

Ministry of Education
Press Conference
July 4th 2013

(1) AUTOMATIC PROMOTION AND GRADE RETENTION

Background

Traditionally, students who failed to achieve the criteria (overall pass mark) set by the school were made to repeat the grade i.e. repeat all the subjects, including those at which the student may have done exceptionally well. This led to repeaters dropping-out of school either (i) through boredom of having to redo subject matter they would have already mastered or (ii) through embarrassment of having to be in the same class with much younger students.

Automatic Promotion Policy

- The Automatic Promotion Policy was introduced to correct the negative effects of Grade Repetition.
- With this policy all students were promoted to the next grade regardless of their performance at the annual assessments.
- It was announced that this policy would have been reviewed after two years.
- The review was done and reports from the consultations across Guyana reveal that this policy is not popular with any of the critical stakeholders.
- The parents, teachers and even the students themselves believe that **promotion from one grade to another should not be automatic, but earned.**

The Ministry was faced with the unenviable position of crafting a policy that marries the sound thinking behind the decision not to have students repeat subjects they have mastered with the necessity of making sure the students have mastered subjects that are essential for matriculation.

The automatic promotion policy will, as of September 2013, be revised.

The policy of the Ministry of Education will now be as follows:

1. All students would be instructed in a manner that would make it more likely for them to achieve pass marks. Regard will be had specifically to the listing of a school in this effort, the delivery of the curriculum, the setting of and compliance with timetables etc.
2. If a student scores below the overall pass mark set by the school in more than 50% of the subjects the student is taking then that student will be asked to repeat the grade.
3. If a student achieves less than the overall pass mark set by the school and the reason for the underachievement is either Mathematics or English, the student will be asked to repeat the grade.

The aim of this policy is to help students succeed at English and Mathematics. A student needs at least five CSEC subjects, at one sitting, including English A and Mathematics at Grades 1 to 3 to matriculate. The statistics shows that many schools attain 100% pass in many CSEC subjects, however, the matriculation rate is not satisfactory because of the poor pass rates in English and Mathematics. A student who masters English and Mathematics can thereof choose any other three subjects based on his/her preference (career path.)

4. If the reason the student failed to attain the overall pass mark is as a result of any other subject that student will not be asked to repeat the grade but may be asked to drop that subject.
5. The Guyana Education System uses a spiral curriculum which means that to a large extent the topics across grades are the same. The scope (depth and width) increases from one grade to another. It is therefore, imperative for a student to master the curriculum content and skills of the previous grade in order for him/her to understand the curriculum of the following grade.

The new policy of the Ministry of Education as mentioned above is written based on the contributions of parents, teachers and students that were consulted and heard from in more than 30 meetings held all over Guyana.

(2) HOTLINE

The hotline numbers are **223-7891, 623-4010, and 623-0550**

The Ministry of Education values the relationship with the people we serve and as such, we would like to ensure that we take every opportunity to address their concerns and take recommendations on how to improve the delivery of Education in our country. The hotlines serve to provide rapid response to concerns and by extension provide a direct line of communication between the Ministry and the public.

Since the lines became operational on May 20 of this year we have recorded, a total Thirty-two (32) received. Of this, a total of Twenty-one (21) have been resolved. Our records show that calls came from Regions 3, 4, 5, 6, and Georgetown.

(3) SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMME-KATO PRIMARY SCHOOL

The Problem

On the 17th day of April, 2013, while regional councillors of the Regional Eight Democratic Council were attending a meeting in the Kato Village, one councillor caused photographs to be taken of school children in uniform 'allegedly' fetching 'logs' for the school kitchen and then caused these pictures to be published in the Kaieteur News Daily Newspaper of Wednesday, June 05, 2013 with an accompanying story. This issue has been ventilated in the press thereafter and the Ministry of Education issued a preliminary response to the allegations.

