



STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE

Consolidated Review Report of the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 Annual Reports



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Acronyms

CPOs	- Child Protection Officers
ECE	- Early Childhood Education
FCCC	- Fijian Competition and Commerce Commission
FEG	- Free Education Grant
FEMIS	- Fiji Education Management Information System
MEHA	- Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts
RSL	- Rural Service License
SDG	- Sustainable Development Goals
SIE	- Special Inclusive Education
SO	- Standing Order
TVET	- Technical and Vocational Education and Training

Chairperson's Foreword

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence (the Committee) hereby submits to Parliament the Consolidated Review Report of the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts 2021–2022 and 2022–2023 Annual Reports.

The Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts envisions a future where every individual is empowered through quality, inclusive education that fosters innovation, creativity, and lifelong learning. This vision extends beyond academic achievement, aiming to cultivate well-rounded individuals equipped with life skills, strong character, and critical thinking abilities. Through its commitment to excellence and the provision of safe and enriching learning environments, the Ministry aspires to build a prosperous and resilient nation through the long-term impact of education.

The Committee was referred the Ministry's 2021–2022 and 2022–2023 Annual Reports on 28 April 2025. As part of its review process, the Committee invited the Ministry of Education to deliver an oral public submission on 8 June 2025. This session was broadcast live via the Parliament Facebook page and aired on the Walesi Parliament Channel, ensuring public accessibility and transparency.

To further engage with the public and gather diverse perspectives, the Committee also conducted Talanoa sessions with Ministry officials and members of the public in Kadavu, Beqa, Sigatoka, Tavua, and Rakiraki. These consultations provided substantive insights, which formed the findings and recommendations outlined in this report.

The Committee extends its appreciation to the Ministry of Education for its coordination and constructive participation during the submission and consultation processes. We also express our heartfelt gratitude to all teachers across Fiji for their unwavering dedication and passion in educating the children of our nation.

I further thank the members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for their collaborative efforts in compiling this bipartisan report, and acknowledge the Secretariat for their invaluable support throughout the review process.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I respectfully submit this report to Parliament.



Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua
Chairperson

Recommendations

- 1.0 The Committee recommends the recruitment and deployment of full-time, professionally trained counsellors in all school districts and to relieve teachers from performing non-specialised welfare duties (*reference to points 3.3.2*).
- 2.0 The Committee recommends a nationwide literacy recovery program targeting Years 5 to 8, including the reinstatement of school libraries services with full-time librarians and encourage parental involvement in home reading activities (*reference to point 3.3.3*).
- 3.0 The Committee recommends the acceleration of consultations on the revised National Curriculum Framework and Education Act, ensuring that reforms are supported by clear teacher deployment planning and welfare needs (*reference to point 3.3.4*).
- 4.0 The Committee recommends urgent action to reduce teacher attrition through a combination of improved benefits, recognition programs, permanent appointments for acting teachers, and collaboration with tertiary institutions to increase enrolment in high-need subject areas like maths and physics (*reference to points 3.3.5*).
- 5.0 The Committee recommends that the Ministry implement and strengthen the structured Parent-Teacher Partnership Framework across all schools to formalise parental engagement in both academic and behavioural development (*reference to point 3.3.6*).
- 6.0 The Committee recommends replacing cash-based support with a voucher for Back-to-School Assistance, in order to prevent misuse and ensure educational resources reach intended beneficiaries (*reference to point 3.3.7*).
- 7.0 The Committee recommends a full review and digital overhaul of the student transport assistance scheme, including top-up tracking, simplification of RSL and PSV permit approvals by LTA, and establishment of a grievance redress system for complaints (*reference to points 3.3.8, 3.3.13, 3.3.14*).
- 8.0 The Committee recommends a targeted remediation program be put in place for any future pandemics, with a focus on improving digital connectivity and infrastructure in rural and maritime schools (*reference to point 3.3.9*).
- 9.0 The Committee recommends that the Ministry of Education conduct impact assessments on the Menstrual Hygiene Management initiative to measure changes in school attendance and performance (*reference to point 3.3.10*).

