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Verbatim Report

[VERBATIM REPORT]

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS & DEFENCE

ANNUAL REPORTS

- (1) Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts 2021-2022 Annual Report**
- (2) Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts 2022-2023 Annual Report**

ENTITY: Ministry of Education

VENUE: Big Committee Room, Government Buildings, Suva

DATE: Thursday, 8th May, 2025

**VERBATIM REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE HELD AT THE BIG COMMITTEE ROOM
(EAST WING), PARLIAMENT PRECINCTS, GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS, SUVA,
ON
THURSDAY, 8TH MAY, 2025, AT 9.11 A.M.**

Interviewee/Submittee: Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts

In Attendance:

- | | | | |
|-----|---------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1. | Mr. Meli Nacuva | - | Acting Permanent Secretary |
| 2. | Mr. Pene Aropio | - | Acting Deputy Secretary Professional |
| 3. | Ms. Saleszni Prasad | - | Director Secondary |
| 4. | Mr. Sanaila Nauga | - | Director Primary |
| 5. | Mr. Poate Kaunisela | - | Acting Director HR |
| 6. | Ms. Alumita Ravuga | - | Acting Director Finance |
| 7. | Ms. Ana Lewaqai | - | Head of Executive Support Unit |
| 8. | Mr. Salveen Narayan | - | Executive Support Unit |
| 9. | Mr. Sekove Toduadua | - | Acting Manager ICT |
| 10. | Mr. Ravuama Daurewa | - | Assets and Infrastructure Services |
| 11. | Mr. Metuisela Gauna | - | Planning, Policy and Research |
| 12. | Ms. Rubyna Ravasua | - | Manager Data |
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MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- *Ni sa bula vinaka*, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to your Parliament. I want to welcome all honourable Members and members of the Secretariat - a very good morning to you. It is a pleasure to welcome everyone, especially to the viewers who are watching this proceeding.

As a basic outline, pursuant to Standing Orders of Parliament, specifically Standing Order 111, all Committee meetings are to be open to the public, so this meeting is open to the public and the media. Any sensitive information concerning this submission that cannot be disclosed to the public can be provided to the Committee either in private or in writing. But do note that this will only happen in a few very specific circumstances, which include:

1. national security;
2. third party confidential information;
3. personnel or human resource matters; and
4. Committee deliberation and development of Committee's recommendation and report.

I wish to remind honourable Members and you, ladies and gentlemen from the Ministry of Education, that all comments and questions to be asked are to be addressed through me as the Chairperson. For viewers, you are very welcome to send in your questions through the live coverage on *Facebook*. You can ask your question via the comments and only relevant questions will be considered by the Committee. If there are any questions from the Committee during or after your presentation, please, let us know if you prefer for us to ask questions during or after your presentation, Madams and Sirs. This is a parliamentary meeting, so all information gathered is covered under the Parliamentary Powers and Privileges Act and the Standing Orders of Parliament. Please, bear in mind that we will not condone any slander or libel of any sort, and any information brought before this Committee should be based on facts.

In terms of protocols this morning, please, be advised that movement should be restricted because we have cameras on either side in the front of the room and also, please, put your phones on vibrate or silent mode.

I would like to introduce the Members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence.

(Introduction of Committee Members and Secretariat Team)

Today, honourable Members, we will be hearing an oral submission from the Ministry of Education in relation to two of its Annual Reports 2021-2022 and 2022-2023. I will now take this time to invite members from the Ministry to introduce themselves before you proceed with your submission. *Vinaka saka vakalevu.*

(Introduction of Ministry of Education Officials)

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- I welcome Rubyna and Sekove back to Parliament. I know that you are very familiar with how we do things in the Committee. For those of you who do not know, Rubyna and Sekove are former staff of Parliament, and they were both seconded to the Ministry of Education. Please, continue with your submission.

MR. M. GAUNA.- Madam Chairperson and honourable Members of the Standing Committee, our presentation this morning is a short presentation. It basically covers an overview of the Ministry as a whole, of course, with some basic data just to assist the Team in answering the questions that will follow. We have our data that, so it is a separate data for the two Annual Reports that are presented and discussed this morning.

For 2021 and 2022 - our vision, mission and the values. Our vision is, “Education and cultural diversity for empowerment and sustainable futures for all”. Our mission is to prepare all Fijians to contribute to a sustainable and progressive nation through holistic and empowering education that appreciates and embrace the unique values of all its citizens. Of course, we also have our guiding principle within the Ministry in which education is the centre of everything that we do. It is basically the core of all the activities that we do at the Ministry.

Those are basically our administrators - our Minister, Permanent Secretary and, of course, we have three Deputy Secretaries, which at that time were called Heads instead of Deputy Secretaires.

Those are our responsibilities, so everything that we do has to do with all those – Early Childhood Education (ECE), Primary, Secondary, Special Inclusive Education (SIE),

Vocational Schools, students in the compulsory years of education from Year 1 to Year 12, students in vocational, TVET and vocational, the teaching personnel within, and the school management committee and controlling authorities. Those are the things that we normally deal with on daily basis.

Together with that, we also look after the following:

1. Implementation of the Higher Education Act 2008. The Higher Education Commission of Fiji, which is one of our statutory bodies, have their own Act.
2. Coordination of culture sector in the country. During that time, the Department of Heritage and Arts was with the Ministry of Education. When the Coalition Government came in, the Department was then moved to the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs.
3. Identify and address issues arising out of drugs and substance abuse through the Substance Abuse Advisory Council (SAAC).

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Defence day, 8th May,
2025*

4. Provision of library services to schools. Not only to the schools, but they also look after the community libraries at large.

5. Modernisation and provision of archival services. That was Department that also came under the Ministry of Education then. Now, it is also with, I think, the Prime Minister's Office.

We have 10 strategic priorities in our existing Strategic Plan, as follows:

1. Infrastructure and assets.
2. Legislation and planning.
3. Systems and processes.
4. Standard monitoring and quality assurance.
5. Workforce engagement and development.
6. Curriculum.
7. Culture and heritage and arts.
8. Partnership.
9. Cooperation and communication.
10. Research and development.

In terms of progress, that is, basically, a summary of our school data -

- We had 864 ECE Centres. The number of teachers then was 13,479 and the number of schools was 12,951. Those were the registered number of students in our database.
- For our Special Inclusive Schools, there were 18 in total. The number of teachers then was 241 and the number of students was 1,072.
- The number of primary schools then was 736 with 6,299 teachers and the number of students was 149,482. For our secondary schools, we had 176 secondary schools. The number of teachers was 5,674 and the number of students was 72,360.

In terms of net and gross enrolment, I will probably define what we mean by net enrolment and what is gross enrolment so that we are aware on what those figures represent. Net enrolment is basically the number of school-aged children, so that is the limitation - school-aged children who are currently in the school system. When I talk about school-aged children, that is, from the six-year-olds (Year 1) to 17-year-olds (Year 13) who are in the school system.

When we calculate the rate, this number is then divided by the population estimates given by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics. The actual number of students who are supposed to be in the school system is from the first graph - primary and secondary. Likewise, when we talk about the Gross Enrolment Rate (GER), it does not limit the number of students in the school - it is open. Whoever is in the school system, that is where we calculate the number from.

The Net Enrolment Rate (NER) for primary education is almost a near universal education, in the sense that it is almost 100 percent in terms of the age of students who are supposed to be in the primary school education system. I think it is about 99.8 percent. That is based on the recorded number in our database. The first data is for the primary.

You will note that the first graph above (the one below is the NER and the one on top is the GER), is always more than 100 percent because it includes overage students and those from overseas who are here for study, so we expect the number to be to be more because of those factors.

For secondary, we are also doing well. We have only used Year 9 to Year 12 because from a statistical perspective, that is when the data is more stable. When I say more stable, when we talk about Year 13, that is where students go and join tertiary, and some of them join TVET and vocational, not all of them are in Year 13.

We are following the UNESCO statistical guideline. We use the most stable level, which is Year 12. The data that we have calculated for the indicators is from Year 9 to Year 12 for secondary schools. We are doing well in terms of the information. The data collected and the calculations made are for those indicators. We have improved over the years.

In terms of initiatives, there are so many Government initiatives that the Ministry is tasked with. In terms of the implementation, we have the transport assistance. A total of 93,114 students were the benefactors of that assistance. There is a criteria for that. Not all students are assisted - it is based on the income of their parents and guardians, which is \$16,000 per annum and below. Only those students qualify to be assisted through that initiative.

We also have the boat and engine assistance. During the year, six primary and one secondary school were the benefactors of that assistance.

We have the Free Education Grant (FEG) in which 13,479 5-year olds attending ECE were assisted. We missed out on the primary and secondary, which is reflected in the Annual Report.

We also have free textbooks provided to schools. That is an ongoing initiative. We also provide water tanks. During that year, 39 primary schools and 11 secondary school benefited from that initiative.

In terms of library resources, nine ECE Centres, 17 primary schools and one vocational school were assisted with their library setup. Basically, our Library Services Department provides free libraries, and they also do the setup in our selected schools. In that year, 36 schools were selected, and they benefited through that initiative.

In terms of our workforce, during the year, the Ministry had a total of 13,000, one of the largest workforce, compared to any other existing Ministry. Our workforce then was 13,571 and the breakdown is reflected in the table, which was generated from the Annual Report in front of us.

In terms of school enrolment for ECE, there were 12,951 students registered in our database from the 864 registered ECE Centres. For Special and Inclusive Education, there were 18 Special Schools, and we also had mainstream schools whereby special inclusive students also attend. In total, there were 122 mainstream schools from around Fiji.

In terms of examination, our achievement for that financial year - 2021 to 2022, because it was during the COVID-19 period, we only conducted external examinations to Year 12 and Year 13. Our examination results at the national level for Year 12 was 66 percent and Year 13, it was 70 percent.

Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, that is basically a brief overview of what we have in the 2021-2022 Annual Report. I have not included the Curriculum and the other sections' achievements, otherwise, it is going to take long to present. However, our officers are here to answer questions relating to those areas.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Sir, may I briefly ask, would you be happy for us to ask any questions pertaining to the one you just covered, the Annual Report or would you like to wait until the end of your presentation over both Annual Reports?

MR. M. NACUVA.- Madam Chairperson, because of time limitations, we will allow the Committee to ask questions pertaining to the 2021-2022 Annual Report, if you have any questions.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Members, we will just leave the floor open now for any questions pertaining to their first Annual Report 2021-2022.

