to a close and I wish to thank all members of this Joint Select Committee for participating so enthusiastically in this critical exercise, in ensuring that school violence in Trinidad and Tobago will be something only

relegated to the history books. Thank you very much.

1.17 p.m.: *Meeting adjourned.*

VERBATIM NOTES OF THE FIFTH MEETING OF THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE APPOINTED TO INQUIRE INTO AND REPORTON SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, HELD (IN PUBLIC), IN THE J. HAMILTON MAURICE ROOM ,MEZZANINE FLOOR), OFFICE OF THE PARLIAMENT, TOWER D, THE PORT OF SPAIN INTERNATIONAL WATERFRONT CENTER, #1A WRIGHTSON ROAD, PORT OF SPAIN, ON WEDNESDAY, APRIL 20, 2016.

PRESENT

Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir	Chairman
Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine	Member
Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein	Member
Mr. Hafeez Ali	Member
Mr. Esmond Forde	Member
Miss Nadine Stewart	Member
Miss Khadijah Ameen	Member
Mr. Julien Ogilvie	Secretary
Miss Kimberly Mitchell	Assistant Secretary
Miss Katharina Gokool	Graduate Research Assistant

ABSENT

Miss Shamfa Cudjoe	Member [*Excused*]

10.15 a.m.: *Meeting resumed*.

Officials of Primary Schools

Mr. Daniel Sahadeo (Principal)	Canaan Presbyterian Primary

UNREVISED

Mr. Carel Lewis (Principal)	Laventille Boys Government Primary
Mishael Henry (Student)	Laventille Boys Government Primary
Mr. Eric Christopher Floyd (Principal)	Moruga Anglican (Holy Cross) Primary
Rennie Nicholas (Student)	Moruga Anglican (Holy Cross) Primary
Mr. Lance Mottley (Principal)	Carenage Boys Government primary
Kareem Spears (Student)	Carenage Boys Government Primary

Mr. Chairman: Good morning and good morning to members of the listening and the viewing public. Welcome to this our Fifth Meeting of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration. This is the Committee's third public enquiry into the issue of violence in schools.

The issue of violence in schools was deemed to be of critical importance by the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration. The reason it was deemed to be of critical importance is that the Committee held the view that the students of this country must be given every opportunity to excel from the moment they start school to the moment they complete their primary and secondary school education. The problem of violence for us was a worrying and troublesome phenomenon, because all of us having been to school understand how difficult arithmetic, English, history and algebra is, and we do not wish to compound that level of academic difficulty with fear, which may arise in a school environment.

It is the hope of the Committee that at the end of the enquiry, the public enquiries, we will be able to make recommendations to the Parliament, to the Ministry of Education and to all other stakeholders on how our schools can return to

being havens of comfort, peace, security and tranquillity so that we may ensure that our students from age four all the way up to A Levels are studying in an environment where they are comfortable, safe and secure.

This particular committee hearing is being broadcast live on Parliament Channel 11, Parliament Radio 105.5 FM and Parliament YouTube Channel, *ParlView*—p-a-r-l-v-i-e-w. So I will invite all members of the public to tune in to today's historic sitting of the Parliament. It is first time in the history of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago that a joint select committee of Parliament has determined that we need in the Parliament to engage in a process of consultation with all stakeholders so that we will obtain their views, first hand, as we make laws and as we make recommendations for the better governance of Trinidad and Tobago.

Today we have invited the school principals from the primary school system accompanied by their students, and we have principals and students from the following primary schools for the first session of our proceedings this morning: Canaan Presbyterian, Laventille Boys Government, Moruga Anglican, Carenage Boys Government and Chaguanas Government Primary School.

We would like to hear from the principals in the primary schools and from students in the primary schools: what is their own experience with respect to handling school violence of all types at the level of the administrator, the principal, and how the student deals with this issue of violence. So we would want to hear from the students themselves how, in fact, they deal with it, what their experience is and what recommendations they have that will inform us in the joint select committee to make better decisions for them.

Before I ask members of our panel to introduce themselves, I will invite members of the Committee to introduce themselves for the benefit of the audience and for the panellist. May I start on my left? Sen. Ameen. Yes, you introduce yourself, Sen. Ameen.

[*Members introduced themselves*]

Mr. Chairman: Good Morning, I have been prattling on this morning. I am Sen. Mahabir, Independent Senator. For the benefit of our students who I have a suspicion may not be tuning in to the Parliament Channel regularly, for the benefit of all of our students, primary and secondary, you will realize that this is a joint select committee.

A joint select committee of the Parliament is made up of Members of the Parliament from both the House of Representatives and from the Senate. There are two Houses. It is made up of Members from the Government of the country, Members of the Opposition. So we have Government Members such as, Ret. Brig. Gen. Ancil Antoine, we have Government Members such as Mr. Forde, Deputy Speaker. We have Government Senators such as Sen. Nadine Stewart and Sen. Hafeez Ali. We have an Opposition MP such as MP Christine Newallo-Hosein and Opposition Senator and that is Khadijah Ameen, Opposition Senator and I am an Independent Senator in the Parliament. So every single bench in the Parliament is represented in this joint select committee.

It is testimony to the importance all Members of Parliament hold to the issue of addressing the problem of violence in schools. I will now ask the principals to introduce themselves accompanied by the student who is with them. May I start on my right with Mr. Lewis?

Mr. Lewis: Pleasant morning everyone, I am Mr. Carel Lewis, Principal of Laventille Boys Government Primary.