- 10.0 The Committee recommends that the Ministry of Education clarify reporting lines for all statutory bodies under the Ministry and strengthen the FEMIS system for real-time data for better planning and accountability (*reference to point 3.3.11*).
- 11.0 The Committee recommends the allocation of dedicated vehicles/boats to support schools in rural and maritime areas (*reference to points 3.3.12*).
- 12.0 The Committee recommends prioritising the urgent installation of electricity and reliable water supply to rural schools including Navatusila District and Thomas Baker Secondary Schools (*reference to point 3.3.16*).
- 13.0 The Committee recommends an increase in the per-student boarding grant from the current \$50 to a level that realistically meets the high cost of living over a school term, especially in rural and maritime boarding schools (*reference to point 3.3.18*).
- 14.0 The Committee recommends urgent renovation or reconstruction of the dormitory at Beqa Yanuca, Kavala, Vunisea Secondary School and similar facilities nationwide (*reference to point 3.3.19*).
- 15.0 The Committee recommends that the first priority for accommodation in university and secondary school dormitories be given to rural and maritime students, ensuring equitable access to education (*reference to point 3.3.20*).

1.0 Committee Remit and Composition

Under Standing Order 109(2)(e) the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence is mandated to look into matters related to Fiji's relations with other countries, development aid, foreign direct investment, oversight of the military, and relations with multi-lateral organizations. The members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence are as follows:



Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua
Chairperson

*Deputy Speaker of Parliament
Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs*



Hon. Rinesh Sharma
Deputy Chairperson



Hon. Ratu Isikeli Tuiwailevu
Member

Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Heritage and Arts



Hon. Penioni Ravunawa
Member

Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services



Hon. Virendra Lal
Member

1.1 Committee Secretariat Team

Supporting the Committee in its work is a group of dedicated Parliament Officers serving as the Committee Secretariat. These officers are appointed and delegated by the Secretary-General to Parliament by Standing Order 15(3)(i). The Secretariat officers are as follows:

- Mrs. Susana Korovou – Senior Committee Clerk
- Mrs. Elesi Tabuyaqona – Deputy Committee Clerk

2.0 Background and Terms of Reference

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence (the Committee), was referred the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 Annual Reports on 28 April 2025. The referral of the Annual Reports were done in accordance with SO 38(2), whereby the Committee was assigned to investigate the contents of the report and provide a report to Parliament at a future Sitting. This report is outside the usual mandate of the Committee, but the referral was made to help ease the workload of the other Standing Committees.

2.1 Procedure and Program

Public Submission (written and oral submission)

In relation to Standing Order 111 (1), the Committee is committed to upholding public trust in Parliament, by ensuring that there is public participation and that all such participation is given due consideration. The Committee had called for an oral public submission from the Ministry of Education on 08 May 2025. This session was broadcast live on Parliament Facebook page and aired on the Walesi Parliament channel. The Committee also held talanoa sessions with the general public and officials from the Ministry in the regions of Kadavu, Beqa, Sigatoka, Tavua, and Rakiraki.

A summary of the submission is provided in a later part of this report, under the heading ‘Committee’s Deliberation and Analysis’. Copies of the written submission and the verbatim from the meeting can be obtained from the online Appendices of this report, which can be accessed from the Parliament website: www.parliament.gov.fj.

3.0 Committee Deliberation and Analysis

3.1 Introduction

The Ministry of Education envisions a future where all individuals are empowered through quality, inclusive education that nurtures innovation, creativity, and lifelong learning. This vision emphasizes not just academic success, but also the development of well-rounded individuals equipped with life skills, character, and critical thinking abilities. By fostering excellence and providing a safe, enriching learning environment, the Ministry aims to build a prosperous and resilient nation through the long-term impact of education.

Following a strategic restructuring in 2023, the Ministry is now solely focused on education, enhancing its capacity to deliver its mission: cultivating holistic, globally benchmarked learning experiences that prepare independent and adaptable learners. Guided by values such as cultural respect, integrity, inclusivity, and civic responsibility, the Ministry is committed to addressing national development goals. It does so by strengthening legislation, infrastructure, digital learning, TVET, student wellbeing, and stakeholder partnerships, ensuring that education in Fiji remains responsive to changing socio-economic needs and global trends.