HON. V. LAL.- Madam Chairperson, because the latest report is 2022-2023, I suggest we listen to their presentation on that, and then we can ask questions all together at once.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- If you are both happy, then the Team can carry on with their presentation on the next Annual Report.

MR. M. GAUNA.- Madam Chairperson and honourable Members of the Standing Committee, I now present to you a brief overview of the 2022-2023 Annual Report for the Ministry of Education.

On the school data for ECE, there were 873 schools, 1,369 teachers and 19,173 students. For Special Inclusive Education, there were 18 schools, 186 teachers. We have the mainstream schools with 336 students and students for special schools was 1,179. For primary education, there were 738 schools compared to the previous one which was 336, 5,150 teachers and 210,252 students. For secondary education, there were 176 secondary schools, 5,142 teachers and 74,392 students. For vocational education, there were 32 vocational centres, 55 teachers and 1,161 students.

For the net enrolment rate during the financial year, for primary education, again, something similar to the trend in the previous year, we had been consistent in retaining the students at almost 100 percent. Of course, the gross enrolment was over 100, simply for the reason that I have already stated.

The extra students, probably that catered for those who came in, of course, it created an increase in our gross enrolment, as well as overage students. For secondary, in 2022-2023, there was an increase in the gross enrolment rate but a decline from 1993 to 1996 in terms of gross enrolment.

The financial year saw the continuation of the same Government initiatives, such as the Free Education Grant. We also had the Menstrual Hygiene Management Initiative for our girls in secondary school. There was an allocation in our budget and that benefitted female students from Year 7 to Year 13.

We also continued with the Transport Assistance Initiative, Boat and Engine, Water Tank Assistance, provision of free school textbooks, library initiatives, and the new one that came in was the Government policy on the employment of those staff who had reached 55 years then but still within the age limit between 55 and 60.

Madam, that is the breakdown of those who were re-engaged - 19 ECE teachers, 190 primary school teachers, 81 secondary school teachers, and 16 non-teaching staff. The other one that we brought back was the repeal of the 'No Jab No Job' policy, which was

another Government. A total of 199 Ministry officials were terminated then. However, we were able to re-employ only those only who were interested in joining. We gave the option for them whether they would like to come in and those who applied were taken in.

Madam Chairperson, the Back to School initiative, which was the \$200 given to eligible students was also the Government initiative. The year also saw the implementation of the outcome of the Education Summit. That was, again, another initiative of the Government. We were able to conduct the Education Summit and the outcome of which is the *2023 Denarau Declaration* in 2023. That is basically the roadmap for the Ministry of Education for the next 10 years. All our plans are aligned to that document.

For the workforce, we had a total establishment of 15,887. The breakdown in terms of occupation type by male and female and the total workforce is there. You can see that those are established positions but in terms of the total workforce, we have 13,396.

On school enrolment, for ECE, there is a total of 19,173 students. I had already summarised that in the previous slides, so that was for the 32 vocational centres that I had already discussed as well.

For our examination results that year, we brought back the external examinations which were shelved during the previous year because of the impact of the pandemic. For Year Eight Examination result, it was 62 percent; Year 12, it was 66 percent; and Year 13, it was 70 percent.

That, Madam Chairperson, is basically an overview of what we have for the two years' report. As I have said, some of the major sections of the Ministry - the Curriculum Section, our Finance, we have our TVET, and we also have Assets and Infrastructure Section are not reflected here but they are here to answer any questions that may arise during our discussion this morning.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you for outlining those two Annual Reports, Sir. I open the floor now to the honourable Members for questions.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Chairperson, my question is in regards to student behaviour - students fighting, drugs have been found on students, illicit material, pornographic material, have you seen a rise in that?

Then you have counsellors in place, I believe, to attend to those students. What is the number of counsellors that the Ministry have? Is it sufficient? Is it effective? We have

cases of students even punching teachers. What is the Ministry doing to ensure the safety of their teachers?

MR. M. GAUNA.- Thank you, Madam Chairperson and honourable Members. The Ministry of Education emphasised on the safekeeping of our teachers and we have implemented the Student Behavioural Management Procedure in schools. With that, we have clearly stated the criteria of students' behaviour, and it is categorised into five categories. Any student who may have some type of behaviour in school, they go through those criteria and the head of schools is the first respondent to that behaviour.

We have procedures in place in schools. If a student does not behave in a manner that is handled by the head of school, then we have the Development of the Students in Schools in place. We also have 35 counsellors who are engaged by the Ministry and trained by SAC. Those are some of the strategies and procedures which are in place currently with the Ministry of Education. We also do emphasise on the welfare of our teachers and the Ministry, not only has the Child Protection Policy in place, but we also look into the welfare of our teachers. That is why the Ministry is currently implementing the Student Behavioural Management Procedure.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- I will ask Mr. Nacuva to just say something.

MR. M. NACUVA.- Honourable Member, we do acknowledge the fact that we do not have the exact data that you are asking for to trend over the years, whether there has been an increase or there has been a decrease. As you know, social media has begun to grow very dramatically over the last few years, so a lot of the recordings that we have are based on that. I am speaking from experience, of the days when I was still in school, there was a lot of fighting as well. It used to happen at the bus stand, but a lot of that did not come out because we did not have the recording devices that we do have today, we did not have proper registers to record that, and that is something that we will take on board.

One thing that the Ministry has done this year is that we have established a Data Management Unit. The Ministry has a lot of listening systems. We have the Fiji Education Management Information System (FEMIS), we have got the Fiji Education Staffing Appointment System (FESA), we have got our Exam Database, and you will see by the presentations in our Annual Reports that we are still talking about pass rates. There are far more in-depth indicators that we can use to analyse and diagnose why our pass rates are sitting either at 60 to 70 percent, and why it is not hitting 90 to 95 percent when it comes to the higher grades, which should be, because you have filtered out, unfortunately, the so-called dropouts so the pass rate should actually be hitting at that but we are not doing that.

One of the things we have identified with the Ministry this year is the ability to take the data and go through some of those indicators which are what we call leading indicators. We can analyse in Term 1, Term 2 and Term 3, before we hit the external examinations, so data analytics is an issue. It is something that we are dealing with, and the honourable Minister has set up this Data Management Unit with the Manager Data and we are looking at securing 10 high-end laptops for those so that we can churn out information for honourable Members and for the general public so they can better understand the information that the Ministry collects. That is one, and we will get back to you on those exact numbers when we do get it.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- It is really important for us to remember – for me personally – that as teachers, you have the students for only eight hours a day. The behaviour in school is reflective of what is happening at home. A lot of times, unfairly, the responsibility of the students’ bad behaviour goes and sits with the Ministry of Education. As we are speaking about discipline, how often are parents brought in and involved in discipline cases? If I may just ask, is that a normal thing that happens in schools, or is it just between the teacher and the misbehaving student? How often does the parent or guardians get called in?

MR. S. NAUGA.- Madam Chairperson, on that, the Ministry of Education has four pillars whereby the fourth pillar is on community and partnership. The Ministry is emphasising on the participation and involvement of parents.

We have the Parents-Teachers Interview (PTI), we usually come on a termly basis for them to have interactions with the teachers. At the same time, we are encouraging our parents to come often because the more they discuss things with the teachers, the better they understand the behaviour and the academic achievements of the students.

MR. M. NACUVA.- There is a level of complexity. One is, if you look at the resourcing, most of that is what we do in life. Most of the things we spend funds on are reactive things. It is targeted at secondary and primary, and ECE is one of our smallest budgets. We have developed a new policy that looks at holistic development at the ECE level, which we neglect. That is where I talk about the gender violence issues. You can focus on corrective issues, but if you do not focus on the actual human traits of courage and collaboration, it is like a piece of land where the soil is not fertile to plant anything. If the soil is fertile – that is where ECE comes in – then it will grow what is being planted. Of course, there are weeds, but that is where secondary and primary come in.

Right now, we are trying to focus on increasing the budget at ECE. We are also looking at the next phase of pre-ECE, where it is from birth to ECE education, where the Ministry begins to go beyond that. Again, that comes down to that collaboration component. You can lead the horse to water, but you cannot force it to drink.

We are going to be engaging with the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs and the Ministry of Rural Development, on how we can reach out to the parents to make that engagement where the education of their children becomes the topic during dinner, and something that they would prefer to go to rather than going to a grog session. That has to be embedded at home, and the Ministry of Education is limited in terms of what it can do.

For us, the collaboration has to be with the Ministry of Rural Development, Ministry of iTaukei Affairs and the Ministry of Multi-Ethnic Affairs, on how we can get there to be able to create this engagement, and instil these traits in our children so when they grow, these beautiful traits of a beautiful human being is coming through the system.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Madam Chairperson, we thank the Ministry of Education for their presentation this morning. I have a follow up question from honourable Sharma; what the Permanent Secretary has mentioned is the plan to develop that will be implemented in time to come but right now, would the Ministry consider corporal punishment in our system?

MR. M. NACUVA.- Yes, that is a difficult one. It is something you will probably have to refer to the Solicitor-General but asking me as the Acting Permanent Secretary, I will take this ball and run it - any form of violence is still violence. I know that if we go back to our holy books, it always says there is an allowance to spare the rod and spoil the child. That is a dilemma with the Ministry - on what level of corporal punishment or what level of reactive punishment is necessary to correct the behaviour of a child.

There is research being done where corporal punishment has not been used, and the behaviour of children has been positive. There is also research that contradicts that, so that is something that is going to be a dilemma for us, but it is something that will be discussed. Again, I know it is not the answer that you are looking for, Sir, but I do not know whether any other of my staff would like to answer that. It is not an easy question to answer but that is why I fielded it so I take responsibility for that question.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Madam Chairperson, Australia just did an evaluation on the education system and they have come out publicly about the reintroduction of corporal punishment in the education sector. For those of us who are over 50 years of age, we know, we have learned through the hard way and we have come through that. The public is watching this and it is becoming very clear to the public. The reintroduction of corporal

punishment may help our children, but then there has to be a guideline or something that can support that, Madam Chairperson.