Mr. Chairman: And your student, Sir? Could he introduce himself?

Student Henry: Good day all, I am Mishael Henry and I am accompanied by my Principal, Mr. Carel Lewis.

Mr. Chairman: Excellent. Thank you very much.

Mr. Sahadeo: Good Morning Chairman and the panel, I am Daniel Sahadeo,

Principal of the Canaan Presbyterian School. My student could not make it this morning, because no permission was granted by the parent for him to attend this.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Before we continue, I would just like to say that all permissions were sought so that the Committee made sure that the permissions from parents and principals were sought for all the students.

Mr. Floyd: Good morning Mr. Chairman and members, I am Eric Christopher Floyd, Principal primary, Holy Trinity Anglican School, Moruga.

Mr. Chairman: Welcome, Moruga. It has been a long trip, I imagine. You probably were travelling since 6.00 a.m. this morning.

Mr. Floyd: Approximately.

Mr. Chairman: Very well. It is good of you to be here, and your student.

Student Nicholas: Good morning all, my name is Rennie Nicholas and I am accompanied by my Principal, Mr. Eric Christopher Floyd.

Mr. Chairman: Very well. Thank you.

Mr. Mottley: Good morning, Mr. Chairman and to the panel, my name is Lance Mottley, I am the Principal of Carenage Boys Government and I am here with my student.

Mr. Chairman: Could he introduce himself?

Mr. Mottley: Sure, certainly.

Student Spears: Good morning, my name is Kareem Spears and I am introduced by my Principal Mr. Lance Mottley.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Let me again repeat the objectives of this particular enquiry. We would like to know, at the level of the Parliament, what is the experience of both principals and students with respect to violence in schools and what kind of recommendations from your experience you can make to the Committee so that when we write our report and make our recommendations to the whole Parliament, the recommendations will result in a primary school system which

is more and more in keeping with a stable environment in which there is a reduction in this practice of violence.

So let me just ask the Principal, Mr. Lewis, to give us a few brief opening remarks. I will deal with the principals first and then if you can give us some brief opening remarks, and then we will come to the questioning.

Mr. Lewis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In our school we recognize that violence and indiscipline is, in fact, a real concern. We recognize also that it is complex in nature and, therefore, in attempting to come up with solutions or addressing the problem, we realize that we have to try or take a number of multifaceted approaches to it. So it is real. We have experience of indiscipline in several forms. We have instituted a number of strategies and I am pleased to report that we have had success in effecting a reduction in the number of incidents and types of violence that we have at the school.

Mr. Sahadeo: The escalating trend of violence in the primary school is a concern for myself as principal as well as members of staff simply because it disrupts the learning environment and the peace and harmony that is supposed to go with the schools. Simply, there are many reasons for that, and at Canaan Presbyterian we have adopted several strategies in dealing with these issues, and one of the strongest things I could say is there is a serious disconnect between the parents and the school. Once we could get those things working together then the harmony and peace that should exist within the school system will come back once there is a strong parental involvement in the education of their children.

Mr. Floyd: Violence and indiscipline in schools is, indeed, a serious problem and it is creeping into the Moruga area right now, but our view at Holy Trinity Anglican is that if you engage students sufficiently and you have parents on board, you may be able to address some of the issues. One of the main concerns is discipline—all right—instilling discipline and consequences for actions, because if there are no

consequences you will find that it continues. It is just a cycle and it gets worse. So we are hoping that in some means we can have consequences for actions to deal with that issue.

Mr. Mottley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Violence and by extension indiscipline—because violence is part of indiscipline at school—is a major problem at Carenage Boys Government Primary School. We would have adopted a number of measures to treat with the issue. I can say that we have had a tremendous success in treating with the issue of violence and indiscipline at our school.

I want to echo what Mr. Sahadeo said a short while ago with respect to the disconnect between parents and what happens at the school, and I want to say here that I do believe that parenting or perhaps poor parenting is one of the major factors that is contributing to indiscipline in the school environment. If we address the issue of parenting and, perhaps, maybe later on, I might be able to expound in that area, but I feel if we address the issue of parenting, we may be able to attack in a very serious way the issue of indiscipline in schools.

Mr. Chairman: Very well. We will exercise the prerogative—just a big word for the right of the Chair—to ask questions now of our students. The first question I would like to pose—and all members of the panel will be raising their questions as well, but I would like to ask the first question of students. I would like to get from you the kinds of experience that you know students in your school go through with respect to other children who bully them, take advantage of them and harass them.

Could you give us an indication of what really do the children in school who are not well behaved do to the well-behaved children? What do the badly behaved children do, examples? Could you give us some examples of things that you know about which occur on a daily basis in your school? It may or may not happen to you, but things of which you are aware. Would any student like to go first? Yes, we have our student, Mr. Henry, who has volunteered to go first to indicate to the

Committee what his own experience or the experience that he is aware of in his school.

Student Henry: Now, there is a lot of stuff going on in the society and even in my school, Laventille Boys Government Primary. The bully normally attacks the children by giving them physical bullying and mental bullying. They may beat them up or they may even tell them stuff that make them to think bad of themselves. So when the bully tells the person who is getting bullied those stuff, those things will start to—that thing will keep in the children's mind and that thing will grow up with the children, and when that child grows up, grows up—he becomes a big man or woman—he or she would want to take matters into their own hands and even want to commit suicide, commit murder even to the person who bullied them, because it grows in their minds. It is physical and mental. It stays in their mind. They feel that what it is worth anymore.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. But could I ask other students who are here to also indicate if they wish: what their own knowledge is with respect to what happens in their school? Any other volunteers? No. Okay. We do have a follow-up question from MP Newallo-Hosein.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you very much. Before I address my question to Mr. Henry, I would like to ask the students: are you all afraid to open up?