3.2 Summary of Ministry's 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 Annual Reports

3.2.1 Overview

3.2.1.2 Budget Allocation

The Fijian Government continues to prioritize education as a key driver for sustainable economic growth and societal development. In the Revised 2021-2022 Budget, a total of \$661.6 million was allocated to the education sector. Out of this, \$447.1 million went to the Ministry of Education, \$47.9 million to Higher Education Institutions, and \$156.5 million for scholarships, loans, and grants via the Tertiary Scholarship and Loans Board. An additional \$10 million supported school construction and rehabilitation, while \$1.4 million was directed towards Menstrual Hygiene Management for female students in Years 7 to 13. The budget also included standard ongoing initiatives such as free education (Years 1–13), transport assistance, textbook distribution, and tuition grants for ECE and TVET programs.

In comparison, the 2022-2023 Budget marked a significant increase, with the education sector receiving \$713.4 million. The Ministry of Education, then still including the Department of Heritage and Arts, was allocated \$489.9 million, while Higher Education Institutions received \$48.9 million, and \$162.6 million went to scholarships and loans. The construction and rehabilitation budget increased to \$12 million, with continued emphasis on rebuilding schools damaged by natural disasters such as TC Gita. Key programs from the previous year, including the Menstrual Hygiene Management initiative and inclusive

education support measures, were retained, reflecting the government's commitment to equitable education access and gender-sensitive policies.

The comparative analysis shows a year-on-year budget increase of \$51.8 million for the education sector, with notable enhancements in infrastructure investment and tertiary education support.

The Ministry responded that the transport assistance is based on application processed annually. The transport unit of the Ministry ensures that RSL vouchers are distributed to all education districts every term to serve remote schools. To address the gaps of transportation in maritime areas, the Ministry has donated boats and engines to support the need to transport students.

3.2.1.3 School Data

		2021-2022	2022-2023
Early Childhood Education	No. of ECE Centers	864	873
	No. of Teachers	13,479	1,369
	No. of Students	12,951	19,173
Special Inclusive Schools	No. of SIE schools	18	18
	No. of Teachers	241	186
	No. of Students	1,072	1,415
Primary School	No. of Schools	736	738
	No. of Teachers	6,299	5,950
	No. of Students	149,432	210,252
Secondary School	No. of Schools	176	176
	No. of Teachers	5,674	5,142
	No. of Students	72,360	74,392
Vocational Education	No. of Vocational Centers		32
	No. of Teachers		55
	No. of Students		1,161

Between the fiscal years 2021–2022 and 2022–2023, Fiji's education sector experienced notable shifts in student enrollment and staffing across various education levels. Early Childhood Education (ECE) saw a substantial increase in student numbers, rising from 12,951 to 19,173, while the number of centers increased slightly (864 to 873). However, there is likely a data error in the reported number of ECE teachers for 2021–2022 (13,479), which seems disproportionately high compared to the following year (1,369) and other subsectors. This may warrant verification.

Special Inclusive Education (SIE) maintained 18 schools across both years. However, student enrollment increased significantly from 1,072 to 1,415, while the number of teachers declined from 241 to 186, suggesting rising student-to-teacher ratios and possible pressure on resources in inclusive education.

In primary education, student numbers saw a sharp rise from 149,432 to 210,252, while the number of schools remained nearly constant. However, teacher numbers dropped from 6,299 to 5,950, again indicating a growing student-teacher ratio. A similar trend occurred in secondary education, where student numbers grew modestly from 72,360 to 74,392, while teachers decreased from 5,674 to 5,142.

Vocational Education data appears only for 2022–2023, with 32 vocational centers, 55 teachers, and 1,161 students, marking a clearer effort to formalize and expand technical and vocational pathways.

3.2.1.4 Government Initiatives

3.2.1.4.1 Free Education Grant (FEG)

In 2022–2023, the FEG supported 239,588 students across ECE, Primary, and Secondary schools with a total allocation of \$68.39 million, an increase from \$61.94 million in 2021–2022, which supported 236,472 students. The highest allocation remained for primary education, reflecting its large student base. Notably, both ECE and secondary education saw increased funding and student coverage year-on-year.

3.2.1.4.2 Transport Assistance

The 2022–2023 initiative supported 111,664 students with a budget of \$32.89 million, up from 93,114 students in 2021–2022, who were assisted with \$16.43 million. This near-doubling of financial investment indicates enhanced coverage and support, especially in remote districts like Lautoka-Yasawa and Macuata-Bua.

