

Minister emphasizes importance of inclusive education

The cost of providing quality educational opportunities for children with special needs is very high. Even in a developed country like the United States, the cost is prohibitive, amounting to as much as an estimated US\$100,000 per child per year.

This disclosure was yesterday made by Minister of Education, Dr. Rupert Roopnaraine during his attendance of a special ceremony at the Diamond Special Needs School yesterday in recognition of a grant from ExxonMobil.

According to information out of the Education Ministry, the School Improvement Committee after some deliberation had approved the use of the grant for disability friendly physical works (pantry and washrooms), and a training course for teachers.

The ceremony yesterday

marked the completion of the physical works and the commencement of the training. The training is being done and certified by the Institute of Distance and Continuing Education (IDCE) of the University of Guyana (UG). It is intended to equip the teachers with improved knowledge and skills for the delivery of special education.

At yesterday's ceremony the Minister underscored that Guyana's constitution requires that all children should have access to appropriate educational facilities. Moreover, it is the firm view of the Minister that children with special needs should benefit from an inclusive approach, and be placed in mainstream schools. But because of the absence of appropriate physical facilities and teachers trained to handle special needs, and the individual chal-

lenges of special needs children, inclusivity is not always appropriate, he observed. It is for this reason, he asserted, that there is a dire need for special schools like the Diamond Special Needs School.

But according to the Minister, "the Ministry of Education has made a good start. It has established schools that seek to address the needs of children with specific disabilities, such as children with hearing, visual and speech impairments, but even within these schools, improvements are badly needed."

As such, the Minister noted that upgrading of the knowledge and skills of special needs teachers is a crucial need. Training, he highlighted, cannot be limited to a few lectures at UG or at the Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE). "A minimum of six months of theoretical

and practical training provided by qualified trainers is essential. Teachers need to learn to use the best methods available; methods that are evidence-based and internationally recognized," said the Education Minister, as he added "Failing this, we are doing little more than providing a day care facility."

Special needs schools, Minister Roopnaraine said, must be equipped with physical and educational resources, and sufficient human resources to enable small group teaching and individualized programmes. Further, he disclosed that teachers need to be able to benefit from the continuous guidance and oversight provided by specialists.

Moreover, collaborating with like-minded Non Governmental Organisations and charities could greatly help the Ministry achieve its goals, said the Minister. With this in mind, "we have begun negotiations with the Step by Step Foundation for children with autism. The Foundation and the School it runs can provide excellent theoretical and practical training opportunities for the Ministry's teachers".

The Minister asserted that his Ministry needs to provide such training for selected teachers across Guyana, so that children with autism in all regions can benefit from excellent educational opportunities. He added,



Education Minister, Dr. Rupert Roopnaraine

"Guyana should be proud that its Step by Step School is unique within the English-speaking Caribbean, and leads the way in the region in the field of autism education." "There are a number of other issues that we need to address. We need to improve public awareness and reduce the stigma associated with the physical, mental and behavioural challenges of our special needs children," said Minister Roopnaraine. He pointed out too that "parents will tell you of the difficulties they face using public transport, for example, or access-

ing child care. Help is badly needed from the private sector in providing funding and suitable employment opportunities".

The Education Minister is convinced that community support groups could provide invaluable assistance to families of special needs children. But even as the Minister boasted yesterday that "Guyana has made an excellent beginning in meeting the educational and other requirements of children with special needs," he added that "the road ahead is still long and challenging."

Guyana Energy Agency

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The Guyana Energy Agency invites eligible bidders to submit their bids to:

- a. Supply and Install LED Lamps and One Complete 6.5kWp Grid-Connected Solar Photovoltaic System at Leguan Secondary

1. Bidding will be conducted through the National Competitive Bidding (NCB) procedures, specified in the Procurement Act 2003.

2. Interested bidders may obtain further information, inspect the bidding documents and purchase a complete set of the bidding documents from the cashier at the Guyana Energy Agency, 295 Quarmina Street, South Cummingsburg, Georgetown from Monday to Friday between 09:00 to 15:30 hours. Tel # 225-8569 ext. 226. The cost for each bid document is one thousand Guyana Dollars (G\$1,000).