Students: No.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: You are not afraid. All right. Good. That is most important. Mishael, you had indicated, in your opening statement, very briefly, you mentioned society. Do you think that society, do you think adults have failed you?

Student Henry: Well, some adults may fail children. So, it is a norm that when children are being bullied they say to call the police, to call child services or whatever the case may be, but to come to think of it that is not really working, because through all the years they are saying to call the police, call child services,

call Crime Stoppers, call you know, but through all the years nothing has been stopped because the bullying is still taking place. It is spreading. It is like—I am just using an example—smoking weed. It is something that you cannot help it anymore. It is just there. So the bullying, it spreads.

So if I am a child and I am being bullied and I am afraid to tell my parents, the bully, the person who is bullying me, will say, "All right, he is not telling his parents, so let us continue." It goes on to another child, the same thing. It goes on to another child, the same thing. But the next thing you know that the child stands up, but then there are other bullies. So, it keeps spreading, spreading, spreading until the discipline drops.

Miss Ameen: Mishael and other students as well, beyond those agencies that you mentioned, such as the police and child services, the first stop really is the adults who are in the environment in the school: teachers, members of staff, even the auxiliary staff, the nurse, if you have an attendant and so on in the school. Do you feel that children are able to go to these adults and, if so, do these adults respond well? Do they respond in a suitable manner? A child is not going to call child services. It is when it gets bad you reach there, but the first person you are going to tell is the adult who is in your environment. So I want to hear from you if you feel that your teachers respond well. Do they ignore you? Do they try but they cannot handle the bully? Your opinion.

Student Spears: I think they will try to help because the students are being bullied and the bully is taking their money.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Could you expand on that? Tell me a little bit more. You said the bullies would take away children's money. What other things do the bullies do which are unpleasant? Do they fight you, tax you? Tell me, I do not know what happens.

Student Spears: They say bad things about you. They take your money.

Mr. Chairman: That is fine. Okay. So there are bullies who actually physically take. Do they hit you as well?

Student Spears: Yes they do.

Mr. Chairman: What class are they in? I would really like to know the age of this bully. Do they start like in Standard 1, Standard 2. Is it that they are from the bigger classes?

Student Spears: Standard 5.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. So it is basically the bigger students taking advantage of the little students, the younger students.

Student Spears: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: But do you have a bully like in Standard 1 taking advantage of children in Standard 1 also, from your experience?

Student Spears: Yes.

10.40 a.m.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. So you get Standard 1 bullies, Standard 2 bullies, and then you get Standard 5, so it starts from very young?

Student Spears: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, very well. Any other experience from our—any other experience? Okay. Right. Could I ask Sen. Stewart to come in?

Miss Stewart: Good morning. My question is specifically to the students, have any of you ever been bullied?—or are you aware of a friend or a classmate that may have been bullied by someone else? And how did that make you feel?

Student Nicolas: Yes. It made me feel sad because how it feel to me it may have felt more emotional to other students.

Miss Stewart: So you were the one being bullied or you know of someone that was?

Student Nicolas: I know of someone.

Mr. Chairman: MP Hosein.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you. To the principals, I would like to ask, is there any established protocol to deal with instances of bullying on the school compound? In light of what the children are saying, do you have an established protocol?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, and we would like to hear from all principals on this one, and the reason is the Education Act clearly indicates that the principal of the school is responsible for the care and well-being, not the Ministry of Education, not the police, it is the principal of the school who has that responsibility for the care and well-being of all students under his or her charge. So I would like to hear from the principals themselves what protocols they have in place to deal with a report of victimization, bullying, harassment of all forms in your school?

Mr. Mottley: If I may, the *National School Code of Conduct*, that is a booklet, and it tells us—it gives us some guidelines on how to address many of the issues that we would be experiencing at the school level, particularly in the area of violence and bullying, and so forth, and so fifth, and so, if I remember correctly, it tells us that we would engage the child, in the first instance, so you have a student conference. Depending on the severity of the issue you would have a conference with the parent and you would address it from that specific. Now, also, the Education Act speaks about suspension, so you also have that option of suspending the child, depending again on the severity of the issue. But the issue of suspension, when we suspend a child we have another issue, where do you suspend the child to, and that is a very real issue. But I want to say that when you have—and I should say that there are only a few children at the school who continue to terrorize, sometimes, classes—

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Could I interrupt here? What Senator—what MP Hosein—I say Senator because she was in the Senate with me last year, she is now an elected MP. What MP Hosein in asking is the protocol in your school, what do you do when a teacher tells you, or a student—a report comes to you that this particular student is

fighting me, he is threatening me, he is making my like miserable, I am scared to come to school, what do you do as principal to eliminate his fear and to deal with the perpetrator?

Mr. Mottley: Well, the perpetrator, you engage, as I said, you engage the perpetrator, you talk with the perpetrator to find out, "Why are you behaving like this?", and try to get to the root of the problem. Depending on the severity you engage the parent as well, and indicate to the parent that this kind of behaviour is unacceptable and that something has to be done, and you have to do something about it, failing which we may have to take other kinds of action. That sometimes work, or it may work for a period of time; oftentimes it does not.