3.2.1.4.3 Menstrual Hygiene Management

The 2022–2023 program supported 57,549 female students with \$1.45 million, a consistent continuation of the initiative that was introduced in the previous year. It helped reduce hygiene-related absenteeism, promoting gender equity in education.

3.2.1.4.4 Infrastructure Assistance

- **Boats and Engines:** Both years saw support to 7 schools, mainly in maritime zones, ensuring safer and reliable school access.
- **Water Tanks:** Assistance expanded from 50 schools in 2021–2022 to 59 schools in 2022–2023, with more tanks delivered and higher capacity in 2023.
- **Library Support:** In 2021–2022, 36 schools were supported with library resources. This increased slightly in 2022–2023, which saw 28 schools formally assisted with full setups and an expanded variety of learning materials and furniture.

3.2.1.4.5 Textbooks Distribution

Free textbook distribution remained consistent across both years, ensuring that all curriculum-required books were supplied to schools. In 2021–2022, over 490,000 books were dispatched (primary and secondary combined), maintaining the standard in 2022–2023.

3.2.1.4.6 Back to School Initiative

In 2023, the Fijian Government launched the Back-to-School initiative to ease the financial burden on families and support students' smooth return to the classroom. Through this program, 223,475 students received \$200 each, amounting to a total payout of \$44.7 million.

3.2.1.4.7 Policy and Governance Improvements

Significant advancements in financial management were noted across both years:

- FEMIS improvements including automation of bank reconciliations, asset registers, and report generation.
- Enhanced compliance and transparency through online financial reporting and AGM document submission.
- Training for Heads of Schools through Moodle on financial management practices.

3.2.1.4.8 Other Notable Changes

- Retirement age was increased from 55 to 60 years in 2022–2023, resulting in the re-engagement of 306 staff, helping to retain experienced educators.
- Vocational Education saw growing attention in 2022–2023, with formal data on centers, students, and teachers included for the first time.

3.2.1.4.9 Human Resource

The Ministry of Education workforce data shows a relatively consistent structure between the two reporting periods. The total workforce in the earlier dataset (13,571) is slightly higher than the current (13,396), indicating a reduction of 175 staff. Both datasets reveal that the majority of the workforce are teaching personnel, especially in primary and secondary schools, and that females dominate the teaching profession, particularly in early childhood education (ECE).

Key comparisons:

- Senior Executive roles increased slightly from 6 to 7.
- Non-teaching staff increased from 292 to 319, showing a slight growth in support and administrative roles.
- Teaching roles, including heads and assistants, remained relatively stable, though with minor shifts in counts, suggesting ongoing workforce optimization.
- Government Wage Earners (GWE) appear in the second dataset with 212 staff, which were either phased out or not included in the previous report.
- A notable gender disparity remains in teaching roles, especially ECE, where female representation is overwhelming.

3.2.1.4.10 Access, Retention and Completion

• Early Childhood Education

In 2021–2022, Fiji had 864 Early Childhood Education (ECE) Centres, comprising 610 attached to primary schools and 254 stand-alone centres. The ECE Unit played a key role in promoting inclusive, holistic early learning focused on a child’s social, emotional, physical, spiritual, and cognitive development. The Unit provided administrative and professional support through school visits, advisory services, grant facilitation, registration processes, and collaboration with other agencies. It also responded to public concerns, facilitated financial training for stand-alone centres, and participated in relevant forums.

In 2022–2023, the number of ECE Centres increased to 873, with 250 stand-alone and 623 attached centres. Eleven centres were inclusive, supported by the Ministry’s Special and Inclusive Education Unit. ECE admission remained optional for Year 1, with eligibility for the Free Education Grant based on children being 5 years old by June 30 of the admission year. The curriculum continued to emphasize play-based learning across five developmental areas. However, challenges persisted for stand-alone centres, particularly where the overseeing head teacher was not nearby.

- **Special Inclusive Education**

In 2021–2022, the Special and Inclusive Education Unit focused on policy implementation, coordination, and monitoring of special and inclusive education across Fiji. Operating under the Primary Section but supporting all education levels, the Unit provided guidance, allocated resources, engaged donor agencies, and raised disability awareness. It oversaw 18 special schools and 122 mainstream schools offering inclusive education, with a key emphasis on infrastructure suited for learners with diverse needs.