As the Acting Manager HR had talked about child protection, it really saddens us when teachers are being abused in the school premises and also on the road, children are swearing at police officers even in town, they are walking, and they are swearing at people inside the bus. We see it everyday and it is a real challenge for the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders to seriously looking at society and we try to mould them in our education system.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you very much, honourable Ravunawa. I want to ask some questions from the Annual Reports. Mr. Gauna spoke about the Denarau Declaration and the 10 Year Plan of the Ministry. Can you please just give us a rough outline of the Denarau Declaration and what it means for the next ten years for the ministry, please?

MR. M. NACUVA.- The *2023 Denarau Declaration* was born out of a countrywide consultation and it has the needs and determination of all our stakeholders on the ground. Looking back, there is a need to change and transform our education system. After that nationwide consultation and after the *2023 Denarau Declaration* in September 2023, we sat down and put together the way forward which is the current policy direction of the Ministry of Education. It has seven thematic areas, it:

1. dissects the curriculum and assessment;
2. teaches leadership and workforce;
3. ECE, Special Inclusive Education (SIE), likewise the disaster risk reduction areas and climate change adaptation including inclusivity;
4. improves our finances;
5. improves and looks into strengthening TVET as a matter of strengthening our skills base in the country;
6. documents and discusses the way in which digital learning can assist and strengthen our current system; and
7. improves policies and systems of the Ministry of Education.

Madam Chairperson, that is the whole overview of the *2023 Denarau Declaration*.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Chairperson, going back to the previous question whereby a student punched a teacher which was in the news, what happens after that? Is there counselling or expulsion? If there is expulsion, can the student never be enrolled in any other school?

I do agree when it comes to the behaviour of students that it is not the responsibility of the teachers but rather parents and society as a whole. One of my recommendations was that looking at the degree of the act that was carried out by the student, the parents should be held accountable, even to the point of being charged. However, coming back to this question, what happens to a student if he carries out such an act and if there is expulsion, can he or she never enrol in a school?

MR. M. NACUVA.-Through you, Madam Chairperson, a specific case came to my table on student teacher violence. It is not always clear-cut, but like I said, there is no place for violence in schools, whether it be from the student or from the teacher. That is where this stand on corporal punishment comes in.

In the recent case that we had, the Police was involved. It became a police matter because an assault took place. However, there is a mediation occurring between the Ministry and the parent and the student - the student being a victim of alleged regular mental abuse that occurred in the classroom, so it was being called out. Those are some things that in our generation, it was part and parcel of education. If you have been told that you are not smart, you are stupid, we cannot accept it coming from the teachers.

The students nowadays are a bit more reactive to that and protective of their dignity. Some of the behaviour of our teachers as well need to be tampered on - how we react to the students. In that particular case, we are still in that mediation process between the Ministry, the student and the parents. However, the case is with the Police because it is an assault case. That is something we must demarcate - the role of the Ministry and also when the crime occurs, it has to be dealt with the relevant authorities.

HON. V. LAL.- Madam Chairperson, through you, on the initial question of child behaviour and drugs in schools, looking at the number of schools, number of teachers and students, and I hear that you only have 35 Counsellors, at one stage, there was almost one counsellor in every school. Why was there a need to reduce that to 35? How are these 35 Counsellors utilised?

MS. R. RAVASUA.- Madam Chairperson, through you, we have 30 Counsellors and four counselling hubs around the nation. For your previous question, Sir, we do have data on drug-related issues. In 2022, there were 2,932 cases; 2023 - 2,627 cases; and 2024 - 3,041 cases.

Drug cases from schools increased by 23 percent from 2022 to 2023 but decreased to 16 percent from 2023 to 2024. That is a sign that students are getting the messages and are making the right choices of staying away from drugs. We think that our counsellors are doing a great job in addressing these issues in schools.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Can we also go back to honourable Lal's question about the drop in the number of available Counsellors per school or per head count of students.

MS. R. RAVASUA.- We have counsellors in each of the four Divisions. Those schools that do not have counsellors easily refer to those Divisional Counsellors.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Carry on with your follow-up question, honourable Lal. Maybe just details on that question, Sirs and Madams. Honourable Lal is a former teacher as well.

HON. V. LAL.- In every school, there used to be a counsellor. Now that you are saying that you have 35 Counsellors in Divisions, why was there a need to reduce the number of Counsellors?

Looking at the issues, I know you are saying that, but do not forget that, that good eight hours is spent with the teachers in school. For parents, most of the time they are sleeping or away, but this good eight hours is spent in school - the teachers and students. It is very much a part of the teaching. We teachers create these values of love, peace, truth, non-violence and good conduct. The class of moral values is all gone, so I suggest there is a need to bring back moral class back, plus my initial question of having counsellors. How are you using those Counsellors? Why the need to reduce the Counsellors?

MR. M. NACUVA.- Madam Chairperson, on honourable Lal's question on the reduction of counsellors, initially, those counsellors were school based. As had been mentioned Ms. Ravasua, we have four Divisional Counsellors and we have 35 who are there in the district to assist the teachers. However, in all the schools in our county today with 738 primary schools and 179 secondary schools, they have Child Protection Officers. Their role is to also assist in the counselling work in schools, so the counsellors that was mentioned by honourable Lal, Madam Chairperson, are the counsellors that are just school-based. We are replacing them with Child Protection Officers, who are also doing some basic counselling in schools.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- In terms of the training of those Child Protection Officers to become counsellors, how are they trained? How long does it take to train them before you deploy them to a school?

MR. M. NACUVA.- Madam, we have a statutory body called the National Substance Abuse

Council and they are responsible. One of their core deliverables is to conduct testimony to our teachers. They usually have it in Divisions, Districts and also in clusters where they go down and do professional development, just on basic counselling to our Child Protection Officers.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- We do have questions that have been prepared for us as well. Also remember that we will be reporting back to Parliament on the two Annual Reports, if we could focus our questions on the Annual Reports before us.

HON. V. LAL.- Madam Chairperson, through you, in comparing the two Reports, I can see there is a significant drop in the number of teachers in secondary schools, which is more than 500, compared to 2021-2022 and 2022-2023. Why is that? What is happening to the teachers?

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- We noted as well, during the number of years that we have had after COVID-19, the migration and resignations, I think that is where honourable Lal is coming from.

MS. A. LEWAQAI.- Madam Chairperson, through you, you may understand now that the number of migration is increasing every year for teachers migrating overseas. That is one of the major reasons, the resignation of teachers, especially secondary teachers. We cannot compete with developed countries in terms of salaries, but the Ministry has put in place a lot of strategies, like incentives for retention purposes, and we continue to work on that. We are working at specifically looking into teacher welfare policies. There are a lot of other initiatives, like salary increase that the honourable Minister may have mentioned in Parliament in the past Sitting.

One of the major reasons is resignation, migration - the exits. It has dropped in 2024, but it was at its peak in 2023, about 1,896 exits.

HON. V. LAL.- Madam Chairperson, through you, you are still not telling me how are the schools coping with the number of teachers because compared to the number of

students in the schools, how are the schools coping with the less number of teachers now with the same number of students?

MR. M. NACUVA.- Honourable Member, the question you are asking, how do we stop exits?

HON. V. LAL.- I am not saying how you should stop, I am saying how you are coping.

MR. M. NACUVA.- The simple answer is that we still have vacancies in schools. We can graduate as many teachers as we want, and this is not only the teaching sector, but also across the entire country. If you look at Maslow's hierarchy of needs, you need to fulfil the physiological needs first, and the first thing that teachers will look for is salary. We just do not have that. We cannot match that, so what our team is trying to do is trying to fulfil level 2 and level 3. If you do not fulfil that level one, we have resignations who prefer to go to NEC, to become apple pickers rather than be teachers, just because of the sheer economic prowess they get from their ability to buy a house. Do we have the financial and the economic capacity to increase their salaries across the board to meet the salaries in other countries? That is not my area but looking at it from a holistic point of view, I wish I had an answer for you, to tell you that we are coping.

I get issues from my Head of Schools who are constantly asking me for teachers. Where do we get them from? We are working on strategies, but it is not going to be a quick fix. It is the same thing with our health system. It is a real concern. It is not that we are not concerned about it, we are trying to be proactive by going to the high schools where we pick our teachers and train them, so that we can fast track them, but then you are not allowing them to grow the normal growth rate that the former teachers had, who went through proper grooming and training, and then reintroducing them into schools. I wish I had an answer for you, and I will fill that question and take responsibility for that.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Just a reminder, when someone decides to migrate, it is not a sixmonth thing, it takes more than a year, two years, perhaps, to decide as a family to change jobs, to uproot from your family. We cannot just say, why have they just moved in the last six months or so?

It is a long-term decision for a family to change jobs and decide to migrate.

HON. V. LAL.- There are certain teachers who are trained to teach in secondary schools, but are teaching in primary schools now. Can you confirm that?

MR. S. NAUGA.- Madam Chairperson, we can admit that. I believe it has already been delivered by the honourable Minister in the Cabinet, with the number of our secondary school graduates who are teaching in primary schools.

HON. V. LAL.- Can we not bring these secondary school teachers back to their secondary schools?

MR. S. NAUGA.- Madam Chairperson, just to correct that, the data that the honourable Member has been asking is the 2021. As we speak for 2025, we have sufficient teachers in all our schools throughout Fiji.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Again, I ask the honourable Members to, please, stick to what we are talking about – the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 Annual Reports – because that will reflect on how we report back to Parliament in the next Sitting.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Reflecting on the 2022-2023 Annual Report, the retirement age has moved from 55 years to 60 years. On page 39, in total appointments issued under Acting, you have 3,011. Why are they still in acting positions and their positions have not been confirmed? When you spoke about getting back the members who are redundant or any employment under Ministry of Education in 2022-2023, were the Open Merit Recruitment System OMRS guidelines followed for each of them? Can you confirm that? There are two parts to the question.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Page 39 of the 2022-2023 Annual Report right at the top, it is a few years old, so the acting positions which was 3,011, how has that changed over the last couple of years? What did you do to make those positions permanent?

MR. P. KAUNISELA.- Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, the Ministry is aligning itself with the OMRS Policy 2016. The Ministry is always focusing on that recruitment process and ensure that all appointments are done correctly and follow the procedures and the systems in place within the policy, together with the Ministry of Civil Service.

For the acting appointments, considering that the Ministry is the largest workforce across Government, we are working towards filling all the acting appointments and to date, the Ministry is still working to fill quite a number of acting positions. A few, I must say, is still pending, but the Ministry is working towards trying to seek avenues in the recruitment process by engaging with other private organisations, such as KPMG, to speed up that process.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Chairperson, just a follow up, thank you for that data. For teachers who were charged or lost their teaching licence, can they still be recruited back into the Ministry?