Mr. Chairman: Before I move on to Principal Floyd, I just want to ask one question of you Mr. Mottley, do you, at the beginning of each term, invite parents and you address them as to what their parental responsibilities are with respect to maintaining discipline with their child? Do you have at least a meeting with parents three times for the year?

Mr. Mottley: Well, indeed, we have a very active PTA at our school, and the issue of violence and indiscipline, that issue is addressed almost in every instance at our PTA, but from time to time I would invite, of course, facilitators and experts, and so on, to address parents and give them some guidelines on how they would treat with discipline in their home environment, and how to treat with the issue of bullying. So that is ongoing. That is ongoing, and there is some measure of success, but not at the rate at which we would want to see it happen.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Before we move on to Principal Floyd, I will ask Sen. Hafeez Ali to come in at this time.

Mr. Ali: It is a follow-up to Mr. Mottley, you said in your opening statement that you have a low success and a high level of violence in your school, and a low level of success, right, what are some of the root problems you had just spoken about that

you will be generating from most of these students?—the troubled students that are creating the problem.

Mr. Mottley: What I have found is that parenting, poor parenting, or the absence of parents in the home environment, which of course constitutes poor parenting, is affecting tremendously the behaviour of the child at the school, so we engage the parents. We talk with the parents, but parents are hardly at home, and I am not knocking that per se because parents have to work. So parents are hardly at home, but also too when you call or you try to engage parents of the children who are difficult, a number of them, they attack you verbally. They attack you the teacher, the principal, the administration, and they even go so far as to want to verbally attack other children in the school, and it is always somebody else. Parents are refusing to accept that their children may have a problem on the one hand, and that they too may be the core, or the source of the problem, and I think if we address—if we get them to own up to the responsibility that they have, as I said in my opening statement, that we may be able to affect some positive change going forward.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. I would like to ask MP Antoine to come in.

Brig. Gen. Antoine: I want to follow up, and I want to focus on your mention of suspension, because when an act occurs in your environment and a student has to be suspended we are dealing with three different groups here. We are dealing with the victims of whatever act is was, if it was bullying as the case; you are dealing with the perpetrator, but then you are dealing with his parents. Now if it is that the parents are working and you suspend a child where does he go? And there is a possibility that when the parents are not at home then that child is left in a vacuum where all sorts of things can play. So, what kind of counselling takes place when something happens and a child is suspended, both for the victim, the perpetrator, and their parents? And how is it resolved?—because when that child returns to school we

now deal with the youth subculture, and this is something with the students. A suspended child who comes back to school may have gained ranks in terms of, you know, how he is seen, you know, and how is that matter resolved to the benefit of the students and also of the parents, and also of the teachers in the school?

Mr. Mottley: I do not want to appear to be hogging the microphone, but—

Mr. Chairman: We will come to the other principals.

Mr. Mottley: I want to respond very quickly to two points that you have just made, the issue about where do you suspend the child, where does the child go. That is a very, very real issue, and hampers that particular option that the principal has, that tool that the principal has, and therefore prevents—it would affect the suspension in a very real way, where do you suspend the child if the parent is not at home, and so on. So you may not very well suspend the child given such a situation like that. And I want to recommend, perhaps, maybe later on, and we can expound on that, suspension centres, but I want to talk about the other issue about counselling. Schools are supplied with personnel from the Student Support Services Division, not all schools are outfitted with the full cadre of officers that are expected to be at the schools, including special education facilitators, guidance officers, social workers, and, most recently, behaviourists.

At our school we do have a Special Education Facilitator, this is to address the whole issue because an indisciplined child is also a child who also, the records will show, is a non-performing child, so we have to deal with the issue of remediation, special education. We have a Special Education Facilitator, we have a Social Worker, and we have a Guidance Officer assigned to the school, but these officers come to the school one day per week, and very often these officers are taken away on assignments, on other kinds of assignments, so that you may very well find that at our school one of these officers may show up, perhaps may be once or twice for the term. Real intervention in that cannot be addressed—

Mr. Chairman: Could you repeat that?—that you are saying that the guidance officers may make an appearance at your school once or twice for a term.

Mr. Mottley: Once or twice per term because the officers may be pulled out.

Mr. Chairman: Because that was not articulated by the Ministry of Education to us. We were told, and so we need to clarify with respect to the information from the Ministry of Education and what you are telling us. We will come back to that, but that is very important. It is something that we have noted, we will come back to it. But I will now ask, before I ask MP Forde to come in, Principal Floyd to make a brief remark with respect to the protocols you follow in your school when a child—you know of a child being bullied.

Mr. Floyd: Okay. There is what you refer to as in-school suspension; that is where I as the principal would take charge of this child, have discussions. The child is taken out from the classroom, that is in-school suspension where I am looking after this child for the period of time, but given the—

Mr. Chairman: For clarification, Sir, is this like a detention that you are keeping the child in after hours? What is the process for dealing with that? Do you keep him two or three hours after school has gone?

Mr. Floyd: No. No. No. During school hours. All right?

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: For what period of time, please?—if you can just explain.

Mr. Floyd: It may be sometimes for about 45 minutes. It may be that he is allowed to have lunch and is denied playtime for lunch. Recess time he will use the washroom and come back—

Mr. Chairman: Okay, intervention again, is this that you have determined is an appropriate course of action for your school?—or are you following some protocol issued by the Ministry of Education with respect to dealing with a badly behaved child?

