

Minister of Education
The Hon. Dame Jennifer Smith DBE, JP, DHumL, MP
Friday 11 March 2011
Ministerial Statement on the
Transfer of Students

Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning to announce a policy change as relates to the transfer of students **within and into** the Bermuda Public School System.

Under **Rule Sixteen** of the Education Rules 2006: *“a parent may transfer a child to any primary school within the zone in which they reside provided the school has space according to the maximum enrolment and subject to any policy established by the Minister.”*

At present, there is **no** policy regarding the transfer of students, the practice has been simply based on the availability of space within the accepting school.

Mr. Speaker, in an age when Government has had to introduce parental responsibility legislation, this area of transfers has become a cause for concern.

While the majority of transfers will proceed with little indication of change - where there is a concern, this new policy will allow us to be assured that a transfer is in the child's best interest.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Education **must** take its responsibility to look out for the best interests of the students seriously and, in order to deliver on that responsibility, there must be Department of Education oversight of the transfer process.

There are a number of reasons why a transfer might become necessary. The obvious one would be because of a change of residence. That is most common and the action to be taken is usually mutually agreed between principal and parent. It is not the intent of this process to stop any such legitimate transfer.

However, there are occasionally transfer requests which require closer examination.

Let me give you an example: A student comes to school and staff notice changes in that student's behaviour or appearance. Staff and/or the principal bring their observations to the attention of the parent.

If that parent wants to avoid attention, as the policy presently stands, the parent may transfer the child within a matter of days and there is little or no opportunity for any intervention. In addition, the school receiving that student has no knowledge of any concerns or possible issues concerning that transfer.

Mr. Speaker, this cannot be right!

I have learned of a primary school student who was transferred four times! Primary school is only for six years. In another case, immediately after concerns were raised about a student's welfare - that student was transferred to another school.

I don't know how many student's learning may have been interrupted as a result of being pulled out of a school unnecessarily.

Mr. Speaker, parents are the caregivers, the primary guardians and their rights are protected in law. Children also have rights that are protected in law and we and schools must play our part in ensuring that children's rights are preserved.

Mr. Speaker, once I became aware of this situation, I asked the Permanent Secretary to ensure that we did nothing more to endanger a child while I determined a way forward that meets the needs of parents, children and schools.

As a result, the following policy has been put into immediate effect.

1. Parents who wish to transfer a child may collect, complete and submit a **Transfer Application Form** from the Department of Education Headquarters on Dundonald Street;
2. This form must be approved by the Assistant Director for Education, Standards and Accountability for the student's school zone;
3. The Assistant Director will first liaise with the principal of the relevant school and if both Principal and parent are in agreement, immediately approve the transfer.
4. If any concern is expressed by the principal or staff, the Assistant Director will liaise with Student Services to interview the parent, principal and any necessary staff to determine the reason for the concerns;
5. If necessary, the Assistant Director will coordinate with Child and Family Services;
6. The Assistant Director will also liaise with the receiving school principal, or with the relevant Assistant Director (who will liaise with principal) if the receiving school is not in the same zone;
7. The Assistant Director/s must determine whether to approve the transfer (taking into account all of the information) and then communicate their decision to the parent;
8. This process must be completed within 10 days of the application being filed; and
9. The parent has the right to appeal to the Appeals Committee.

Mr. Speaker, there is also the matter of the transfer of students from private schools or home schools to the public school system.

In this regard, the principal of the receiving school must advise their zone Assistant Director of the request. If the Principal is confident of the reason for the transfer and can accommodate the student, the Assistant Director will approve the transfer.

If, however, there is any concern, the relevant Assistant Director will interview the parents and the private (or home) school principal/administrator to determine the reason for the transfer to determine how the public school system may best serve the incoming student.

In addition **Mr. Speaker**, any student **leaving** the public school system, for any reason, will be the subject of an exit interview, arranged by the relevant Assistant Director with the parent/or guardian.

Mr. Speaker, while we have no desire to impede the right of parents to determine where their children go to school, we take our responsibility to meet the needs of the children we are charged with educating seriously.

We can only do our job well if we have **all** of the information necessary. I believe that the changes I have announced will help us to make the best decisions for our students, teachers, principals and parents.

Thank you.

(End)