Investigation

The Ministry of Education sent personnel into Kato Village to receive feedback on the issue on Thursday, June 13, 2013 and at a community meeting held at the Kato Primary School at 11:00 hours and attended by pupils, teachers, cooks, parents and other community members, the Assistant Regional Executive Officer of the district, a police representative and other community stakeholders, found out the following;

- As far as the Head Cook who has held this position for the past two years recalls, this was only the second time that children were asked to assist with the fetching of wood for the school kitchen. The supply of firewood is the responsibility of the community. Wood is cut by a villager who has a chainsaw and then transported to the kitchen by the community tractor. This supply of wood provided by the community is expected to last for an entire school term. At the time of the incident, the community tractor was not fully functional, thus resulting in the village not meeting up to its obligation re' the provision of firewood for the school kitchen. The wood was already cut but required transportation to the school kitchen site.
- The school kitchen has a gas stove but the gas bottles have been lost and so the stove is currently not in use.
- The school kitchen also has a freezer which is not being used as the solar electricity system at the kitchen is not functional.
- On the day in question, (April 17, 2013), against the advice of the head cook, another cook of the said school kitchen, asked the teacher in charge of the school to have the

children fetch firewood to replenish the supply of firewood for the school kitchen, this in spite of the fact that there was still some amount of firewood at the school kitchen. The teacher in charge refused this request whereupon the cook approached the District Education Officer with her request.

- The District Education Officer advised that she ask the school to release ‘three or four big boys’ from the secondary level to assist in the chore of fetching the firewood.
- The cook returned to the school and informed the teacher in charge that the District Education Officer had given permission for the children to fetch the firewood and the teacher in charge complied. The children accompanied by a male teacher left for the firewood which was about a twenty minute walk away from the school. This took place around 10:00 on the day in question. (See report from teacher in charge in annex of this report.)
- It is alleged by some persons that the councillor who caused the pictures to be taken, on being made aware that the children were going for firewood, expressed uncertainty that he would be present when the children returned with the firewood because he expected his flight to Mahdia to arrive at any moment (his meeting in Kato had concluded), and requested the children to pose with pieces of firewood that were aback of the school kitchen. He was however still present when the children returned and took more pictures. The councillor was assisted in taking the photographs by two other persons, a pastor from the Mahdia community and one other councillor.
- Villagers acknowledge that sometimes when there are occasions like Mashramani etc and the children have a ‘cook out’ at school, children are sometimes asked to bring bits of firewood and do other activities around the school such as cleaning the school compound etc.
- The wood brought on the day in question was brought from the farm of the head cook which is approximately twenty minutes walking distance from the school compound. The claim that the children trek for miles three times per week for firewood which is gathered from the forest is completely erroneous. Provision of firewood by the children as a prerequisite for receiving a meal is completely out of the question.
- The entire community is embarrassed by the incident and has given a commitment that there will not be a recurrence of this or any other similar incident.

Steps to prevent a recurrence of this incident.

- All four hinterland Regional Education Officers have been advised to communicate with schools in their respective region that are on the Community based school feeding programme to let them ensure that children are not engaged in any work related activity associated with the provision of daily meals by the school kitchen.
- The Kato Primary School has been advised to procure two gas bottles with gas to make use of the gas stove in the school kitchen. If necessary, a second gas stove with bottles could be procured as this school reported having ‘savings’ of approximately Six hundred thousand Guyana dollars, (G\$ 600,000.00). Schools realize savings through prudent management of their operation funds and the fact that while they receive funds for the total number of children enrolled, school attendance is rarely 100 percent. The money for meals for the absent children is retained and over time accumulates as ‘savings’. The savings of the Kato Primary School would have accumulated over a period of approximately six (6) years.
- All schools on the feeding programme will be required to complete and sign an adjusted proposal/contract form which will give current particulars of the programme at each school and will include commitments of the school and community, including prohibiting children from being involved in any feeding programme related activities that may be interpreted as child abuse.
- During the August vacation, all schools will be engaged in a two day refresher training workshop which will deal with all issues and activities associated with the feeding programme. These workshops will be conducted at the Regional centers at Mabaruma, (Region One), Bartica and Kamarang, (Region Seven), Kato (Region Eight and Lethem, (Region Nine). Training will focus on the cooks, Treasurers (Finance) and programme management (Head teacher and Chairman).
- Where possible, before the school year concludes in July, telephone contact will be made with schools to sensitize them concerning the non-involvement of children in the provision of meals by the school kitchen or any related activity such as the provision of firewood etc.