Mr. Floyd: It is a mixture of both. For more severe situations there is the suspension, as mentioned by Mr. Mottley, but I would inform members that a suspension is not effective unless the document is handed to the parent in his or her hand. A child cannot be sent in a vacuum, this is not secondary school. We cannot send the primary school children out. So that, let us say, I decide I am suspending a child, if the parent decides not to come to school to collect that suspension the child comes back to school the next day. All right? I do not know what obtains at a secondary school, but I get the feeling that when a child is suspended they go because they are probably more—they are older.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. I would like to get Principal Sahadeo to indicate to us what are the protocols, and we will elaborate subsequently, but Principal Sahadeo.

Mr. Sahadeo: Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, at the Canaan Presbyterian School I take the responsibility of security and safety very seriously with regard to the children so I invite them, and I go to them and talk to them very regular, in assemblies and in the classroom. They need to come and let me know if anybody—they are doing anything, anybody is doing something to them that will make them uncomfortable that they do not like, and in cases of bullying I treat very seriously and handle myself, are those things that I deal with.

Mr. Chairman: How do you handle it?

Mr. Sahadeo: I investigate the nature of the complaint.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Let me give you an example, a student has cornered, in primary school, another student in a part of the school and says, "I am going to take away your lunch money", he takes away his $5, you get a report, what are you going to do?

Mr. Sahadeo: I call the student to the office. I investigate. I look for witnesses. I call in the parent. Because of the nature of the complaint I call in the parent, we

have discussions with regard to that. I let the parent deal with the issue. I will also call the parent of the victim to let them know this has happened at the school. I treat with those things at the office. Suspension is never a course of action for me; that does not work at all at Canaan Presbyterian, and I have never suspended any child for the last 15 years that I have been a principal. What I also do, if we have the Minister attached to our church we call them, we do some counselling and guidance with regard to the act, they talk about the consequences, let them know if they continue along that line where it could end up. So we do not have that, how you say, major issue of bullying at all, or violence at any high level at Canaan Presbyterian School.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, and I will ask Mr. Carel Lewis, Principal of Laventille Boys.

Mr. Lewis: Well, firstly, the established protocol would be based on the philosophy of the Ministry, which is a zero tolerance approach, right, which is interpreted for me as dealing with every issue of indiscipline. So a child takes money from another child, or whatever form of indiscipline, we would immediately remove the child, the one that is doing the bullying, or doing the act of indiscipline, and investigate the matter. So you would most likely call him to the office, or her to the office, investigate the matter, and take appropriate action according to the circumstances that you gather, right, which may involve—at times we call the victim as well, together; students have offered apologies, students have returned moneys. We also document, we keep a documentary, you know, evidence of actions that children commit over time. In cases of repetition we refer children, both the victims and the bullies to the Student Support Services Division where they would mediate with respect to the counselling and meeting the parents, and so on.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. And how often do you get counsellors, guidance counsellors coming to your school to actually talk to the perpetrators to try to see if

they could modify their behaviour? Do you get them once a week?

Mr. Lewis: Yes. The Student Support Services Division has been active at my school. Once per week we would see the school social worker, guidance officer, right, and what they do, they collaborate with other stakeholders. So they do not only wait on, let us say, a reported case, but they try to be proactive in the sense of liaising with other stakeholders. So we have had interventions—well, I should not say interventions—well, interventions, but in terms of taking a proactive approach from the IATF through the Hearts and Minds Programme, you know.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Yeah. I would now invite MP Forde to intervene.

Mr. Forde: I am sitting here and listening to the discourse and I am saying to myself, you know, we are talking about primary school students, so we are saying that these are students 12, 13 years and under, 11-year-olds, 10-year olds, you know, and to know—hearing of the different discourse and to understand what is taking place definitely it would mean that the breakdown from home is where this whole situation would have started, all right, because we are talking about under 12, and the parents definitely need to play a more important role.

As principals, right, I am thinking that, you know, you all need to somehow get the parents' involvement, not only by the PTA that we talk about, but I am talking about on a one on one basis where—is it that some of these students are coming from single-parent homes, is it that these students are coming from homes that they are living with their grandparents, or they are living with brothers and sisters, because, definitely, it would show that there is a social breakdown, hence the reason for some sort of—the responses that are coming from these individuals who are creating the bullying. And I am thinking that, as principals, you all will need to—besides the handbook coming out from the Ministry of Education, besides the procedures, besides the guidance counsellors, the principals and teachers of these schools will definitely have to be, you know, more involved with these guys, you know, in

finding out exactly, you know, what is causing John, right—I am just using a hypothetical name here—you know, John wants to take money from this other individual. Why would John want to take his pencil or his pen?—you know.

And I am thinking that, as principals—yes, I know it may be difficult, but I think, you know, definitely, you know, you all need to be a little more, you know—how to put it, boy—you know, taking more interest in these guys, because if at under 11, definitely when they go on to secondary school, if they do go on to, we are going to lose them, right. And I think a bully will always continue to be bully once it is that he is getting no control, once he is not put under any control measures.

Mr. Chairman: Before I get a response from the principal, I will just ask MP Hosein, are you going to follow up on this?

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Yes—

Mr. Chairman: You can follow up and then we will ask for the response. You want to come in?

Miss Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Right. So I will give members of the Joint Select Committee an opportunity to raise their views and then I will keep a note of it and we will ask for responses.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Chair. I just wanted to ask the principals, I am hearing you speak, as MP indicated, that we are hearing the discourse, and for some strange reason I feel as though you all are holding back and you are not going fully into the problems that you are experiencing. And I just want to reiterate why it is we are here, we are here not to interrogate you, we are not here to criticize your methods, we are here to find out the root problems so that we can in fact provide a paper, a proposal to Parliament in how we treat with the situation, because it is actually very concerning to us and to the citizens of this country. So I wish that you would be a little bit more, you know, open, please.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much MP, and Sen. Stewart.