In 2022–2023, the SIE Unit advanced its digital transformation with the launch of a Mobile App for Student Learning Profile data entry and the FEMIS Dashboard for grant management and reporting. Capacity-building efforts expanded, including training for all nine Education District SEA officers, Heads of Schools, and 90 champion schools. The introduction of Resource Centre pilots at three special schools, Ra Special, Nausori Special, and Early Intervention Centre, marked a new model for centralized support, funded by the Fiji Program Support Facility.

- **Primary Education**

In 2022–2023, the number of primary schools increased to 738, up from 736 in 2021–2022, with Yasawa I Rara Infant and Tebara SDA added. Student enrolment surged to 210,252, compared to 149,432 the previous year—a jump of over 60,000, with female students outnumbering males both years. The total number of teachers dropped from 6,299 in 2021–2022 to 6,099 in 2022–2023.

Boarding schools remained at 115, though the number of operational ones decreased slightly (from 98 to 96) due to cyclone damage and pandemic impacts. Infant schools increased from 10 to 12. The Free Education Grant (FEG) compliance improved, with full 100% disbursement achieved in most terms in 2022–2023, compared to partial disbursements in 2021.

Grant centralization remained unchanged at 16 schools both years, indicating persistent financial compliance challenges. School visits, curriculum rollout, and digitization via FEMIS monitoring continued, with a stronger emphasis on data verification, student attendance, and compliance reporting.

- **Secondary Education**

In both years, Fiji maintained 176 secondary schools, with Navesau Adventist High School rejoining the government-funded list in 2023 after privatization in 2019. Schools remained categorized into small (121), medium (42), and large (13).

Student enrolment increased slightly from 72,360 in 2021–2022 to 74,392 in 2022–2023, with female students consistently outnumbering males.

The number of teachers decreased from 5,674 in 2021–2022 to 5,210 in 2022–2023. There was also a notable drop in boarding schools from 2021–2022 to 2022–2023, down to 64 (previous number not explicitly stated for direct comparison but implied slightly higher based on graph).

In terms of Free Education Grant (FEG) administration:

- In 2021, grant distribution ranged from 50% to 100%, with 13 schools having their grants centralized.
- In 2022–2023, compliance improved, and only 2 schools remained centralized by the end of 2023.

A strong focus on Psychosocial Support (PSS) continued, especially post-COVID-19, with over 8,900 students and 680 teachers participating in the 2021–2022 phase. The school monitoring and infrastructure assessments expanded in 2023 to verify readiness for Year 11 expansions and quality teaching.

3.3 Committee Findings

The Committee's findings are outlined below. The Committee notes that while having consultations on the annual reports 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, some current issues were also raised by members of the public.

3.3.1 Student Behaviour, Discipline, and Wellbeing

There has been a noticeable increase in student behavioural issues including violence, drug use, and possession of illicit content. In response, the Ministry implemented a five-tier Student Behavioural Management Procedure, with heads of schools as the first point of intervention. Student-on-teacher violence is also on the rise, prompting police involvement and mediation efforts. The Ministry attributes some behavioural issues to poor home environments and emphasises the need for stronger parental and community engagement. Early intervention through proposed pre-ECE initiatives is underway. Despite the ban on corporal punishment, public debate on its reintroduction continues. Data on behavioural trends is currently insufficient due to historical limitations in collection and reporting.

3.3.2 Counselling and Support Services

It was noted that there are shortage of school counsellors throughout Fiji, with only one officer per division. It was noted that most schools lack designated counsellors despite policy mandates. The shortage of trained counsellors—only 35 serving 917 schools—is being supplemented by Child Protection Officers (CPOs) tasked with basic counselling duties. However, the workload is spilling onto teachers, who are increasingly responsible for student welfare beyond their expertise. There is a call for full-time, specialised counsellors in schools to support both students and staff. Tavua College's case, where only one CPO is deployed, highlights the inadequacy of current support services.

3.3.3 English Proficiency and Literacy Development

A steep decline in English language proficiency has been reported, particularly in Tavua, where Class 7 students struggle with basic reading. This affects both iTaukei and Indo-Fijian students. Key contributing factors include lack of parental support, insufficient reading resources, and absence of full-time librarians in primary schools. The Committee recommends reviewing assessment structures, such as reverting to "English and Maths" in the best five subjects and addressing the negative impact of the "no-repeat" policy on student motivation.

