



STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Review of:

Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts January - July 2016
Annual Report

Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts 2016 - 2017 Annual
Report



Parliamentary Paper No. 118 of 2019

November 2019

Published and Printed by the Department of Legislature, Parliament House, SUVA

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CHAIRPERSON'S FOREWORD

I am pleased to present the consolidated review report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts' January - July 2016 and 2016 - 2017 Annual Reports.

In accordance with its established Annual Report review process, the Committee examines Annual Reports of agencies, in order to investigate, inquire into, and make recommendations relating to the agencies' administration, legislative or proposed legislative programme, budget, functions, organisational structure and policy formulation. As part of this process, the Committee conducted public hearings to gather additional information.

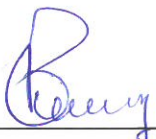
The process has proven to be an effective means of gauging its progress and maintaining a high level of scrutiny of the agencies under review.

This review was made in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(b) which mandates the committee to look into issues related to health, education, social services, labour, culture and media.

The review looked at nine key areas covering the period from January 2016 to July 2017, conducted into: The Ministry's administration; structure; budgetary allocation; programmes offered; policies; challenges; highlights; priorities for the coming years; and its implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

I thank the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts, Ms. Alison Burchell, and her staff for their assistance in this inquiry. I also extend my gratitude to my Committee colleagues Hon. George Vegnathan (Deputy Chairperson), Hon. Alipate Nagata, Hon. Salote Radrodoro, and Hon. Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu for their contributions as well as to Hon. Simione Rasova for availing himself as an alternate member for those Members who were unable to attend the committee meetings. Finally, I thank the Secretariat namely, Ms. Sheron Narayan, Mr. Tevita Tuivanuavou, and Mrs. Atelaite Leba for the assistance provided during the committee's deliberations.

I, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, commend the *Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts January – July 2016 Annual Report* and the *Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts 2016 – 2017 Annual Report* to Parliament and request all members of this August House to take note of the Committee's Report.



Hon. Viam Pillay
Chairperson

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AMU	-	Assets Monitoring Unit
CIU	-	Construction and Implementation Unit
FEG	-	Free Education Grants
IAGG Unit	-	Internal Audit and Good Governance Unit
MEHA	-	Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts
OMRS	-	Open Merit Recruitment System
SDGs	-	Sustainable Development Goals
SAAC	-	Substance Abuse Advisory Council
WASH	-	Wash Sanitation and Hygiene

RECOMMENDATION:

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs has conducted a review of the following Annual Reports:

- Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts January – July 2016 Annual Report
- Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts 2016 – 2017 Annual Report

The committee recommends that Parliament take note of its report.

INTRODUCTION

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs of the last Parliament term was referred the January – July 2016 Annual Report of the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts which was thereafter reintroduced in this new Parliament term and referred to the current Standing Committee on Social Affairs, for its scrutiny. Subsequently, the Ministry's 2016 – 2017 Annual Report was tabled in Parliament during the May 2019 sitting and also referred to the Committee for its review.

Standing Orders 110(1)(c) authorises the Standing Committee to *scrutinise the government departments with responsibility within the committee's subject area, including by investigating, inquiring into, and making recommendations relating to any aspect of such a department's administration, legislation or proposed legislative program, budget, rationalisation, restructuring, functioning, organisation, structure and policy formulation.*

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The substantive members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs are:

- Hon. Viam Pillay (Chairperson)
- Hon. George Vegnathan (Deputy Chairperson)
- Hon. Alipate Nagata (Member)
- Hon. Salote Radrodoro (Member)
- Hon. Dr Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu (Member)

During the Standing Committee's meetings, the following alternate membership arose pursuant to Standing Order 115(5):

- Hon. Simione Rasova

FUNCTIONS OF THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, HERITAGE AND ARTS

The Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts is responsible for the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of educational legislation, policies and programs in Fiji. The Ministry provides the structures, human resources, budget and administrative and management support to ensure that the quality of service delivery is maintained at a high level.

The Ministry is specifically tasked to conduct and deliver education services to the following:

- Early Childhood and Care Education
- Primary and Secondary Education
- Special Schools for Children with special needs
- Students in the years of compulsory schooling (Year 1-Year 12) and those participating in Year 13 studies
- Vocational education and training programmes
- Technical and Vocational education through the Technical College of Fiji
- Professional Development and training of teachers
- Training for school managers, school management committees and controlling authorities.

