



## **Ministerial Statement**

**The Hon. Dame Jennifer Smith, DBE, JP, DHumL, MP**

**Minister of Education**

**February 10, 2012**

**Mr. Speaker,** today is the last day for parents to register children for public school. It is therefore, an opportune time for me to share with Members of this Honourable House and the listening public, several important changes to our Policy and Procedures for First Admission to Primary School.

In addition, I also want to inform Members of a significant change pertaining to students transferring from private school to a public school and the attendant responsibility of private schools.

Members will know that I have been reporting regularly to this House and the public on the modernisation activities being employed by the Ministry of Education in schools. You will probably not be surprised to learn that the

modernisation of the Policy and Procedures for First Admission represents the first change in some 15 years.

Administrators reported that the current practice resulted in a mixture of inconsistency, confusion and a lack of transparency for parents and guardians of children entering primary school.

The old policy was examined with an eye to ensuring that it was up-to-date and compliant with the Education Act 1996 and the Education Rules 2006.

**Mr. Speaker**, the revised Policy and Procedures for First Admission sets out the registration requirements for all students entering public primary schools.

The policy impacts students who will be 5 years old during the registration year. (For example, this year, children born in 2007 are affected). I should add that the birth rate in 2007 was a little higher than the previous year, with an additional 61 births. Therefore, we anticipate a slight increase in P1 enrollment for this coming school year.

The policy changes are consistent with the governing legislation, and does not result in any unfair preference for any particular parents.

I must admit that there were some practices that have been changed because they were not in compliance with legislation.

One such change resulted in a clarification of what was known as the ‘sibling rule’. Over the years, custom and practice has resulted in Principals being mandated to set aside places for siblings of children already attending primary school, even if the siblings did not live in the same school zone.

Most certainly in consideration of families, legislators saw fit to allow Principals to give preference to a sibling, but those same legislators were very specific in making this option discretionary, and the Education Rules 2006 are even clearer: **that siblings must reside in the same zone.**

For the avoidance of doubt, reference to siblings includes step or adopted siblings, but they must live in the same school zone.

Another practice put in place by the Ministry allowed teachers preference for their children to obtain spaces in primary school.

Although well meaning, this practice was inconsistent with the legislation and communication has been made to all primary school Principals that while we value our teachers, they should be treated in the same way as all other parents.

**Mr. Speaker,** the Education Act 1996 requires that all students be bona fide residents of Bermuda; therefore parents of non-Bermudian children must demonstrate that said children are bona fide residents. They may do this simply by presenting a copy of the child's entry/re-entry permit; or the presentation of a letter from the Department of Immigration.

In order for any child to register, a photocopy of his/her identification must also be submitted to ensure that the child's name is spelled correctly; this documentation also demonstrates proof of Bermudian status for Bermudian children.

**Mr. Speaker,** the Ministry of Education continues to invest in early intervention; therefore the policy also makes reference to special needs students. Parents of a child who may have mobility, vision, hearing, medical, social-emotional,

developmental or any other special needs are asked to contact the Student Services Early Childhood Education Officer at the Ministry of Education **prior to the submission of an application** for primary school.

This requirement is in place to provide assistance to parents in selecting the school most appropriate to their child's needs.

In addition, the policy refers to the opportunity for both 'early' and 'delayed' entry into primary school. In both instances, parents are requested to make an application to the Minister, with supporting documentation. After formal and informal observations, interviews and assessments, a recommendation will be made to the Minister who makes the final determination. While some students may be suitable for early entry, I have to note that preference will be given to students who are at the prescribed age.

**Mr. Speaker**, parents have the right to appeal the decision when a child is not admitted to their particular school of choice. The legislation requires that such an appeal be made in writing to the Chair of the Appeals Committee. The decision being appealed will stand until a decision is made by the Appeals Committee,

which is final. These procedures emanate from the Education Act 1996 and the Education Rules 2006.

**Mr. Speaker**, it is my understanding that it has been several decades, since there has been a change to the existing boundaries that make up the three school zones of East, Central and West. This year, I saw fit to amend the boundaries to bring parity to each school zone so that each zone consists of 6 primary schools.

The boundary change sees Paget Primary School and Gilbert Institute (both located in Paget) move from the western zone into the central zone. Students will have the same choice of Middle Schools.

In closing, **Mr. Speaker**, I would like to share one last, but salient change to existing practice, this one related to the admission of students from private schools into the public system.

On January 24<sup>th</sup> and February 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Ministry of Education gazetted an official notice outlining the procedures for enrolment for the 2012/2013 school year.

Those notices included the following statement: “The manager or principal of a private school **must**, on request from the Ministry of Education, submit the official transcript of any student who has applied to be admitted to a maintained or aided school.”

This provision is to ensure that persons in charge of private schools provide the information necessary to meet the educational needs of students transferring to public school. While there has been only one impediment to date, the change is to clarify for everyone what is expected.

We believe that it is important that children not be educationally disadvantaged because of the policies and/or actions of adults.

**Mr. Speaker**, thank you for your indulgence and I look forward to reporting the results of school registration once it has been completed.

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