MR. M. GAUNA.- Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, for teachers who are willing or interested to come back to the Service, we have a system in place that we do clearance for them in case they have pending legal issues, some payments need to be done to the Ministry and other areas which we consider before engaging the Ministry's need to get them on board as a teacher. Apart from that, we also have the Fiji Teachers Registration Authority (FTRA). They have their own process and their criteria are rigorous.

At this point, honourable Members and Madam Chairperson, I think the process currently in place is quite a good one. I must say that getting a teacher into a classroom goes through various processes, not only with the Ministry of Education but also with FTRA.

MR. M. NACUVA.- Madam Chairperson, I wanted to add that so that the Committee can understand. In 2019, I was an advisor through DFAT with the HR Department of the Ministry. One of the things that I was tasked with was to come up with a P2P that could be live in nature - a person to a post, meaning that when you click on at any one time, it would tell you the exact number of teachers in schools, the postings through our FESA, et cetera. The best that we could do was to have a system that was 99.96 percent accurate, which means that at any one time when you click on the dashboard, it would give you a Person to Post with a plus or minus eight teachers, which means eight teachers would be out of place always and it is because of the movement that happens within the Ministry. You are looking at 13,000 teachers that move - transfers, replacements, overseas leave, and I have been able to trend that over the years to see that we have an Enterprise Control Panel (ECP) right now, that can give that exact number, but to that accuracy only. If we are having those eight movements, at any time in a day, you have eight teachers moving, there is always going to be this flux, so acting is always going to be part and parcel of the Ministry.

When a person moves, someone has to take over. It is something that we are trying to manage so that it is not prolonged. Firstly, it does not motivate the teacher and, secondly, it does not create stability. Again, with the exits that is going on, it is always the dynamics, it is just the magnitude of the Ministry. We are not making an excuse, but we do have a current system with an accuracy of 99.994, I think. There is always a variance of eight teachers. When you press the button, it will tell you the establishment, but there is always going to be eight out of place because of the processes that we have.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- I have a couple of questions. One is about the rural and maritime students and transport assistance for them. Coming from a maritime area myself, I know how difficult it is for our children, in particular, my village and my husband's village, to go to another island for school.

In 2022-2023, you had around 3,000 students needing transportation assistance, both over land and over sea. How does the Ministry assess the effectiveness of that support? I know that there was probably a mismatch in calculation of fuel costs because for us in the islands, the price of diesel in Suva and the price of diesel in Kadavu, for example, is very different. It caused a lot of difficulties in getting children back to school at the beginning of the school year. How often does the Ministry take a look at how much budget is being allocated to make sure that children from rural areas, Rotuma, for example, up in Naitasiri, out in the islands in Lau, Lomaiviti, do get to go to school because the fuel is being paid in a timely manner? Receipts are being collected when they come to the Subdivisional Education Offices.

MR. M. NACUVA.- Madam Chairperson, through you, I will answer that with our Manager Finance. I am sure you would have heard that there was an issue in Kadavu on the boat, a most recent one at Kavala Bay. You are right, the cost of transportation is not cheap. I have had a discussion with MSAF and through our Finance Department to come to a standard figure that is better than what they got before, probably not as satisfactory to the boat owners.

Coming up with a standard unit metric value for transportation is something we are working towards because of the geographical location, specifically for RSL from Naitasiri will be different from the RSL in Tailevu, even though the mileage is the same, the terrain and the road condition is going to be different. We are coming up with a formula and it is something that we are working towards.

MS. A. RAVUGA.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, at the moment, our Unit is revising the Transport Policy. We have been aware of the increase in fuel cost in the maritime areas, especially in Kadavu and that is something that we are considering at the moment. We will incorporate that into our policy because we have to consider the children, we have to look at the attendance and the geographical location that they travel, so that is something that we are working on at this moment.

MR. M. NACUVA.- In addition, Madam Chairperson, it also depends on some of the schools. For secondary schools, we can expect the child to go in and board and then maybe go home once or twice but for primary schools, we have to be sensitive that these children come in and then weekend out. When we are transporting someone from Baba

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Ceva all the way to Kavala Bay by boat and you only have three children on that boat, the cost is quite substantial so, again, for myself, every child's education is important. It is coming to a compromise - sometimes asking the boat owners to do things to be committed to the education of their children rather than having it as a business. I know it is not fair because they have a livelihood, they have a family to feed but that is what some of the boat owners in Kadavu are doing. They are finding other means to sustain the cost, but we are looking for a solution.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- I have a question about the Menstrual Hygiene Management Initiative from 2022-2023. Your Annual Report says \$1.45 million was spent to support just under 58,000 female students, which is a great initiative, and I thank the Ministry for thinking about menstruating girls, especially in remote and underserviced areas. What are some of the reporting mechanisms that the Ministry of Education is using to assess the initiative's impact on school attendance and participation in school because of having that initiative available for female students? If you wish, we can send you this question in written form. We do have some time before we report back to Parliament. I know some of these are coming off from left field, et cetera, but I appreciate it if you have some preliminary answers.

MS. R. RAVASUA.- Madam, can we please come back to you after half an hour when we return from here?

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Absolutely, thank you very much.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Madam Chairperson, back to RSL and the boat, I noticed there are 29 boats and 47 RSL that were issued operating licences between 2022-2023, in Kadavu, Lau, Lomaiviti and Rotuma.

This request comes from the operators almost every second week on the effectiveness of receiving their remittances from the Ministry. I keep flagging the honourable Minister on that and I know they will be listening this morning. They want me to ask this question.

They leave early in the morning to pick up children, bring them safely to the school and then they take the children back home safely. When they are not paid on time, they have household, they have business to run, they have a payment to pay the bank, so they are at a disadvantage because the bank normally charge extra interest for late payment of their loan from the bank. What is the Ministry doing about it? What is the cause of the delay in the payment for those who are operating RSL and the boat in our maritime islands?

MR.M. NACUVA.- Madam Chairperson, through you, I acknowledge what you are saying, it is a fact. There have been delays and I know you are probably tired of hearing that. It is a system issue that we have, a lot of it is reactive in nature so for Finance, we have to manage the reports that come in, the format that it comes in because if not, it becomes an audit issue for us. The stage that we are trying to go through now is to become proactive so that we put forms in place that it is easier for the

RSL owners to be able to submit their receipts and submit their forms. A lot of it has to do with this back and forth. The submission of forms, sometimes they are incomplete, sometimes the forms are not in the way that it is supposed to be, and we all know the government system, if we bypass those things, it becomes an audit issue.

What we are trying to do now is to do what we had done at the FRCS when I was in charge of the transformation and move FRCS from being a policing agency to more voluntary compliant, so most of the systems we have now is online. It is systems-friendly and text-friendly. We are trying to do the same thing with education. A lot of our systems are still very reactive, and it is something that the honourable Minister is pushing the Ministry through to become more proactive in nature in engaging with our stakeholders to ensure that our system is able to push some of its processes through a lot quicker. You will see a substantial change in the next few months.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- A follow-up question on that, Madam Chairperson, I believe from the stories that I hear, the school secretaries are holding up their tickets or whatever, and they are not submitting it in a timely manner, which is causing a lot of problem in their operation. However, I thank the PS for highlighting that and the way they are trying to resolve this issue moving forward.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- My question is regarding the 2022-2023 Annual Report on page 117. I see curriculum review, but from a holistic approach, are you considering the academic curriculum review for primary and secondary school students in respect to the challenges we have with AI - the need for virtues, the need for education on entrepreneurship, self-defense, which we need to incorporate at a very tender age?

I think a lot to do more of one of my personal recommendations, that is, we need our children to be patriotic. They need to be for Fiji. That is something that I feel should be ingrained - they should be for Fiji and for this nation because that really has an effect on their moral behaviour. Are there any views on the review of the academic curriculum? Was there any assessment done on the quality of students graduating, whether it is from the businesses in the workforce or whether it is from the academic tertiary institutions?

Is there any assessment of the quality or any data on that? If not, whether it can be reflected in this report, going forward?

MR. M. NACUVA.- Madam Chairperson, in response to your last question, we are working very closely in collaboration with tertiary institutions and as far as that question is concerned, we all know that the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) has been there since 2013, which needs to be reviewed and that is one of the areas, including the Education Act, which will address the question of assessment, the quality of our graduates either from secondary training to tertiary and also from tertiary to the workforce.

The review of the two documents this year will surely address these gaps that we are facing today in our country. For the curriculum review, the NCF is still to be reviewed this year, but it is an ongoing process, and we have been reviewing our curriculum. There are plans to integrate TVET programmes, the entrepreneurship education and skills, bringing it down to our ECE, and from ECE to Year 8, as we have already engaged in the secondary level, but just a little bit of strengthening in that area so that it is aligned to our legislative documents and to the demands of the labour market. Honourable Member, whatever you have mentioned, that is a process that the Ministry is engaged in this year.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- A follow up on that because the whole matter was on reflecting of data and the Annual Report. Under the Ministry of Education, as I see on page 10, these statutory authorities – the SAAC, FTRA, Higher Education Commission Fiji and TELS, could you update the Committee if those four Authorities submit their own annual report, or if they submit it to the Ministry and it should reflect in the Ministry's annual report?

MS. R. RAVASUA.- Yes, they submit their own reports.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Do they submit it to Parliament or to the Ministry Because if they submit it to the Ministry, it should be reflected in this Annual Report of yours?

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- You are welcome to answer the question, we can write and add that to our written questions to the Ministry.

Can I ask about utilisation percentages from 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 - the utilisation percentage of your budgets, and how effective were those funds spent in relation to your planned programmes for that year and the capital projects? Was it a good utilisation percentage or was it not? Was it a low utilisation percentage? If it was low, can you explain why that might be so? Again, in the interest of time, we are happy to send that to you, Madam, in written form.

HON. V. LAL.- I have a supplementary question on the same issue, on the audit opinion. My question is to the Manager Finance. What measures have the Ministry taken to address or improve on the audit opinion of not modified?

MS. A. RAVUGA.- The Ministry of Education's 2020 Audit Report was a qualified opinion and in 2021, it was a modified report because the Ministry has improved on some of its processes. What the audit has raised, we have tried to improve on those processes, and we are still working on the improvements. We are trying to better on the audit report.

