

Ministerial Statement

Minister of Education

The Honourable Dame Jennifer Smith DBE, JP, DHumL, MP

Friday 24 June 2011

Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning to announce the first step in a plan to make life easier for parents, ensure maximum use of school facilities, and follow the policy set by government concerning the housing of government departments.

This step, **Mr. Speaker**, will see the Lyceum Preschool housed in what is now the Infants Department of Francis Patton School. Effective September 2011, the Lyceum Preschool will move from its present rented premises on Wilkinson Avenue to a government-owned building on the site of Francis Patton Primary School.

This move, mirrors the action of a previous administration who, rather than close a school added to the number of public preschool places by moving Southamton Preschool to a government-owned building next door to Dalton E. Tucker Primary School.

Lyceum Preschool remains under the administration of Mrs. Turini. While Francis Patton is under the leadership of Mrs. Garita Coddington. Of course, there may be opportunities for interaction, but that is a matter for those in charge.

Mr. Speaker, you may recall that last November, there was some public discussion about school closures. I stated then that it was not our intention to close any schools; instead we intended to have full utilisation of all educational resources - be they human or structures.

One of the reasons for not seeing school closures as a viable option is because birth rates fluctuate and when there is lowered enrollment we should look at what other opportunities this offers.

For example, there are **Eight hundred and twenty-one three** year olds currently in Bermuda. They will be eligible for the 430 public Preschool places we have next year. The fact that there are not enough public preschool places to ensure that all 4-year-olds get a 'head start' is well known - but, I believe that where, and when, we can increase the number of places, we will do so.

Accordingly Mr. Speaker, when presented with the opportunity to give Lyceum Preschoolers a larger facility located right next to the school attended by many of their siblings - I thought it was a win-win situation. I must use this opportunity to express

thanks to our landlords at Lyceum for agreeing to let us out of our lease so that students could begin the new school year in their new location.

Mr. Speaker, while we will - over the long-term save on rent (twenty-thousand dollars a year) - in the first instance, there are some costs associated with the relocation.

In conclusion, let me reiterate: the relocation of Lyceum Preschool accomplishes the following:

1. It provides parents with one child in preschool and another in primary school, the benefit of having them in one location.
2. It is in keeping with the policy to house government entities in government facilities wherever possible;
3. It continues a plan started with the location of the Southampton Pre-school next door to the Dalton E. Tucker Primary School;and
4. Provides one thousand, one hundred and two more square footage than the Lyceum property.

Mr. Speaker, I am thankful to the principal of the Francis Patton Primary School Ms. Garita Coddington and the Head Teacher of the Lyceum Preschool Mrs. Helen Turini. They have embraced this initiative and whilst acknowledging that with change comes challenges, they see the benefits that can result for both of their schools.

Together, Mrs. Coddington and Mrs. Turini have been working with the Ministry's Facilities Manager to ensure that the needs of teachers and students are met now in the transition, and going forward in the future.

Mr. Speaker, although they will share an address, it is important to us that both the preschool and the primary school keep their individual identities.

The primary school will be entirely housed in the main building; while the preschool will occupy the current 'infant block' (a separate building on the other side of the school field.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Education team, including me, will be on hand at the meetings held prior to the commencement of the school year for parents of students entering Lyceum and Francis Patton to answer any questions.

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