



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

## MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

# MEDIA RELEASE

April 21, 2022

Dear Editor / Head of Department,

### **Update on Measures Being Undertaken to Eliminate School Violence**

School violence continues to pose a challenge to the operations of, in particular, fifteen (15) secondary schools across Trinidad and Tobago. Though all schools operate by the guidelines of the National School Code of Conduct, and notwithstanding the operations of the School Social Workers and Guidance Councillors of the Student Support Services Division, and the collaboration of Community Police in these particular schools, violent incidents continue. The staff of the Student Support Services report that the impact of these incidents is compounded by their taping and circulation on social media. The effect of this has been, in some cases, to encourage perpetrators, as they see this as glorification of their deeds- a positive development- in which they revel.

The current School Discipline Matrix relies on suspension from school as one of its most severe consequences for indiscipline- however, this no longer serves as a deterrent for many of the repeat offenders. In fact, being suspended from school is seen as a badge of honour, and in many cases, allows them freedom to engage in other activities, many of which are negative. A trend also observed is the fact that making contact with the parents of the repeat offenders is often very difficult for school officials, and those parents generally do not attend the various parenting seminars and other developmental programmes hosted by the Student Support Services at the schools.

For these reasons, the inter-ministerial committee was assembled to make recommendations for the updating of the School Discipline Matrix, with



involvement of key ministries and agencies such as the Ministries of National Security, Youth Development, Social Development and Family Services, Sport and Community Development, Gender and Child Affairs, along with the Children's Authority and the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service - TTPS. This committee is expected to deliver its recommendations by the first week of May, 2022, for discussion with wider Education Stakeholders and approval by the Cabinet.

In the interim, to provide more immediate support to schools at the start of Term III, the Community Police, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, assigned dedicated staff to each of the 15 Secondary Schools where violence incidents have been seen to be most prevalent. These schools also have dedicated Guidance Councillors and School Social Workers.

At this time, based on the number of violent incidents which have taken place both inside and outside of these schools' compounds over the last two days, the Ministry of Education consulted with both the Ministry of National Security and the Commissioner of Police to discuss an immediate response to incidents of school violence, pending the recommendations of the inter-ministerial committee. The outcome was a letter of formal request from the Ministry of Education to the Commissioner of Police for advice on the procedure for removing violent students from the school environment to one which can offer them rehabilitative services. The TTPS has also been asked to immediately provide patrols directly outside of the schools in question, as well as in their vicinity, at the close of the school day, to deter students from violent outbursts.

The Community Police held an emergency meeting with the TTPS Child Support Unit and the Chief Education Officer of the Ministry of Education today, April 21st, 2022, to discuss what steps would need to be taken to return these schools to an atmosphere of safety, conducive to teaching and learning. One of the immediate recommendations is the temporary posting of Police Officers to the 15 schools, so that they would be available throughout the school day to provide support for violence deterrence. The Ministry will immediately discuss this with the Commissioner of Police and other stakeholders.

While these measures are in place, along with those of the Student Support Services, the Ministry awaits the recommendations of the inter-ministerial team which will include other supportive structures aimed at the elimination of school violence and the promotion of positive behaviours among the nation's student population.

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