The Ministry in its response highlighted that the impact of the library set up on the students' academic achievement is identified by the Teacher Librarian and report relayed to the Ministry during its school visit. They gauge the effective usage of the new library on the library program through the report and videos sent to their office on the world book and

copyright day and the national library week celebrations. They also gauge the effectiveness and usage of the library on improvement taken by the school with full-time librarian to maintain the level of usage in a school library. For example, provide air-con and convert a library into a one-stop shop (library, computer access and media) The fact is that most schools do not appoint personnel solely responsible for overseeing the daily operation and gauge the impact of the library resources on students' behavior and academic performance and the sustainability of library resources.

3.3.4 Curriculum and Legislative Reform

The Ministry is reviewing the outdated 2013 National Curriculum Framework and the Education Act to better align with labour market needs. Reforms will integrate vocational training and entrepreneurship from ECE to Year 8. However, policy feedback mechanisms are underdeveloped, with concerns about deploying secondary-trained teachers in primary schools without adequate planning. These reforms fall under the broader 10-year vision outlined in the 2023 Denarau Declaration.

3.3.5 Teacher Workforce, Deployment, and Welfare

The teaching workforce faces a critical shortage, with over 500 secondary teachers lost between 2021 and 2023 due to migration and resignations driven by better overseas opportunities. The Ministry is training new recruits and offering incentives to improve retention, yet shortages, especially in remote areas, persist. There are over 3,000 acting appointments, which are under review for permanent placement via OMRS and KPMG assistance. Additionally, teachers are overburdened with non-teaching responsibilities like supervision from 6:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., affecting their wellbeing and job satisfaction.

According to the Ministry, one policy that was reintroduced back that contributed to the slow influx of teachers was the introduction of Location Allowance. Other policies that could have minimized the resignation of teachers is Enhancing Work Conditions.

MOE through CAS had designed a teacher friendly classroom resources kit through which enables to plan their work from the unpacked curriculum planned at CAS unit.

Addressing workload, classroom resources, and administrative support that improve job satisfaction and reduce burnout. There also is a flexibility for teachers to develop teaching and learning programs and the strategies for them to use.

3.3.6 Parental Involvement and Accountability

Parental support is seen as critical in addressing both behavioural and academic shortcomings, especially in literacy.

3.3.7 Education Assistance Misuse and Monitoring

The Committee raised concerns about the misuse of the government's back-to-school support. Students sometimes drop out after receiving the funds, and some parents allegedly use the money for non-educational purposes. There were recommendations for an attendance-based screening system and a voucher-based model for school supplies to mitigate this problem and promote accountability.

3.3.8 Access to Education and Transport Constraints

About 3,000 students needed transport assistance in 2022–2023. Inadequate bus capacity, especially during peak hours, delays student arrivals. The Ministry is reviewing its Transport Policy and working on a formula for equitable subsidies based on terrain and fuel costs. Delays in payments to boat and bus operators were attributed to administrative inefficiencies, prompting the Ministry to digitise these systems for better management.

According to the Ministry, A Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is in place to guide the selection of schools eligible for boat and engine assistance. Schools located in areas accessible primarily by rivers or seas are invited to apply through their respective District Education Offices, with applications due by the 15th of February each year. The District Office or an officer from the Assets Monitoring Unit (AMU) is responsible for verifying the suitability of each application. Priority is given to schools facing the greatest accessibility challenges to ensure that support is distributed equitably and according to need.

District and Divisional Education Officers play an important role in informing communities about this assistance during their outreach and awareness programs. At the school level, the responsibility for monitoring the use and condition of boats lies with the Head of School. However, there is a need for the Assets Monitoring Unit to strengthen its oversight and monitoring mechanisms to ensure the effective and sustainable use of the boats and engines provided.

3.3.9 Covid-Era Learning Gaps and Resource Distribution

During the COVID-19 pandemic, remote learning strategies had limited success, particularly in rural areas. Students who relied on hardcopy resources often faced delays, while those attending online classes submitted incomplete or screenshot-based work. Teachers and administrators agree that face-to-face learning remains the most effective method. Enhanced logistical and technological support is needed to close post-pandemic learning gaps.

