**Press Release**

**For Immediate Release**

**Date:** 10th June, 2015

**Statement Re. Complaint against the Lighthouse School**

This release is a joint statement from the Ministry of Education and Department of Education Services. This statement is provided in relation to the enquiries that have been raised regarding complaints received about the Lighthouse School and the ensuing investigation and findings of that investigation.

The complaint received expressed concerns about the leadership of the school. As a result, the Department of Education Services has increased support to the leadership and management team at the Lighthouse School. We are also currently reviewing other mechanisms to further strengthen leadership and management at the school. The Ministry is not in a position to make further comments regarding changes to leadership at this time.

The complaint also highlighted issues regarding the supervision of the students at the Lighthouse School. The following actions have taken place to address this:

1. Expectations about supervision have been made clear to all staff during staff meetings and school management will repeat this exercise at the beginning of each term.
2. A clear duty roster has been established to ensure that staff is on duty at all break times and before and after school. The Senior Management Team (SMT) monitors duty/break periods each day.
3. The SMT conducts regular learning walks where amongst other aspects, they monitor supervision.
4. The support plan also includes the installation of video camera surveillance to enhance the safety of students, staff and all others on school premises. In order to ensure that camera usage meets best-practice criteria for safety and privacy the Ministry has developed a draft policy for video surveillance in schools. Once the draft policy is approved by the Education Council, the Ministry will be carrying out consultation with key stakeholders, including parents, prior to cameras being introduced.

It was revealed to the Ministry of Education and Department of Education Services, through the complaint, that some staff at the Lighthouse School was involved in a game of impersonating students. This matter was investigated at the time that the incident was reported. Appropriate actions have been taken to address the matter and to ensure that incidents of this nature are not repeated.

It was also expressed in the complaint that students are not treated well by some staff and that some of the behaviour boarders on bullying. Any suggestion of mistreatment of students is of grave concern to the Ministry and Department of Education Services. There are clear protocols and procedures in place with regards to the reporting of child protection matters. All staff has been re-trained about child protection prevention and procedures as well as their duties with regards to child protection reporting in line with the Children’s Law. Any incident which involves a staff member (should one occur) is reported to the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) as per the agreed protocols and procedures. The DCFS would then advise if it is a matter for them to investigate and if not then the school would follow up and take appropriate actions. All staff has had de-escalation and safe management training to support them managing student behaviour appropriately.

We recognise that the Lighthouse School has students with a wide range of learning disabilities who may also present with challenging behavioural difficulties as a result of their disability. Therefore the school has received support to review the whole-school behaviour management procedures and their school discipline and student behaviour policy to ensure it is sensitive to the needs of the students. Part of this review has led to the introduction of a Behaviour Intervention Team that will lead on the development of the school policy as well as be able to offer support and appropriate intervention where students are having difficulties. Further to this, all staff received training in February 2015 from The Wellness Centre in ‘Behaviour Management in the Special Needs Classroom.’

A detailed support plan for the school which addressed all of the issues highlighted by the investigation was produced by the DES in consultation with the Ministry of Education. Regular meetings have been held between the Principal and the Senior School Improvement Officer (SSIO) on a weekly basis to monitor actions, report on progress, and plan the next actions with clear deadlines. The Support plan is updated regularly (by the SSIO after progress discussions with the Principal and Senior Management) to reflect what has been done. Meetings were held with staff and parents where the Support Plan was presented and discussion was held on ways in which the concerns coming out of the investigation will be addressed including persons responsible for completing actions, plan monitoring, and progress reporting.

Staff and parents will be invited to a meeting towards the end of this term where the SSIO will update them on the progress so far and actions for the next school year.

The School Support Plan developed and the reviews of staff assignments and management structures have led to the following changes:

1. Various training has been provided to improve skills of staff.
2. A supervision roster has been established and is monitored by the leadership team at break times.
3. Heightened awareness by staff of what is expected of them and monitoring of this by school leadership is taking place.
4. Safe-handling and health and safety guides have been drafted and will be presented to both staff and parents for consultation before implementation.
5. A Behaviour Intervention Team has been established. This has allowed for critical incidents to be responded to appropriately with the minimum disruption to the rest of the school.
6. The School Information Management System (SIMS) has been set-up to monitor behaviour and discipline issues across the school.
7. The SMT and staff are updating the Teaching and Learning guide for their school which will be completed by the end of this term for introduction at the start of the next academic year.
8. Procedures for monitoring of staff absenteeism have been improved.

The Ministry of Education and Department of Education Services were obviously concerned about the seriousness of the issues raised in the complaint and ensured that they were adequately addressed through a rigorous support plan. We also recognise that there are many teachers and staff at the school who actively promote a positive, safe and appropriate environment for the children who attend the school, and we have received unsolicited communication from parents and caregivers that highlights this fact. That being said, it is our goal to ensure that this good practice is consistent and as such, as outlined above, we have taken measures to resolve the issues identified in a holistic manner. With the numerous changes already made, and the initiatives that will be put in place over the next few months, we will continue to see improvements in the educational experience of the students attending the Lighthouse School. The Ministry and Department will continue to monitor the implementation of the support plan to ensure that these improvements are achieved.

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