Miss Stewart: My question is to all the principals, I did hear Mr. Mottley mention, in his deliberation, a very important component, the school's code of conduct, so my question is, do you think that the school's code of conduct in its current form is adequate to deal with the realities that are experienced in the school environment?

Mr. Chairman: Okay, and Sen. Khadijah Ameen.

Miss Ameen: Mr. Chairman, perhaps because I myself, I am a single mother of a primary school boy, I have a slightly different perspective to Councillor—sorry, MP Forde. I was the chairman of the corporation and he was a councillor, so my apologies, out of habit. I know, as a matter of fact, that parents—the fact that there are many parents who work, the fact that there is a lot of family breakdown. There is a change in the dynamics of families today and 20 years ago, and the school hours has not changed. What the school is required to do has not changed much. Parents work from 8.00 to 4.00 and school is from 8.00 to 2.00, or 3.00, there are some schools where students would stay back and play until 4.00 or 5.00 so that they will go home in time for when their parents are coming home, and this is an arrangement between the child and the parent, that is something that happens. Of course, the burden falls on the school to supervise the child in that time.

Some schools have been innovative and they have, what you can call a homework centre, or structured activities that take place between the dismissal of school and around 4.30, or so, so that parents who work can pick up their children. But even in situations where there is improper family structure and family support the student has some sort of structured supervision to complete their homework and participate in career-building activities, character-building activities. Are these initiatives really taken only by the school? Is this an initiative you would support and ask the Ministry to put guidelines in place to have it implemented in schools? And has this ever been discussed with the Ministry of Education at all? Do you think

this could be a useful approach to deal with some of these students who fall through the cracks when it comes to poor parental supervision, and poor family structure?

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. So we have a round of questions, if I may start with the question posed by Mr. Forde, and will open it up to the panel, and that is, with respect to ways of having parental involvement, apart from the PTA in schools, have you all initiated action so that parents could be more and more involved in your school in a number of ways? For example, do you have parents coming in to help coach with cricket and football; do you have grandparents coming in to tell stories, story time; do you have people with some time coming in to speak to the children about ethical behaviour, religion, and so on. Do you have those activities in the schools which will be a part of the school day, but it involves parents' involvement in the school?

Mr. Floyd: If I may, I want to make some corrections to some things that were stated. The primary school is up to 15 years, all right, and member Ameen mentioned that the school is not required to do—the school requirement remains the same. Actually, the school requirement has changed drastically over the years, so much so that it is our belief that parents see the school as a day-care centre, right. Back to the question—

Mr. Chairman: More on answering the question, with respect to parents' involvement in coaching sports, extra-curricular activities, reading, remedial reading, things like that.

Mr. Floyd: Yes. Just this week in school, in a PTA meeting, I had gotten the scout leader for the area, I got the commissioner for guides and brownies to come in to a packed audience to discuss the starting of brownies and guides, and cubs and scouts, all right, football programmes, cricket programmes, and so on, in the school, but even though there was a packed audience the—how should I put it—the amount of support from the parents, they are willing for their children to take part, but what

you have now, you have a lot of parents who do not have the time to come to the school. So what you are talking about with grandparents coming, some of these grandparents are working themselves, because we have children making children. So people my age are grandparents already, all right, and that is in their 40s. So a grandparent now has no time to come to school because a grandparent is gainfully employed, or at least seeking to be gainfully employed.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. That is understandable, and we understand that, the thing is, but are there parents or grandparents who perhaps do have the time and the inclination to come and assist with remedial reading, with storytelling, with having a sports club? We have a very creative society in Trinidad with respect to drama and acting, and putting on plays, and so on, and what the Committee indicated to me was very telling, in that the students who are deviant are really the ones who perhaps are not doing so well in arithmetic and English, and geography, but are there opportunities created for them to display their talents where they can get status and rank by being a lead actor in a play, by being good in the football field, netball, and in the sporting arena, or in drama? Have you considered that at all as an option for the students to star in other areas?

11.10 a.m.

Mr. Lewis: Yes, I have, and if you are around people with aesthetic ability they generally tend to be temperamental. So you would find that some of those people would be the ones involved in so-called deviant activities. But if you give them that same opportunity that you are speaking about, whether it be drama, football or so, they do indeed excel, and what you try to do is to get that transferred, so that the discipline is transferred to other areas.

Mr. Chairman: One question. Can you advise me—a long time ago when I was in primary school, there was a primary school cricket league in my county, and football as well. Is that still in existence, where your primary school plays under primary

schools in your division and you have students getting an opportunity to star on the playfield? That is still in existence?

Mr. Lewis: Yes it is.

Mr. Chairman: Sponsored by whom, the Ministry of Education?

Mr. Lewis: No; there are different competitions. Part of the cricket is sponsored by Flavorite. You have NGC sponsoring athletics. Football—I cannot really say who is sponsoring football, but it goes ahead. I see consistency from the secondary school in the area. The teacher involved in VAPA, she has promised to come and do a dance with the children in the school. So those are the kinds of things—

Mr. Chairman: One curious question to any of the principals. Mr. Sahadeo and Mr. Lewis you will get a chance.