3.3.10. Health and Hygiene in Schools

The Ministry spent \$1.45 million on the Menstrual Hygiene Management Initiative in 2022–2023, benefiting approximately 58,000 female students. While the initiative is seen as a success, the Ministry has committed to providing further impact data, particularly on its effect on school attendance in underserved areas.

3.3.11 Governance, Reporting, and Data Management

The Ministry has set up a new Data Management Unit to improve education data analysis through platforms like FEMIS, FESA, and exam databases. However, questions remain about the reporting structures of statutory bodies like SAAC, FTRA, and TELS—whether they report independently or through consolidated Ministry reports. Better clarity and streamlined reporting practices are recommended.

3.3.12. School Resource Delivery and Infrastructure

While the Ministry organises school visits to deliver support and materials, these efforts are hindered by a lack of dedicated transport, particularly in rural areas. Offices such as Lautoka have made formal requests for vehicles to facilitate consistent school outreach.

3.3.13 Transport Card Top-Up Delays

It was highlighted during the Sigatoka Talanoa Session that a case involving a parent with three children attending Nadroga Arya College faced difficulties with the government-funded student bus card system. Although applications were submitted and approved, and the cards were distributed, the expected top-ups did not occur, causing significant frustration for the parent who travelled back and forth without success. The issue was not with Vodafone (who only issues the cards) but with delays in top-ups from the Ministry. The Hon. Chairperson requested contact details to help follow up and ensure similar cases from other areas like Beqa could also be resolved effectively. Another member of the public also raised concerns over the inefficiencies in the student transport assistance system, particularly with the blue bus card initiative. The process is overly complex and burdensome for vulnerable families, requiring excessive travel and paperwork. Misunderstandings and bureaucratic hurdles delay top-ups and approvals.

3.3.14 Transport Fare and RSL Issues

During the same Talanoa Session, a member of the public raised the challenges faced by Navatusila District School regarding the high transport costs and inconsistent fare structures under the Rural Service License (RSL) scheme. The school, located in a remote area, relies on weekly trips by transport providers. Previously operating under a fixed rate, they now face erratic pricing, with some routes charging as high as \$250 per trip. Many operators have

withdrawn services due to uneconomical routes. He urged that the school's transport situation be reassessed on a case-by-case basis based on distance, road conditions, and frequency of service.

It was also highlighted that the reduced transport vouchers by the Ministry of Education for students last year without explanation, putting increased financial pressure on parents to cover costs for Licensed Carrier (LC) providers. Payments to these transport providers have also been delayed, adding to the strain on families and schools in ensuring students' continued access to education.

Another member of the public gave the following example of the difficulties RSL operators face; of 20 transport assistance applications, only 5 were approved due to permit classifications and bureaucratic processes by LTA. He emphasized the need for simplified, decentralized solutions, especially in rural areas with limited providers, and urged a review of the pricing and regulatory framework to ensure children can access education reliably.

On transport payments by the Ministry of Education, another member of the public explained that although the system has been streamlined, with a standard three-week turnaround period, payments are still not made in a timely manner. He supported the idea of digitalising the payment system and acknowledged that connectivity issues remain a barrier to full implementation at the school level.

3.3.15 Teacher Workload

Burnout among teachers is growing, compounded by a lack of qualified teachers, especially in maths, physics, and technical subjects. Resignations are frequent, and tertiary institutions are not producing enough qualified teachers to meet the demand.

3.3.16 Access to Clean Water Supply for Rural Schools

It was reported that many rural schools faced persistent water supply issues.

3.3.17 Payslip Access

It was raised that teachers' payslip information has not been updated on the FEMIS system, making it difficult for them to access credit or make purchases, especially from retailers like Courts. Despite multiple email attempts to the Ministry's Accounts Department, delayed to no responses were received. Challenges like internet access and verification processes at the school level persist.

3.3.18 Boarding Grant

A member of the public representing head teachers from rural boarding schools, expressed gratitude to the Ministry of Education and the Government for their support but raised concerns over the adequacy of the current boarding grant. He highlighted that the \$50 per student allocation is insufficient when broken down over a 14-week term, covering 14 meals per week, which equates to only 18 cents per meal. While schools are making efforts to supplement food through agriculture, essential items like flour must still be purchased from shops, and the rising cost of living has made this increasingly difficult. It was recommended that a review to increase the boarding grant be considered to support students and teachers in remote boarding schools.