Together with the above, the Ministry also looks after the:

- Implementation of the Higher Education Act 2008 (through the Fiji Higher Education Commission)
- Coordination of the Culture Sector in the country and responsible for the preservation and promotion of Fiji's cultural diversity and unique heritage
- Identify and address issues arising out of drug and substance abuse (through the Substance Abuse Advisory Council)
- Provision of library services to schools and communities and
- Modernization and provision of archival services to Government and the citizens of Fiji.

ISSUES RAISED

CYCLONE AFFECTED SCHOOLS

2016 was a unique year due to the devastation caused by TC Winston. The ruin of TC Winston caused havoc across the education sector as most schools were completely destroyed while many sustained major damages. This created challenges to the Ministry however, assistance was provided by donors locally, regionally and abroad to assist the schools resume classes in temporary classrooms. A total of 495 Primary, Secondary and Early Childhood Education Centre's were either damaged or destroyed during the cyclone.

The committee notes that over 60 schools that sustained minimal damage utilized their Free Education Grant to do own repairs. Also around 60 schools were either fully adopted or partially adopted by donor governments and other agencies. A total of 356 schools have undergone rehabilitation of which the Assets Monitoring Unit (AMU) and Construction and Implementation Unit (CIU) are tasked with the rehabilitation of 150 and 206 schools respectively. A total of \$246m has been utilized for rehabilitation works to these 356 schools.

The progress of rehabilitation works is provided below:

- CIU – 157/206 (49 left - work in progress to be complete by December 2019)
- AMU – 149/150 (1 school left – work in progress to be complete by December 2019)

It is also concerning to note that church halls are currently being used at Qamea schools. Other schools under construction are using available spaces within existing classrooms.

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the Assets Monitoring Unit and the Construction and Implementation Unit of the Ministry of Economy work closely with the contractors to ensure that all outstanding school rehabilitation works are completed by December 2019.

TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE SCHEME

The Ministry was given the responsibility of implementing the bus fare assistance to students. This initiative by the state attempts to reduce the financial burden on parents who are unable to afford transportation costs in sending their children to school.

We note that this program holds a budget of \$20m and still proves to be a challenging task 5 years since its implementation due to resource constraints; human and financial yet all eligible students continue to receive their coupons on time.

The committee was made aware that an audit on the scheme was carried out by the Internal Audit and Good Governance (IAGG) Unit of the Ministry of Economy which highlighted issues of the lack of internal controls at the Ministry's Head Quarter, District Offices and at Schools and lack of monitoring which could lead to abuse. However, thus far, no audit report for Transport has been received by the Ministry from the IAGG Unit. A draft report for March 2018 to March 2019 is currently being finalized for management comments.

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the draft audit report for March 2018 to March 2019 on the Transport Assistance Scheme be expeditiously finalised and submitted to the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts to improve and strengthen the internal controls of the scheme.

CHALLENGES FACED IN RECRUITING AND FILLING POSITIONS OF RESPONSIBILITIES IN SCHOOLS

The committee notes that the challenges for the recruitment of senior staff in schools are in terms of the number of positions to be filled and the volume of applications that have to be processed for these positions.

The committee was informed that it is difficult to fill positions in remote/very remote schools due to unwillingness of qualified people to take up postings in these locations. Furthermore, OMRS allows for an appointment for one month only without the OMRS. A normal recruitment takes 3-4 months to complete. As soon as a vacancy arises in a position of reasonability, the Ministry makes an appointment, preferably from within the school, for a period of one month noting that recruitment takes longer.

The Ministry is working on recruitment cycles to ensure it has orders of merit in place before the beginning of the new school year to fill positions as and when they arise.

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the Ministry strengthen and improve its existing mechanisms and recruitment processes to ensure that vacant positions are filled immediately so that school students are not affected.

DIFFICULTIES IN FILLING VACANT TEACHER POSITIONS IN SCHOOLS

Another issue of concern is the difficulty faced by the Ministry in filling vacant teacher positions in schools. The Ministry informed that this was due to the following reasons:

- There is a shortage of qualified teachers in certain subject areas particularly, in Maths/Science, Industrial Arts, PEMAC, Primary Teaching, Special Education;
- Newly qualified teachers hesitate in accepting offer of appointment to schools in remote locations; and

- Condition of school quarters, unavailability of quarters in rural/remote/very remote locations, and the need to share quarters by single teachers of the same gender.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Ministry work in collaboration with relevant stakeholders to provide more scholarships in Maths/Science, Industrial Arts, PEMAC, Primary Teaching, Special Education to increase the number of qualified teachers in these areas.
2. That the Ministry upgrade school infrastructure so as to attract more teachers to teach in rural and remote schools.