Is there a loop in your school where boys and girls can play basketball? It is a cheap thing to put up in a school, in a pole somewhere and with a basketball, so that people with that kind of talent can just be able to see if they can shoot into the basket over a distance; for students who may not be academically inclined but who are really very good in other areas. Do any of you have one of those loops?

Mr. Lewis: Yes, Mr. Chairman, in fact we have those loops. We have other things, table tennis, and most of those things were, in fact, provided by the Ministry of Education; table tennis balls, bats, everything, and we have been involving in the community in engaging the children in some of these sports: football—

Mr. Chairman: Just to follow up, I know others would like to come in, but do you get ex-students, people in the community who have some facility in these areas coming in to work with your pupils to hone their skills and to give them some inspiration, or is it only left up to teachers in your school to pursue your sporting and other extra-curricular programmes?

Mr. Lewis: We have had community members coming in who were past pupils and so on, for football, cricket. We are also looking to start pan and we already have

offers from community members who have been past pupils to come in to do pan and so on, so the community is, in fact, involved.

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Sahadeo, do you want to come in?

Mr. Sahadeo: Mr. Chair, members of the Committee, we do have a lot of extracurricular activities supported by the Ministry of Education, but I would speak particularly to Canaan Presbyterian. On Mondays we have cricket, Tuesdays we football, Wednesdays we have music and these are parents coming in to assist the students who are interested in those activities. Canaan Presbyterian does not have a playground; the school is overcrowded, so when the car park is cleared we can do those activities after school. There is a very small multipurpose hall which the infant children engage, and we separate them at different times to avoid any kind of jury or accident that may happen. So the infant children play at one section and the other students play at another, because it is a very small building, but a large population. Those are the things that we have, supported by the Ministry.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Sen. Stewart—okay, we have—I would like you to ask your question again.

Mr. Mottley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to address the issue of parental involvement. I am very big on parental involvement at the school. My very first PTA meeting I informed the PTA that I would like to see them more on the compound. I have done things at the school to bring them onto the compound.

One of the things that I did with respect to parental involvement, and we are talking about sports and all of that, is that I took a list from the PTA of parents who would be interested or willing to come and supervise and play with the children during the luncheon period, and that was twofold. One, was to have the children play in a structured environment; that is one, but secondly as well so that the children, the students, would see the same parents. One of the things that my student should have mentioned in terms of what causes a lot of angst and bullying at the

school is about children disrespecting each other, making statements about their mothers and fathers and so on. That is a very, very big issue. I felt that if we brought the parents on to the compound, children would see them as part of the community and they no longer would be seen as something out there, or someone outside, but a real person. I want to tell you that worked.

The parents did come on to the compound, and we had parents doing football, parents doing cricket, parents doing hula-hoop and so on—space is a problem—but that worked up to a particular point, because eventually parents have commitments, and so the numbers dwindled.

I have attempted at times to revamp it, and it is a very, very trying and slow process.

Mr. Chairman: We are running out of time, but really what is coming out quite clearly is that there seems to be a consensus that in the primary school system if parents are too busy, there is a need for community involvement. There is a need for a stronger presence of concerned persons outside the school to make an intervention in the school to help the school. So that we should have more sporting activities, more reading activities, more extracurricular activities and a stronger involvement of the PTA. Is that a consensus among all principals, that a stronger involvement amongst parents and the community to assist you in ensuring that there is discipline in your schools?

Mr. Lewis: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: This would be the last question before we sum up. While we sum up I will ask the students to think about what they would like to tell the Committee upon closing.

Miss Stewart: Just to summarize my question, I asked: the school code of conduct in its present structure, how adequate do you think it is to deal with the realities of the school environment?

Mr. Chairman: One response for the adequacy of the existing school code of conduct. Anyone volunteering. Mr. Lewis, do you want to volunteer on that?

Mr. Lewis: I would suggest that in its current form it is inadequate, because the Ministry of Education would not go down to zeroing in on all the specific skills, strategies and so on to use, and using that as a guide, the responsibility is for the principal to create a school policy or school code of conduct in collaboration with the teachers, students and so on. So using that guide from the Ministry, each school would also be unique. So I see it being very important that the school coming up with a school code of conduct.

Mr. Chairman: So basically you are recommending that the Ministry offers guidelines, but based upon the circumstances in each particular school, the principal be given the authority to really modify the conduct based upon the community in which he is operating? Is that your recommendation?

Mr. Lewis: Not modify the conduct, but use it to shape school policy and school code of conduct.

Mr. Chairman: Because we are running out of time, there is one last question of MP Hosein before I ask the students to tell us, if any, what are the things they would like us to know before they leave?

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Chair. I just want to ask the principals if the school has a relationship with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service Community Policing Unit and to describe that relationship in brief, please.

Mr. Chairman: The relationship between you and the community police.

Mr. Lewis: We have had intervention from different arms of the protective services. The community policy has intervened, given lectures to the students. Tomorrow we have a lecture from the Child Protection Unit. We also had the IATF as I had mentioned earlier. So they have partnered with the school to bring about changes in discipline procedures.

Mr. Chairman: As an example: a student reports to you that he has been threatened by another student, a nine-year-old with a weapon, and you report it to the community police, do you get a response immediately? How long would it take for the community police to come to actually talk to that student and ensure that he causes no harm in your school?

Mr. Lewis: Well response is usually quick.

Mr. Chairman: Half an hour, an hour?

Mr. Lewis: Ten minutes, 15 minutes we will get a response.

Mr. Chairman: We are happy to hear that.

Mr. Chairman: And that school is?