3.3.19 Accommodation for School Children in Remote and Maritime Areas (Dormitory Conditions)

The Committee during its site visits noted that the current accommodation for school children at Beqa Yanuca, Kavala and Vunisea Secondary School are in poor condition, with students reportedly sleeping on the floor. This is in breach of the OHS Act 1996 and Public Health Act 1935. The Committee recommends that the Ministry urgently looks into this issue amongst other schools in need of renovation.

3.3.20 Priorities for Rural and Maritime Students for Boarding

There is a pressing need to support students from remote and maritime areas who attend universities in the mainland. Priority should be given to these students, as many are often forced to live with relatives in overcrowded or unsuitable conditions, making it difficult for them to focus on their education.

3.3.21 Reintroduction of Corporal Punishment in Schools

The Ministry supports the zero tolerance on corporal punishment in alignment with the Rights of Children [2013 Constitution], the CPP. However, with cases of bullying and other behavioral issues, drug and sexual related issues, it could be an option to curb the mentioned issues.

4.0 Sustainable Development Goals

4.1 Gender Equality in Parliamentary Scrutiny

Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. Within the education sector, this involves not only addressing disparities in access to education but also ensuring gender balance in leadership, teaching, and administrative roles.

The Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts (MEHA) continues to make strides toward gender equality in its workforce. As of the 2022–2023 reporting period, the Ministry had a total approved establishment of 15,087 positions, of which 13,396 positions were actively filled. Among these, 235 positions were Government Wage Earners (GWE).

The breakdown by gender across various occupational categories highlights both progress and areas needing continued focus:

Senior Executive and Management Roles: Of the three Senior Executives (Permanent secretary and Deputy Secretary positions), two are male and one is female. Among Directors, all five positions are held by males, indicating a gender imbalance at the highest level of management.

Leadership in Schools:

Head Teachers: 671 total; 490 male and 181 female.

Principals: 159 total; 115 male and 44 female.

Vice Principals: 160 total; 84 male and 76 female.

Assistant Principals: 130 total; 82 male and 48 female.

These figures show a better gender distribution at the Vice Principal and Assistant Principal levels, although men still hold the majority of leadership positions.

Teaching Workforce:

Primary Teachers: 5,172 total; 1,594 male and 3,578 female.

Secondary Teachers: 3,964 total; 1,578 male and 2,386 female.

ECE Teachers: 1,391 total; 10 male and 1,381 female.

There is a noticeable female dominance in teaching roles, especially in Early Childhood Education (ECE), where women account for over 99% of the workforce. Primary and secondary levels also show more female teachers than male, reflecting a positive trend in female participation in core educational delivery.

MEHA has demonstrated commitment toward SDG 5 by ensuring broad participation of women in the education sector, particularly in teaching roles. The gender parity in Vice Principal and Assistant Principal roles is encouraging and indicates a shift toward inclusive leadership.

However, there remains a gender gap in the highest management positions and in traditionally male-dominated roles such as wage earners and infrastructure-related posts. Addressing these disparities will require targeted policies, mentorship programs for aspiring female leaders, and gender-sensitive recruitment practices.

In summary, MEHA's workforce composition reflects both achievements and ongoing challenges in realizing gender equality. Continued focus on leadership development for women, equal opportunity practices, and cultural change will further align the Ministry's operations with the goals of SDG 5.

5.0 Conclusion

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence has conducted a thorough review of the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 Annual Reports. The Committee report is bi-partisan and has 15 recommendations for consideration. The Committee is grateful and commends the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts for being up to date with its Annual Reports.

6.0 Committee Members' Signatures



Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua
Chairperson



Hon. Rinesh Sharma
Deputy Chairperson



Hon. Ratu Isikeli Tuiwailevu
Member



Hon. Penioni Ravunawa
Member



Hon. Virendra Lal
Member

7.0 Annexure

Published evidence

Written evidence, transcripts, and supporting documents can be viewed on the Parliament website at the following link:

<https://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-foreign-affairs-and-defence/>