HON. V. LAL.- I am just going through this 2022-2023 Report on page 88-89, it is reflected there that it is not a modified opinion.

MS. A. RAVUGA.- Madam Chairperson, can we send a written respond to that, please.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Are you happy with that, honourable Lal?

HON. V. LAL.- Yes, Madam.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Yes, that will be fine.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Madam Chairperson, for the library services, there were 28 schools that were in the reporting year. How effective is the library service at the moment because our children these days are more into digital learning?

MR. M. NACUVA.- Madam Chairperson, we do have e-platforms for engaging our students in terms of reading but one of the things that the Ministry is trying to bring back now is the concept of reading books. I remember we were having a committee meeting on literacy and one of our advocates said, "We are coming up with this concept of making reading sexy again", so they are using that. My apologies, Madam, we were trying to find a way to make it attractive because people prefer to go through their phones. However, we are trying to make reading to that level of attractiveness, that a student would go away from mobile phone and actually prefer to read books. I know we are moving towards the digital era but what we found is books still have a strong basis for ensuring that knowledge is captured.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- I do wish you all the best with that. It is very important for parents to read to their children so that children learn how to pronounce words properly.

It builds their confidence in speaking but, again, it goes right back to the home, does it not?

I just wanted to say, ‘thank you’. I know that teaching is not a job, it is a calling, so I want to thank every teacher in this room and every teacher who is watching. I know that it is not an easy job, especially in this time that we are going through. I am mindful of the time again which I am going to open the floor to the honourable Members.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Madam Chairperson, with the health promoting schools and sport promoting schools, we just had a very successful Coca-Cola Games lately. Is the Ministry looking at implementing or ensure equitable access to sports facilities to standardise the level of preparation for all schools? Perhaps, you can do it by Division to start off, this is just a general question.

MR. M. NACUVA.- Madam Chairperson, there are two answers. The first one is through the facilities. When I first came in, I went to the Government schools just to see the sporting facilities and that was when I was the Permanent Secretary for Youth and Sports. I had wanted to see what the sporting facilities was like. Unfortunately, it is not to the standard that would warrant us to be competitive. Sports, as you know, is an important component of the education curriculum and one of the things that the Ministry has done now is to engage with the two Ministries to collaborate.

Most recently, we have just initiated the Fiji Sports Council to do an evaluation. We are starting with Government schools because we still have control. It is easier to access, to look at the swimming pools, the courts, and the cost that would be involved in bringing it to equitable standards for competitions and the cost is substantive.

What we are looking at is, perhaps, a partnership rather than the Ministry bearing the cost. Is there a way to have a co-sharing of the facilities so that it becomes financially viable to operate. If not, our sporting facilities are quite expensive to maintain, so we are looking at options and, especially, looking at all sports, not just rugby.

One of the initiatives that the honourable Minister has just initiated is to have competitions in the Divisions, so the team is looking at having these tournaments in the Divisions and then having the finals in the Central Division. He will probably be sharing that later with honourable Members.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- I thank the Permanent Secretary for that explanation. A follow-up question on that, with health-promoting schools, I believe many schools have their own canteen. I am just worried about the products that are sold at the canteen and also

the hawkers who are parked beside the fence of the school and selling from there. They are making profit over the health of our children, especially that type of sweets and snacks that they sell along the school corridor. Even in some schools, Madam Chairperson, the teachers are also selling in the school. I have personally seen this when I do school visits. They are also doing business while in the school. Does the Ministry have any policy or guideline on that?

MR. M. NACUVA.- We do have a school canteen policy, however, it is the regulation and the enforcement that needs to be strengthened, Sir.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Yes, I noted that, Madam Chairperson. They have a school canteen policy, but the products that are being sold in the school is damaging to the health of our children. If that can be considered, in moving forward, Madam Chairperson.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Before honourable Rinesh Sharma asks his question, I wanted to point your attention to that paragraph, PS. That was the report from this Committee on the 2022-2023 Fiji National Sports Commission Annual Report. The National Sports Commission had a recommendation, a request, that if teaching schools could bring back specialised PE teachers, someone who goes to teaching school, wanting to be a PE teacher.

MR. M. NACUVA.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, I have to declare that I am also the Permanent Secretary for Youth and Sports. We have a collaboration that is ongoing. I have declared my interest so that it is now at the DS level, the collaboration between the two Ministries to have specialists who come through the Ministry of Youth and Sports, and we have identified the submissions being made to the Ministry of Education to consider having that in the various schools.

Again, we are starting with Government schools to start with. We do not want to flood the academic curriculum. There is an academic review that is going on, the review of the Education Act. There is quite a lot of moving parts with the Ministry at the moment and some of those initiatives, we are looking at piloting and one of the pilots is through the Government school with the introduction of specialised, not only, looking at PMEC teachers, not only in physical education, we are also looking at music and arts.

We are using our Valelevu Youth Training Centre for the National Youth Band. We are preparing submissions as well, in collaboration, and like I said, I have declared that interest so that the Deputy Secretaries work together on that.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Chairperson, my final question to the Ministry is on Page 12 about clean water and sanitation. Can you enlighten the Committee on the number of schools that are without clean water or Government-supplied water?

I will narrate a quick case, Naloto District School was flagged, I do not know, they tried their best. I went there personally so as the Ministry of Health had sent a report. I sent it to the honourable Prime Minister, and I think within two days, he assured the headteacher that he will get it connected to the school, connected to the WAF supply. That is just one of the cases.

Since it is part of the National Development Plan and SDGs, how many schools do not have WAF connection and what is being done? Is it supported by the Ministry funding, or is it for the school to source or CSOs and NGOs stepping in? It is a basic necessity because we have had deaths in Moto, Ba, I think in 2023, where residents died but this school is around that area too. Can we have some data on that, please?

MR. M. NACUVA.- Madam Chairperson, if we could respond to that in writing, Sir.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- I think we will take the final question from honourable Lal.

HON. V. LAL.- Madam Chairperson, thank you for allowing me. What I have noticed with the submittees that there are some issues in teaching of vernacular in primary schools. My question is, how the selection of students done for those who graduate from primary training institutions because there was a policy that they should do, at least, up to Form 4, the teaching of vernacular in both languages. When these students become teachers, they say that they have not done *Hindi* or they have not done *iTaukei*, so they cannot teach. That is an issue. How is the selection done for those who will be graduating as primary school teachers so that they are able to teach *iTaukei* and *Hindi* in primary schools?

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, honourable Lal, a good question.

MR. S. RAUGA.- Madam Chairperson, the question on the teaching of vernacular, I want to share with you, Sir, that we used to emphasise on conversational teaching of vernacular in *Vosa Vakaviti* and *Hindi*. What you have shared with us regarding the teaching of vernacular is a fact. That is why for this year, we have started off whereby the Ministry has to come in for the interview of our teachers. We are working with the TSLs in regard to the quota of trying to address the number of *iTaukei* and Indo-Fijian teachers to teach in primary so that the teaching of vernacular is addressed.

Our honourable Minister, together with our senior staff, have been discussing it through our senior staff meeting that this need to be taken seriously - the teaching of vernacular in schools. We are working on that, Sir, because right now, it also goes back to the appointment of teachers. In most of our schools, we have ethnicity issues where some of our *iTaukei* dominant schools where majority are *iTaukei* have some of our Indo-Fijian teachers. We are trying to address that in our appointment so that the teaching of vernacular - *iTaukei*, *Urdu* and *Hindu* are addressed in all our schools.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Madam Chairperson, I noticed that the Ministry has appointed chaplaincy for some Government schools. What about the other schools? Also, those who are appointed are from the Methodist Church? What about other faith, would the Ministry consider that for other faith-based, as well as other education society like the Gujarati society, the Sanatan Pratindhi Sabha society?

MR. M. NACUVA.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, the Ministry is sensitive to the various diversity of the students in our schools. With the Government schools, it is because of the fact that the Ministry is directly managing the schools, but we also understand that in Government schools, we have a lot of diversity as well. It is something that we will take on board, Sir. We do have strong collaborative relationships with the various religious groups through the Ministry but, perhaps, making it visible at the school level is something that the Ministry will need to work on, so it is visible to the students. It is something that we will take on board, Sir.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you very much, honourable Members. Thank you, PS, and to your Senior Team for coming here today to answer our questions. Thank you for answering the oral questions, and we look forward to getting answers to some of the written questions that we will send you later today.

Thank you very much for your time. Again, on behalf of the Committee, we want to thank you and thank every single teacher in Fiji for answering the call.

MR. M. NACUVA.- Madam Chairperson, I just wanted to share very quickly an initiative that the honourable Minister has put in place. The Ministry is now part of the Fiji Business Excellence Award framework. We have just made our submission. It is a learning process for the Ministry. It is opening the Ministry up for criticism by evaluators, so it is going to be a journey for us. We have already identified a lot of gaps that exist in our processes, in our data, and especially in how we translate our results. That is something that I can assure Government that the Ministry is working towards, and you will see a change in how we operate.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you most sincerely, PS and to your Management Team and thank you to honourable Members. Thank you to the members of the public. Those of you who have sent your comments, we do note your comments, and we thank you most sincerely for your great suggestions, one of which was parents taking responsibility for their children's transportation, which I think is key, and not relying entirely on the transportation allowance. *Vinaka*.

The Committee adjourned at 11.03 a.m.

Written Responses

2021-2022 MOE PROGRESS

VISSION, MISSION & VALUES

Our Vision

Education and cultural diversity for empowered and sustainable futures for all.

Our Mission

To prepare all Fijians to contribute to a sustainable and progressive nation through holistic and empowering education that appreciates and embraces the unique values of all its citizens.