Conclusion

In conclusion it is felt that this is an issue that could have been dealt with differently. To have children engaged in the type of activity during or after school hours is unacceptable and is to be discouraged. The councillor and pastor should have brought this issue to the attention of the Ministry of Education as soon as they became aware of it. The Ministry of Education welcomes any information which will help the Ministry to do its work more efficiently. It must be noted that this feeding programme is run predominantly in the hinterland communities and communication with these schools and communities is limited. Region Eight has a peculiar administrative model with the seat of administration being in a sub district far removed from the district which is home to the majority of communities. The Ministry will certainly use this experience to ensure that not only Kato Primary School but all primary schools in the hinterland, run the community based feeding programme in strict accordance with the guidelines governing this programme.

(4) BOOK DISTRIBUTION

Breakdown of Exercise Books Allocated *per Student* on a Yearly Basis.

Nursery					
Grades	Single Line	Double Line	Checkered Line	Plain	Total
Year 1&2				3 (per student)	3
Primary					
Grades 1&2	9 (per student)	3 (per student)		3 (per student)	15
Grades 3&4	12 (per student)	3 (Grade 3)	3 (per student)	3 (per student)	21
Grades 5&6	15 (per student)		3 (per student)	3 (per student)	21
Secondary					
Grades 6 to 12	15 (per student)		3 (per student)		18

NB – Yearly Allocation of Exercise Books to Teachers.

- Nursery – 6 single line per teacher
- Primary – 9 single line per teacher
- Secondary – 12 single line per teacher

Summary of Exercise Books Allocated to All Regions for the Christmas Term 2013

Region	Single Line	Double Line	Checkered Line	Plain	Total
1	38,728	2,848	6,031	8,274	55,881
2	50,222	2,789	7,764	7,471	68,246
3	87,821	4,962	14,232	14,713	121,728
4 East Coast	91,932	4,904	14,747	14,696	126,279
4 East Bank	54,217	3,638	8,341	11,283	77,479
5	58,759	2,607	9,858	10,235	81,459
6	106,046	5,730	17,830	16,053	145,659
7	22,932	1,416	3,477	4,719	32,544
8	11,665	688	1,795	2,207	16,355
9	26,252	2,104	3,768	5,465	37,589
10	46,760	2,634	7,541	6,853	63,788
Georgetown	152,701	6,459	25,106	17,577	201,843
Total	748,035	40,779	120,490	119,546	1,028,850

NB –Figures in the cells represent number of books and type allocated to particular regions.

(5) PAYMENT OF FEES

We have received numerous complaints from parents regarding the amount of money requested by teachers and Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) for various school-based activities and for various supplies. Specifically, the cost of graduation exercise has been excessive for many pupils and students. Additionally, parents are been requested from time to time, to supply schools with toilet paper, soap, hand towels, paper for printing exams, inter alia.

The Ministry of Education would like to inform that we have issued circulars to all schools via the Regional Departments of Education with specific guidelines:

(1) Funds for Graduation

1. The amount of the parental contribution for any graduation exercise should not exceed three thousand dollars (\$3,000). Please note that said contribution asked for CAN be LOWER than three thousand dollars (\$3000);
2. Students should be encouraged to wear their respective uniforms to graduation;
3. No student should be required to rent or purchase caps and gowns for graduation—such costs, where necessary, should be borne by the school;
4. In addition, students should not be prevented from school-based graduation activities because of non-payment of fees.

(2) Acquisition non-budgetary of Funds and Donations

1. No Headteacher, member of the staff or the PTA, is authorized to charge parents specific sums for **Tests or End-of-Term examination papers**. Such funds can be raised through various fundraising activities, for example, cake sales, fairs, and so on. But, should not be directly solicited from parents.
2. No Headteacher or member of staff is authorized to request parents to supply schools with toilet tissue, soap, paper for printing, inter alia.
3. Donations to school, whether cash or kind, must be entirely voluntary, and given without condition. Such donations **must be entered in the school's inventory or stock book**, whichever is appropriate as stipulated by financial regulations.
4. The Heads of Departments of Education must be informed, within seven (7) working days, of the donations received.

The Ministry **warns** that if Head teachers are indulging in acts that contravene these guidelines they will stand before the "Disciplinary Committee" of the Teaching Service Commission. Similarly, if an Education Officer condones such illegal behavior they too will stand before the Public Service Commission.

Parents and or community members are encouraged to call any of the hotline numbers provided below if they have been required to pay more than recommended by the Ministry. The hotline numbers are as follows: 223-7891, 623-0550, 623-4010.