10th July, 2015

**Statement by the Ministry of Education, Employment & Gender Affairs and the Department of Education Services on the recent case of indecent assault by a Special Support Aide in the Cayman Islands Government School System**

The Ministry of Education, Employment & Gender Affairs and the Department of Education Services takes any alleged case of abuse against a student very seriously. Recently a Special Support Aide from the Government School System appeared in Court for charges of indecent assault. As in any situation such as this, it becomes a criminal matter and therefore our comments are limited so that we do not interfere with the investigations being conducted by the police and other government entities.

We can confirm that, in regards to this case, the Ministry and Department received the first report of possible sexual abuse against students on 27th November, 2014. The current policy is that any staff member accused of such crimes is placed on Required Leave until they are either found guilty or innocent. If the person is found guilty they would be terminated immediately. In this case, we can confirm that the Special Support Aide resigned before being put on required leave and is therefore no longer an employee of the Department of Education Services.

It should be noted that before they are hired, background checks are done for all persons who are offered any position in the Cayman Islands Government Education System. This Special Support Aide went through the same procedure and had good references and a clean Police Record at the time of hire.

To ensure protection and assistance to the victims, counselling is standard in these cases and is done in a collaborative effort with the Royal Cayman Islands Police Service and the Department of Children and Family Services as these agencies are directly involved in handling such cases.

Child protection and safety is a priority of the Ministry and Department and as a result of this there is a Child Protection Reporting Procedure currently in place for all Government Schools. It should also be noted that the reporting of all disclosed and suspected abuse or neglect of children to the relevant authorities is mandatory in the Cayman Islands as set out in the Children Law (2012 Revision). There are strict penalties for not reporting which includes fines and/or imprisonment.

The Department of Education Services has set out reporting procedures that must be followed in cases of suspected child abuse. Every Government School has two Child Protection Officers which are the School Counsellor and a full-time teaching or professional staff member within the school. These officers receive regular training and also provide training to their colleagues in their school. There is also mandatory training for all teaching staff on child sexual abuse, specifically the Darkness to Light Training, and on the Children Law (2012 Revision) as well as the Child Protection Reporting Procedures.

The Child Protection Reporting Procedures, which were established in 2013, outline the responsibility and actions necessary by education staff within the first 24 hours of an alleged case of abuse. These procedures were developed in collaboration with the Family Support Unit (FSU) of the Royal Cayman Islands Police Service and the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). It should be noted that it is not the responsibility of the Cayman Islands Government Education System to investigate alleged cases of abuse but rather our responsibility it to report the information and hand the case over to the FSU and DCFS for them to carry out the official investigation.

In light of the recent events, this procedure is under review to ensure that it is meeting all requirements for ensuring the safety of our students and that the process meets the needs of all involved. It is also being reviewed as part of the Education Law Review which will provide further legislative protection to our students. In the Education Bill, 2015 which has been released, Part 16, Section 41. (1) states, “Every school or early childhood care and education centre shall have a written Child Protection Policy which shall comply with the Children Law (2012 Revision). The Education Bill, 2015 has now gone through the public consultation phase and policy development is occurring to further strengthen the framework that is provided in the proposed Bill.