Our Values

Educational provision is based upon a core of intrinsic and enduring values. These are:

- Human rights and human dignity
- Lifelong learning
- Flexibility
- Environment sustainability
- Fairness and respect for truth
- Responsibility
- Safety and security for all
- Creativity
- Peace and prosperity
- Civic pride
- Honesty
- Compassion
- Cultural understanding
- Empathy and tolerance
- Faith
- Sense of family and community
- Integrity

Guiding Principles In education, the student is the centre of everything. In all other services that are provided, the customers are of high priority. The delivery of all services is guided by the Ministry's commitment to:

- Recognise the importance of strong and healthy partnerships with all stakeholders;
- Ensure relevance and responsiveness as required characteristics of all endeavours;
- Improve access and equity, including our constitutional rights and responsibilities
- Maintain a high level of professionalism in all that is done; excellence; and
- Maintain high levels of quality and

OUR PORTFOLIO



Hon. Premila Devi Kumar
Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts



Dr Anjeela Jokhan
Permanent Secretary of Education, Heritage and Arts



Timoci Bure
*Head National Education
Delivery Services*



Edwin Kumar
Head Corporate Service



Hem Chand
Head Human Resources

OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

The explicit roles and responsibilities of the Ministry of Education include:

Design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of educational legislation, policies and programmes in Fiji. MEHA provides the structures, human resources, budgets, and administrative and management support to ensure that the quality-of-service delivery is maintained at a high level. We are specifically tasked to conduct and deliver education services to the following:

- Early Childhood Care Education, Kindergarten;
- Primary Education;
- Secondary Education;
- Specialised Schools for Children with Special Needs;
- Vocational Schools;
- Students in the years of compulsory schooling (Year 1 – Year 12) and those participating in Formal studies;
- Students in Vocational Education and Training Programmes;
- Teaching Personnel; and
- School Management Committees and Controlling Authorities.

RESPONSIBILITIES

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

OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The overarching strategic priority of MEHA in context of national development is to produce better, holistically educated, trained, and skilled job seekers and job creators that support

and grow the economies of the future for Fiji. The following are the ten major Strategic Priority Categories for the Ministry:

1. Infrastructure and Assets;
2. Legislation and Planning;
3. Systems and Processes;
4. Standards, Monitoring and Quality Assurance;
5. Workforce Engagement & Development / Human Capital; 6. Access and Equity;
7. Curricular (Learning and Teaching);
8. Culture, Heritage and Arts;
9. Partnerships, Cooperation and Communication; and
10. Research and Development

PROGRESS

SCHOOL DATA

Early Childhood Education

- No. of ECE Centres: 864
- No. of teachers: 13479
- No. of students: 12,951

Special Inclusive Schools

- No. of SIE schools: 18
- No. of teachers: 241
- No. of students: 1,072

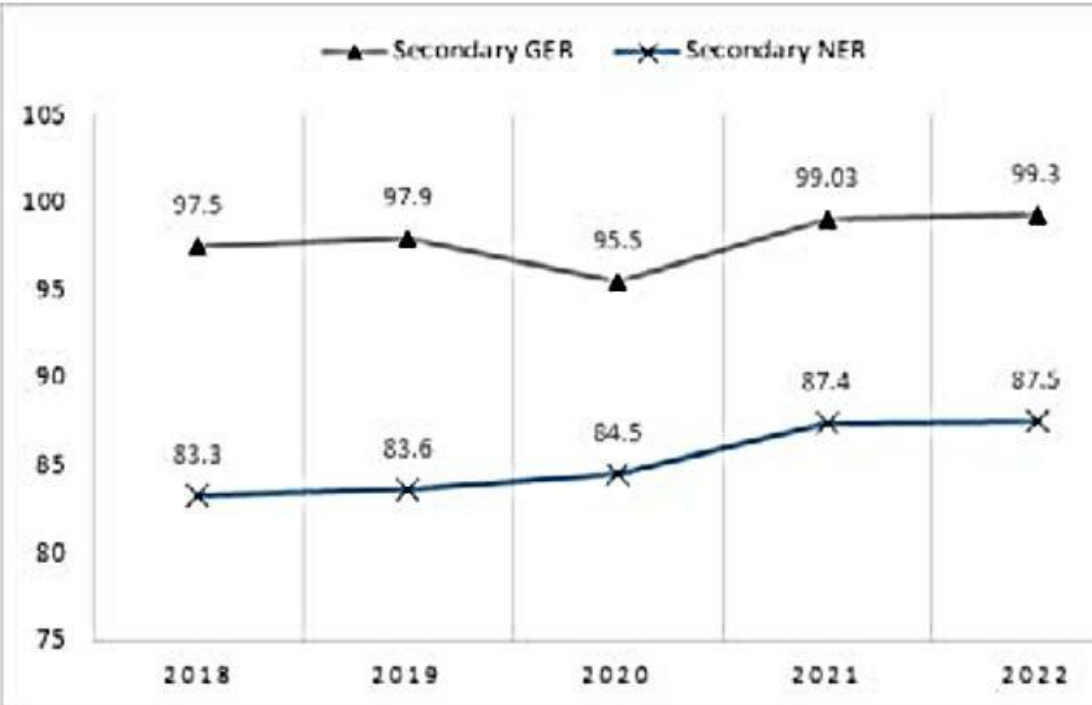
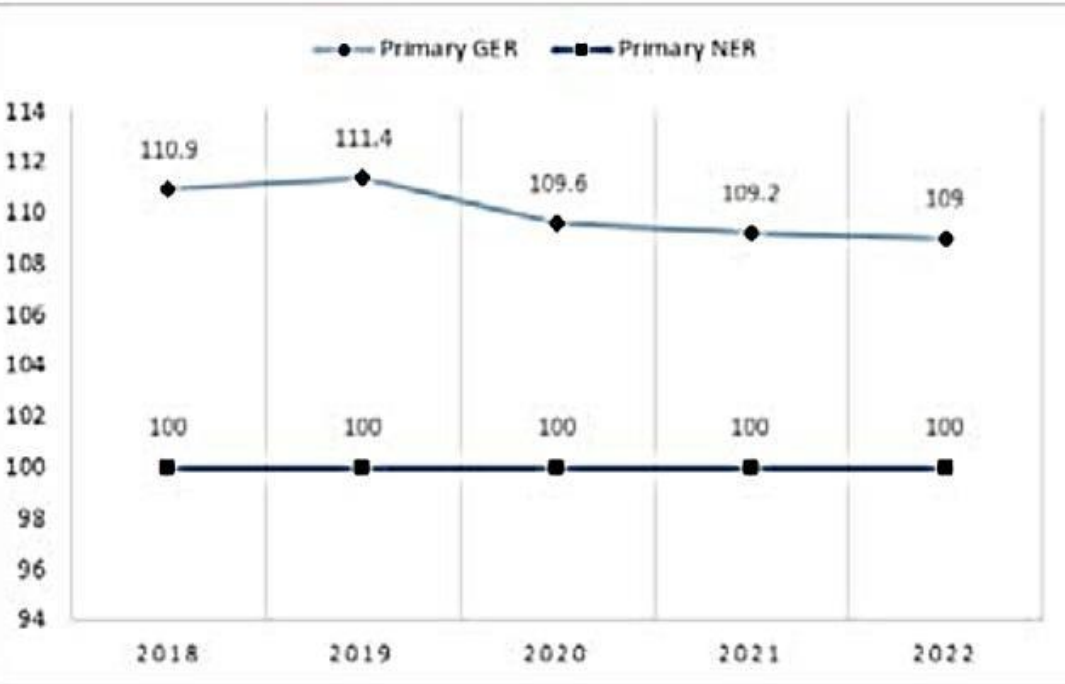
Primary School

- No. of schools: 736
- No. of teachers: 6299
- No. of students: 149,432

Secondary School

- No. of schools: 176
- No. of teachers: 5674
- No. of students: 72,360

NET/GROSS ENROLMENT



GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

Transport Assistance

The Ministry received a budget of \$ 16,426,000 for transporting assistance for eligible students attending primary and secondary schools. A total of 93,114 students benefitted from this initiative.

Boat and Outboard Engine Assistance to Schools

The Ministry of education also assisted 6 primary schools and 1 secondary school with boats and engine

ECE Free Education Grant

\$2,504,400 million was allocated to the 13,479 five-year-olds attending 864 registered ECE Centres **Free Textbooks**

A total of 490 different level textbooks were dispatched to schools during the financial year. This included 305, 923 Primary textbooks and 185, 005 Secondary school textbooks

Water Tanks

39 Primary and 11 Secondary schools benefited from this assistance during the financial year.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

Library Resources Library Resources

- A total of 9 ECE Centres, 17 primary, Secondary and 1 Vocational schools were assisted with their library set-up.
- A total of 1, 200 books were distributed to the 36 selected schools.

WORKFORCE

The Ministry has a total of 13, 571 staff which is made up of 1, 641 Senior Executives, Senior Managers and Support Officers. Approximately 96 % of the total Ministry's work force are based in schools.

Occupational Type	Number	
	Male	Female
ECE Teachers	15	1326
Primary Teachers	1647	3594
Secondary Teachers	1557	2403
Senior Executives (PS/HHR/HCS/HNES)	4	2
School Administrators (HOD/AP/AHT/VP)	793	824
Senior Managers	14	4
Non-Teaching	115	177
GWE (if still existed)	157	46
Head Primary	531	190
Head Secondary	116	56
TOTAL	4949	8622

SCHOOL ENROLMENT

Year 5 Student Enrolled

There is a total of 12,951 ECE students attending the 864 registered ECE and schools.

Special and Inclusive Education

There are 18 special schools in Fiji and 122 mainstream schools that offer inclusive education.

Special Schools - 1072

Mainstream Inclusive - 336

Total : 1408

Primary Education

There were 149, 432 students attending the 736 registered primary schools in Fiji.

Secondary Education

There were 72360 students attending the 176 registered secondary schools in Fiji.

EXAMINATIONS

The year 2021 to 2022 had only two national examinations administrated due to the effect of the pandemic. These were the Fiji Year 12 Certificate Examination (FY12CE) and Fiji Year 13 Certificate Examination (FY13CE).

Results

FY12CE
percentage English greater
than 50 + 3 Best Subjects

FY13CE
percentage English greater
than 50 + 3 Best Subjects

National	66%
Female	68%
Male	63%

National	70%
Female	71%
Male	69%

2022-2023 MOE ANNUAL REPORT

Vision, Mission, Values

Our Vision

Nurturing innovative, lifelong learners and enriching lives through quality education delivery for all.