Mr. Lewis: Laventille Boys.

Mr. Mottley: Mr. Chairman, may I just say that that has to be put into context in terms of the police response. The police may respond very quickly, but the police are constrained with the same kind of constraints that we are faced with, because you have to get the parents. You have to inform the parents, the parents have to be there. So the police would do exactly what you will be doing as the principal.

The police are very actively involved at my school. The police youth club is there. I want to tell you that the students are now seeing the police officers as one of us. In other words, the kind of perhaps respect that we once had for police officers, the children are seeing the police officers just as us, and they tell the police officers whatever they want to tell them.

Mr. Chairman: One follow-up question. Have you had any student who has been deemed a deviant, an individual who is a troublemaker, participate in a police youth club and at the end of a period has emerged as a reformed, law-abiding, pleasant, nice student?

Mr. Mottley: The police youth club is very young at the school, it is about three years old, so perhaps I am not so sure if I can speak to that, but I can tell you this,

that the police youth club has actually put out children from the police youth club. [*Laughter*] So I am saying, Mr. Chairman, if we do not treat with the issue of parenting—and I have a proposal that a parenting programme should become mandatory at the school level at standard five and should form part of the full School Leaving Certificate of a primary school child, and that an advanced programme also be implemented at the secondary level and be made mandatory. Parenting is the problem, and if you do not address the issue of parenting, all these issues that we are talking about here will not resolve the issue.

We do have a homework centre, and we engage the community at the school. We have a homework centre at the school, but these things are not going to go anywhere unless we have a long-lasting effect on parenting.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much for that recommendation. So if I may simplify it and get it internalized, you are recommending that in standard five, maybe after the SEA exam is over, there is a course for students in standard five on parenting, and that is going to be part of the school curriculum? That is what they would have to do, and it is going to be taught by teachers who are trained in the subject.

Really we are over the time, but when we are discussing these issues time just seems to disappear. I would like the students who are with us today, you have heard the deliberations, you have heard the older people look at your problems, and I would like to hear from you in closing, things that you would like to tell us that we do not know, which would help us in making your school a safer school to study. Could I start with any student who would like to offer a suggestion or a closing remark? We have Mr. Henry.

Student Henry: I would briefly like to say that times have changed and now that times have changed we have to think out of the box. All the time we are thinking in the box that all we are doing is to call the police, child services and whatnot and

whatnot. Now we have to think out of the box. To think out of the box—the bullies always try to get small children. They would not get someone who is bigger than them. Let us try to see what the bully fears. Some bullies may fear big and strong people, so let us bring in the police and army into the school so the bully would feel how their preys feel. So when the army and the police come in school, they would feel how their preys feel.

You can even send them to boot camp, as one of the principals said, real boot camp, not a petty boot camp, a serious, serious boot camp.

Mr. Chairman: Where they have some serious discipline. So you are recommending that you think in your school if a soldier from the army comes and he is addressing the school on discipline and order, that that particular soldier can send a message to the bully that there is someone who is bigger than he is always out there who can discipline him, and a fully clad soldier to tell him that you need to follow rules and order. And you think that would work to allow the bully to change his behaviour.

Student Henry: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Very good recommendation; thank you. Any other student who would like to tell the Committee things that would allow us to make better decisions for you? We do have Mr. Nicholas.

Student Nicholas: You could probably, as Henry said, call the police, army or some bigger person in the community to talk to the students in the school.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. So basically what you are saying is that we can have interested people, other than the teachers, because your teachers and the principal are there to look after you. But you can get other people coming into the schools, like the police, the army, sporting heroes, adult role models, people in the community who have some respect, because they have really earned their way in the world. They are maybe managers of banks and so on. You think these are the people

who can come in and let the bullies and the badly behaved children know that their time is limited; that there are good and decent people who are looking after the smaller children who are willing to do the schoolwork. That is an intervention you think you would recommend?

When you talk about a serious boot camp, could you finally give me an idea as to what you think should happen in this boot camp?

Student Henry: What I think should happen in this boot camp is that the police and the army force or whatever, if they want to show them to the extreme level, they can show them—some people they might want to hit, but we know that some people would not like that for their children and whatnot and whatnot, but you can show them pictures of what happens to people that go down that road to be a bully and stuff like that.

Mr. Chairman: One final, final question from Brig. Antoine.

Brig. Gen. Antoine: I am not looking at asking a question; I am making a statement. Yesterday on a talk show, i95.5, it came up that maybe the Ministry of Education should start to recruit soldiers who retire early—soldiers retire from the age of 45 up to 60—to come into the education system as teachers in the schools. There are a lot of soldiers with academic qualifications but they have not seen the school environment as an area to go to on retirement. They go to other fields, but maybe there is a time to do a recruitment drive among the military personnel who retire early, to come into the education system, and they would provide the kind of support that the youngsters are asking for.

Mr. Chairman: Excellent recommendation. So this morning, members of the Committee, this morning, members of the panel, we have had a very fruitful session. We will have to close temporarily our hearing into the primary school system, and we take a break of a couple of minutes before we invite the representatives of the secondary schools to address us. So this hearing temporarily is suspended for a

couple of minutes until 11.30, and then we will invite the next panel.

I will first of all like to thank the principals for addressing us and for offering the suggestions. I would like to thank their students [*Applause*] for bravely informing us about what happens in the school environment and for offering solutions, so that our primary school system can be a safer place in which to study. We are suspended and I thank you all.

11.27 a.m.: *Meeting suspended.*