



Trinidad and Tobago

Esther Le Gendre
Minister of Education



Esther Le Gendre is the Member of Parliament for Tunapuna, and Minister of Education in the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Ms. Le Gendre is a graduate of the University of the West Indies who earned an Executive MBA from the Arthur Lok Jack Graduate School of Business. Certified in corporate communications (UK) and community relations management (Boston MA), Ms Le Gendre has had considerable experience in government and public affairs management in the financial services and energy sectors of Trinidad and Tobago. With a background in teaching language arts in the Trinidad and Tobago education system, Ms Le Gendre has also lectured in Public Relations and Communication Skills on the UWI's School of Continuing Education Programme and more recently on the Master's Degree in Marketing programme of the ALJ Graduate School. She has been a member of the Board of Directors of the Caribbean New Media Group, the National Petroleum Marketing Company and the National Carnival Commission.

Inclusive Education: a challenging and rewarding path to successful development

The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has embarked on an unprecedented development agenda to transform the country into a developed nation by the year 2020. The goal is to bring prosperity and a higher quality of life to every individual, family and community.

In this context, the Ministry of Education has been given the mandate to transform, expand and modernize the education system to provide a world-class, seamless education in Trinidad and Tobago. The goal is to produce holistically developed citizens, who can contribute to and participate in the sustainable economic and social development of the country. A key element of this reform is inclusive education based on the Ministry's philosophy that every child has an inherent right to education which will enhance the development of maximum capability, regardless of gender, ethnicity, and economic, social or religious background.

In this regard, the Ministry of Education has approached inclusive education through school reform focusing on key measures to make the education system more inclusive. The Ministry has developed and commenced the implementation of a comprehensive programme aimed at achieving universal access to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) for all three (3) to four (4) year old children. State-of-the-art ECCE Centres are being constructed and our aim is to have 600 of these completed by the year 2012.

In the area of curriculum development and delivery, the Ministry has developed and implemented a National Certificate of Secondary Education (NCSE). Levels I and II and Caribbean Vocational Qualification Programme. The latter is a competence-based qualification developed from industry-set, regionally approved occupational standards. It is available in several occupational areas including agriculture, business, communication, construction, energy, health and manufacturing. The CVQ allows for flexible articulation within the general education system and addresses issues of quality and access.



Our Centre of Excellence for Teacher Training (CETT) is a United States teacher training model emerging from dialogue from the Summit of the Americas. Its goal is to alleviate problems of illiteracy and focuses on pupils from Infant Year two to Standard Two. It seeks to ensure that best practices are employed in the teaching of reading. Currently, CETT is operational in sixty one (61) Primary schools and this number is expected to be increased to two hundred (200) schools in 2008.

A comprehensive system of support is being implemented to address barriers to learning in order to ensure equity in learning for all students and to facilitate their attendance at school. The Ministry of Education provides through existing programmes meals, books and transportation to the school population.

The Ministry of Education has also established a Student Support Services Division to address the learning and behavioural issues which impact on the psychosocial development of children. This resulted in the commencement of support services of guidance and counselling, special education and school social work at the primary level in seventy (70) schools. There was also the expansion of guidance and counselling at the secondary level from forty five (45) to sixty five (65) schools. This programme also involved expanding off-site services such as a Braille Centre, psycho-educational testing services for students with severe emotional and behavioural problems.

Our continued Vision is for an inclusive education system that involves the development and implementation of a seamless approach to education from the ECCE level to Primary and Secondary and to the world of work. Our approach would target new policy development, the professional training and development of teachers, universal screening of children especially vision screening and auditory testing, outreach to parents and a comprehensive public awareness programme.

The Ministry of Education recognizes that our children are at the heart of the development process. We will ensure the delivery of inclusive education in all schools at the early childhood, primary and secondary levels through a variety of approaches such as providing support and services to all learners and by taking the appropriate steps to make education available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable to all learners. The reformed education system characterized by inclusiveness, seamlessness, equity and quality, will promote the development of innovative, intellectual and spirited learners and facilitate the creation of enterprising citizens and global leaders to take the nation to 2020 and beyond.

I join with all my colleagues of the Member States of UNESCO to congratulate UNESCO for this timely conference in 2008. I feel certain that we would benefit greatly from the conference and that the experience would serve to accelerate our efforts towards achieving quality education for all.