Our Mission

To cultivate holistic, relevant and inclusive learning experiences benchmarked to global best practices that empower independent, responsible and critical learners enabling them to effectively adapt and address the nation's changing socioeconomic needs and enrich the nation's future **Our Values**

The Ministry of Education ensures that service delivery promotes our core values:

- Traditions and culture;
- Child centered;
- Excellence;
- Sense of responsibility, Accountability and Professionalism;
- Civic Pride;
- Honesty & Integrity;
- Respect towards nature and the environment;
- Diversity, Inclusivity and Equity

Our Guiding Principles

We believe that every child is unique and has the potential for greatness. We invest in the social and emotional well-being of children. We promote learning experiences that impact life. We shall be guided by the following principles:

- (i) Striving for excellence in all we do;
- (ii) Build trust through collaboration and partnership;
- (iii) Promote accountability and transparency; inclusivity, and non-discrimination;
- (iv) Responsibility and Accountability;

- (v) Building Team Work (Life Skills);
- (vi) Building cultural competency;
- (vii) Integrate accessibility, safety and security

Our Responsibilities

The explicit roles and responsibilities of the Ministry of Education includes:
Design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of educational legislation, policies and programmes in Fiji.

The MOE provides the structures, human resources, budgets, and administrative and management support to ensure that the quality of service delivery is maintained at a high level.

We are specifically tasked to conduct and deliver quality and inclusive education services to the following:

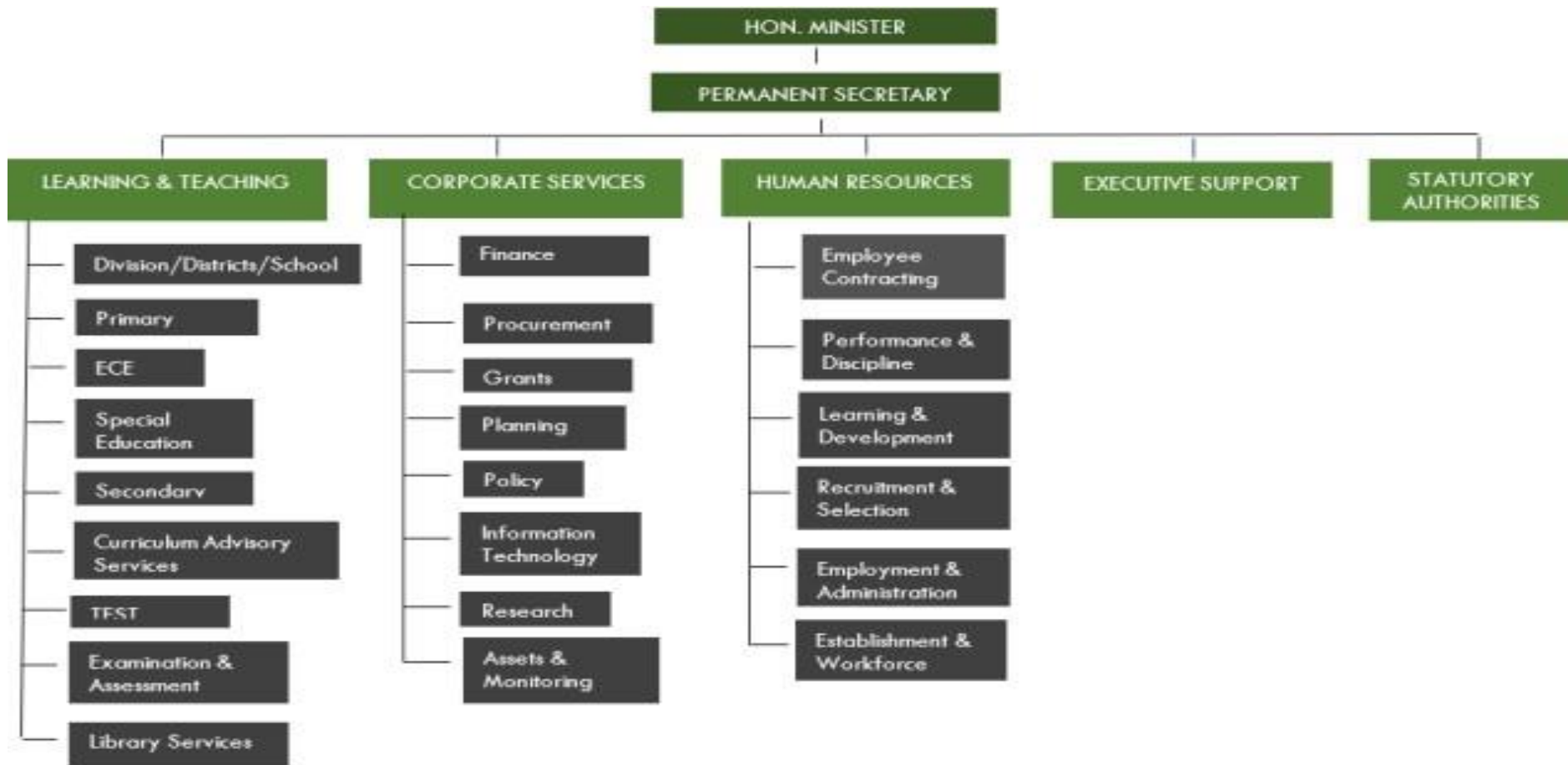
- Early Childhood Education and Care;
- Primary education; • Secondary education;
- Special Schools for children with special needs;
- Technical, Vocational, Education and Training;
- School Management Committees and other stakeholders.

Our Strategic Priorities

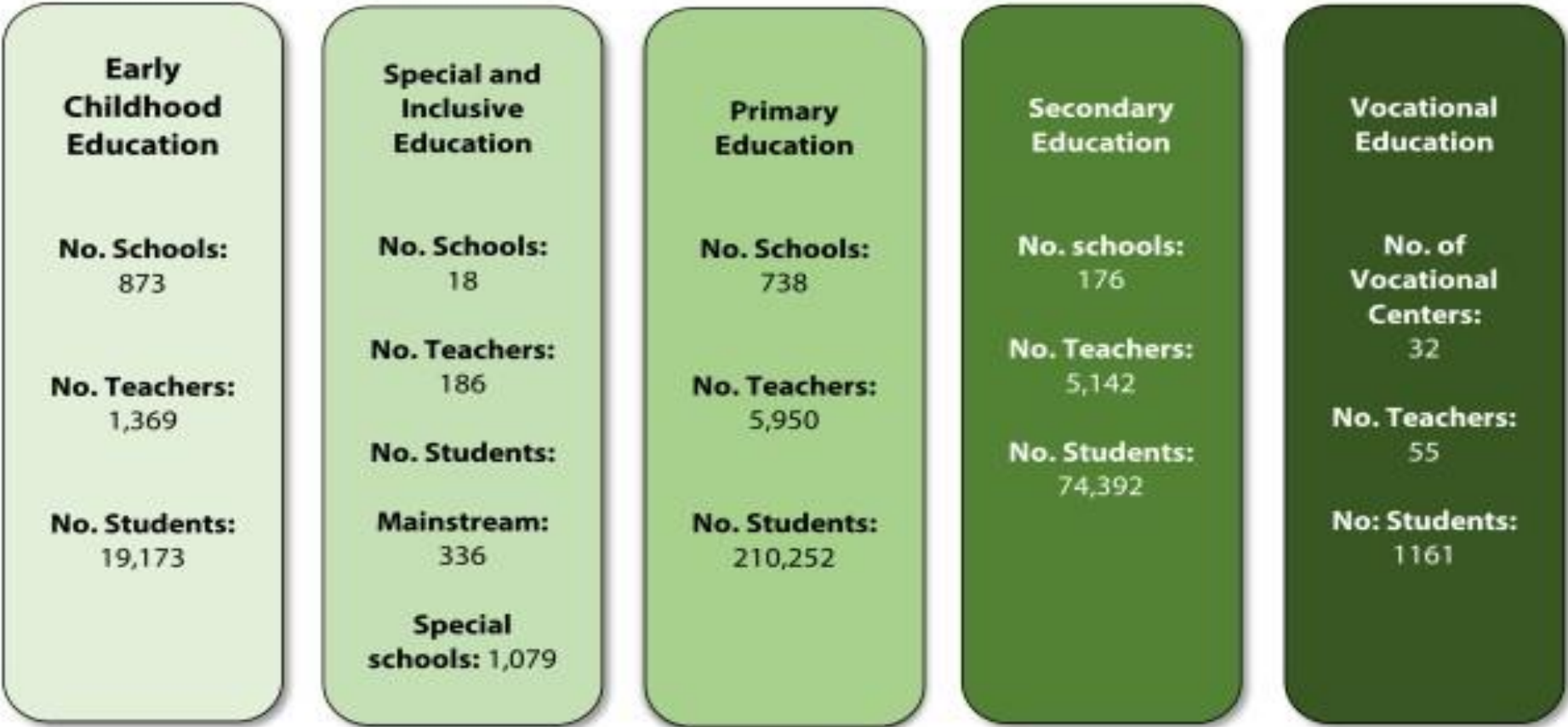
The overarching strategic priority of Ministry in context of national development and aligned to the 2023 Education Summit Thematic Areas is aimed at producing better, holistically educated, trained, and skilled job seekers and job creators that support and grow the economies of the future for Fiji. Following are the major Strategic Priority Categories for the Ministry:

- Legislation & Policy Administration;
- Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation;
- Finance Administrations;
- Infrastructure and Assets;
- Workforce;
- Curriculum, Assessment & Library;
- Technical and Vocational Education & Training (TVET) & Life Skills;
- Information Technology & Digital Learning;
- Student Wellbeing; and
- Community and Stakeholder Partnership