INCREASING TREND IN DRUG AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE AMONGST STUDENTS

The continuous increase in drug and substance abuse amongst students is alarming. We note that the disciplinary procedures in place are not effective to change student attitudes. The committee was informed by the Ministry that its Policy Unit will be reviewing the drug policy and include relevant sections that can address these gaps.

Furthermore, the enforcement of policy at school level needs to be strengthened and the Substance Abuse Advisory Council whenever visiting schools, creates awareness on the drug policy for better understanding.

In addition, there are many cases from schools on inhalant abuse. SAAC has developed the Volatile Substance Abuse Draft Law which when passed by Parliament, will restrict the sale of Inhalants to students and penalize retailers who deliberately sell them to.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Drug Policy be reviewed to capture the new types of drugs entering the country which are used or abused by the students.
2. That the enforcement of relevant school policies on drug and substance abuse be strengthened and more awareness carried out on the Drug Policy for better understanding.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The committee notes that the Ministry specifically aligns its operations and strategic achievements to SDG 4 – “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” However, due to the complexity of the different Sections and Agencies attached, MEHA also contributes to the following SDGs:

- SDG1 – End Poverty in all its forms [through FEG implemented for easy access to schools, transportation assistance, Education for Sustainable Development initiatives, Financial Education, etc.]
- SDG 2 – End hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture [through agriculture programs in schools, Canteen Policy, Free Milk Initiative]
- SDG 3 – Ensure healthy lives and promote Wellbeing for all at all ages [Wellness Programs, Sports programs in schools, Physical Education classes]
- SDG 5 – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and children [equal opportunities for all in accessing education and resources, MEHA being an equal opportunity employer through OMRS]
- SDG 6 – Water and Sanitation [through WASH initiatives in schools, provision of Water Tanks, Environment Programs in schools]
- SDG 9 – Build resilient infrastructure [standards for building in schools]
- SDG 13 – Combating Climate Change and its impact [through curriculum, through environment awareness and programs in schools]

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Committee recommends that the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts:

- Change the format/layout of the Report to facilitate understanding of SDG information.
- Explicitly link results with relevant/priority SDG goals and targets.
- Include a section explaining how the Ministry is prioritising action on the SDGs.
- Report on the challenges faced with the implementation of the SDGs.

2. That MEHA work in collaboration with the Ministry of Economy for capacity building of staff to enable a better understanding of issues relating to the Sustainable Development Goals and its linkages to the Ministry’s work.

GENDER ANALYSIS

Gender is a critical dimension to parliamentary scrutiny. Standing Order 110 (2) requires committees to consider gender equality and ensure that the impact on both men and women is explored in all matters. The committee notes that the Ministry considers males and females equally in recruitment and selection based on merit.

CONCLUSION

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs has fulfilled its mandate approved by Parliament which was to examine and review the following Annual Reports:

- Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts January – July 2016 Annual Report
- Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts 2016 - 2017 Annual Report

The Ministry of Education is tasked to conduct and deliver education services at early childhood education, primary and secondary education, special and vocational schools, vocational education and training programs, technical college education, professional development and training for teachers and training of school managers and controlling authorities. To achieve this, the Ministry was provided a total allocation of \$448.5 million for the 2016-2017 financial year, which is an increase of 3 per cent compared to 2016.

Maintaining and improving quality in education is paramount in the Education Sector and the committee is glad that the Ministry continues to devote its resources towards this end.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS' SIGNATURE

We, the Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, hereby agree with the contents of this report:



.....
Hon. Viam Pillay
(Chairperson)



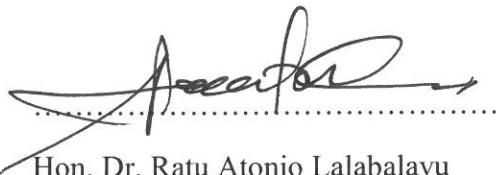
.....
Hon. George Vegnathan
(Deputy Chairperson)



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Hon. Alipate Nagata
(Member)



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Hon. Salote Radrodro
(Member)



.....
Hon. Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu
(Member)

APPENDICES

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the Parliament website at the following link:

Friday, 16 August 2019

Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts

Alison Burchell, Permanent Secretary Education, Heritage and Arts, **Timoci Bure**, Deputy Secretary for Primary and Secondary Education, and **Kirti Sharma**, Head of Human Resources.

Published written evidence

Written evidence and supplementary information was received from the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts and can be viewed on the Parliament website at the following link:
<http://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-social-affairs/>