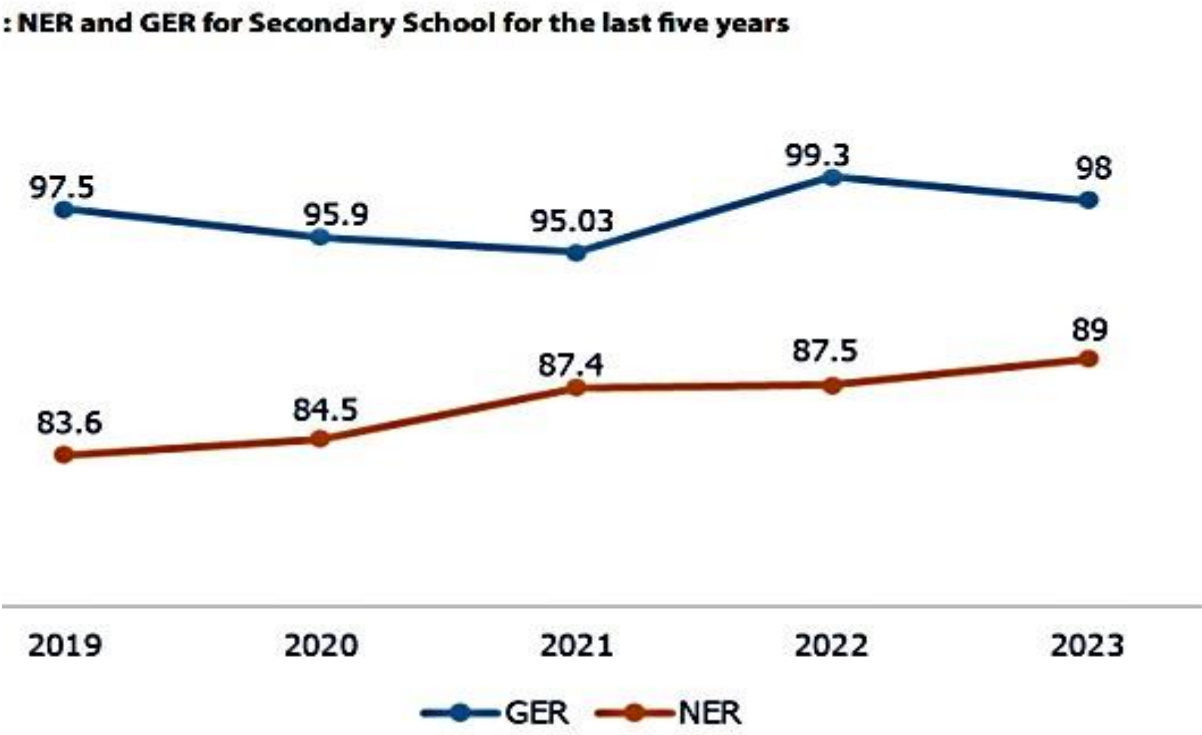
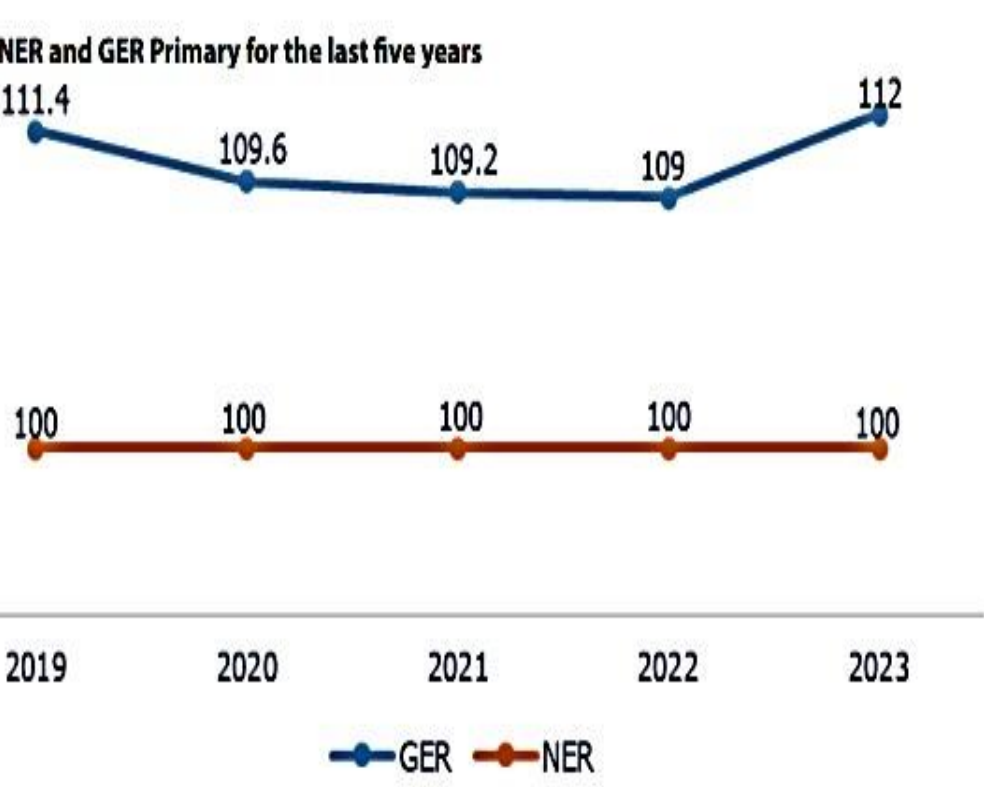
Our Structure



School Data



Enrolment Rates



Government Initiatives

Free Education Grant

239,588 ECE, Primary and Secondary school students benefited from the amount of \$68,389,343 given as Free Education Grant to schools during the financial year.

Menstrual Hygiene Management Initiative

The amount of \$ 1,448,304 was used to assist 57,549 female students from Y7 to Y13 through this initiative.

Transport Assistance Initiative

The amount of \$32,893,173.28 was used to assist 111,664 eligible students attending primary and secondary schools in Fiji.

Boat and Engine

Seven (7) schools have so far benefitted from this initiative and the amount of \$131,649.55 was used to purchase boats and engines for these schools.

Water Tank Assistance

The amount of \$78704.86 was used to purchase water tanks for schools identified and approved to receive this assistance. 55 primary and 4 secondary schools benefitted from this initiative.

Government Initiatives

School Textbooks

The free school textbooks initiative continued during the financial year whereby all school textbooks requirement by schools have been distributed.

Library Assistance

Library Services of Fiji continue to assist schools in setting up their libraries including the provision of free library books, bookshelves, book carts, furniture, and other accessories.

Government Policy of extending retirement Age from 55 – 60 years

A total of 306 Ministry's staff were re-engaged as a result of the Coalition Government policy on extending the retirement age from 55 years old to 60 years old. These include:

- 19 ECE teachers
- 190 Primary school teachers
- 81 secondary school teachers and • 16 Non-teaching officers

Repeal of the “No Jab No Job Policy”

A total of 197 Ministry’s officers were terminated as a result of the previous government policy on “No Jab No Job Policy”. 36 of these officers have since re-applied and re-reinstated during the 2022-2023 FY

Back to School Initiative

A total of 223,475 students were paid around \$44.7 million as Back-to-School Support payment for the 2023 school year. Qualified students were provided \$200 each to support them as they return to school during the academic year.

Education Summit

Pre Summit consultation conducted at the four Education Divisions. The outcome was the 2023 Denarau Declaration, the 10-year Roadmap for the MOE

Workforce

While the MOE has a total establishment of 15,087 of which, 235 are Government Wage Earners (GWE), it currently has an existing workforce of 13, 396 on the ground.

Occupational Type	Number		Total
	Male	Female	
Senior Executives (PS & DS)	2	1	3
Senior Managers (Directors)	5		5
Head Teacher	490	181	671
Principal	115	44	159
Vice Principal	84	76	160
Assistant Principal	82	48	130
HOD	365	432	797
Assistant Head Teacher	116	140	256
Teacher Secondary	1578	2386	3964
Teacher Primary	1594	3578	5172
ECE Teachers	10	1381	1391
SIE Teachers	30	127	157
Non-Teaching	82	237	319

School Enrolment

ECE

There are around 873 ECE Centres with a total of 19173 registered students

Special Inclusive Education

Schools	Total schools	Number of Students
Special Schools	18	1079
Mainstream Inclusive	122	336
Total	140	1415

Primary Education

There are 738 Primary schools spread over 9 Education districts for 2023. An additional 2 new schools compared to 736 schools in 2022.

Secondary Education

There are 176 secondary school compared to 175 in 2022. Navesau Adventist which was privatized in 2019 has now rejoined the lists of schools funded by the Ministry. There were a total of 74392 registered students in our schools during the FY.

Vocational Education

There are 32 Vocational Centres

Subjects	2021		2022		2023	
	Students	Teacher	Students	Teacher	Students	Teacher
Carpentry & Joinery 16 centres	147	18	210	16	181	15
Welding & Fabrication 2 centres	67	3	92	3	78	3
Hospitality Studies 17 centres	406	18	273	18	438	19
Fashion & Design 3 centres	26	3	44	3	30	3
Vocational Agriculture 4 centres	196	5	166	5	221	4
Automotive Engineering 5 centres	185	8	178	8	209	8
Office Technology 1 centre	5	1	2	1	4	1
Total	1032	61	965	59	1161	55

Examination

2022 National Examination Results by Levels

Examination Levels	Results
FY8E percentage English greater then 50 + 4 Best Subjects	National 62%
	Female 71%
	Male 53%
FY12CE percentage English greater then 50 + 3 Best Subjects	National 66%
	Female 68%
	Male 63%
FY13CE percentage English greater then 50 + 3 Best Subjects	National 70%
	Female 71%
	Male 69%

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence Talanoa Session

Talanoa Sessions on the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts 2021 – 2023 Annual Reports (MOE) held from Monday 02 June 2025 to Friday 06 June 2025.

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence conducted Talanoa Sessions on the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts 2021 – 2023 Annual Reports (MOE) at the Central, Eastern, and Western Divisions.

These sessions provided a platform for interested individuals and stakeholders to share their views and feedback on the services delivered by MOE.

The Talanoa Sessions were held in the following locations:

Date	Topic of Discussion	Venue	Time
Monday 02 June 2025	Talanoa session with the public and representatives from FPF, MOE and FCCC	Vunisea, Kadavu	1.15pm – 4.15pm
Tuesday 03 June 2025	Talanoa session with the public and representatives from FPF, MOE and FCCC	Rukua, Beqa	10.15am –12.15pm
Wednesday 04 June 2025	Talanoa session with the public and representatives from FPF, MOE and FCCC	Sigatoka Town	9.00am – 11.00am
Thursday 05 June 2025	Talanoa session with the public and representatives from FPF, MOE and FCCC	Tavua Town	6.00pm – 8.00pm
Friday 06 June 2025	Talanoa session with the public and representatives from FPF, MOE and FCCC	Rakiraki Town	2.00pm – 4.00pm

Below are images taken during the Talanoa Sessions

Monday 02 June 2025 - Kavala, Kadavu



Vunisea, Kadavu



Tuesday 03 June 2025 – Rukua, Beqa



Wednesday 04 June 2025 – Sigatoka



Thursday 05 June 2025 – Tavua



Friday 06 June 2025 – Rakiraki



-END-