**Statement by the Ministry of Education on the Baseline Inspection Reports of Government Schools**

The Ministry of Education, Employment and Gender Affairs commissioned baseline school inspections of all government schools as well as a review of the governance model for education. The baseline inspections were conducted by the Independent Schools’ Inspectorate Consultancy, with the assistance of Lead Local Inspector, Mrs. Mary Bowerman. The review of the education governance model was done by KPMG whose Centre of Excellence in Education in the UK was utilised as a vital resource in the review process.

These inspections were conducted over the 2014/2015 academic year and the reports provide vital information as it relates to our schools.

At the Annual Education Professionals’ Welcome on Wednesday 26th August, 2015, Hon. Tara Rivers, Minister for Education, revealed the overall findings of the inspections. She said, “The overall finding of the inspections is that most government schools have had improvement in terms of student performance across the board; however, these results are still significantly below the expected minimum when compared to international standards. Generally, in English, mathematics and the practical aspects of science, overall achievement is significantly lower than UK norms by at least one year.”

Minister Rivers also informed the audience that the inspections revealed a number of other shortcomings in the system, including: several Human Resource related issues in regards to recruitment, retention and deployment of high quality teaching staff; the need for better appraisal and performance management practices for underperforming staff; the need to increase resourcing and improve training and support for the management of Special Education Needs and behavioural issues; the need to ensure that teaching assistants are effectively deployed and supervised; the need for better collection and use of assessment data, and monitoring of performance trends over time; the need to have more targeted induction and Professional Development (PD) programmes to meet the needs of teachers and support staff; and the lack of inter-school support and exchange of ideas, good practice and successes, which is believed to help improve the overall performance of all schools.

One of the key recommendations of the Governance Review was to enhance accountability in the education system through reporting of key performance indicators and more detailed regular reporting by each school.The Review also highlighted the fact that many stakeholders in Education believed the schools needed more autonomy in their day-to-day operations.

There has been some overlap in the findings from the inspection reports and the education review, but importantly, the findings have been consistent. These reports will be made public in September 2015 once schools have received their individual reports.

Since the release of this information, there have been several questions and comments concerning the baseline schools inspections and the Ministry wishes to clarify any misunderstandings regarding the inspections and their findings.

**1.** **Why was the Independent Schools’ Inspectorate Consultancy (ISIC) chosen to carry out the baseline inspections?**

It has always been the practice of the (then) Cayman Islands Schools’ Inspectorate to use overseas inspectors to supplement the local core team. Government schools in the Cayman Islands provide an education based on the British model, and as relatively few jurisdictions have school inspections as such, it was natural to seek inspectors from the UK as the local Inspectorate had always done.

After taking into consideration our particular needs at this time, for example, the need to have continuity in the process across primary and secondary schools, the narrow focus that was needed for this particular purpose, and the need for inspectors to be able to provide extensive international experience – the Independent Schools’ Inspectorate Consultancy was chosen.

ISIC had the capacity to respond to the scale of the project being requested and to complete it within the stipulated timeframe. The information provided by ISIC in terms of costing, flexibility of scheduling, deployment and the way they went about ensuring their understanding of the Cayman context and the exact requirements, made them an obvious choice.

**2.** **What experience does ISIC have?**

The ISIC teams are very experienced in inspecting all types of schools in many different parts of the world. ISIC is the largest independent schools’ inspectorate in the UK and the agency responsible for inspecting more than 1,250 primary and secondary schools in the UK, and has undertaken schools inspections in over 60 countries worldwide. ISIC is regularly monitored by Ofsted for quality assurance purposes. Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills in the UK which inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people, and services providing education and skills for learners of all ages.

**3.** **How much did ISIC know about the Government School System?**

Lead Local Inspector, Mrs. Mary Bowerman, who was responsible for organising and carrying out this mandate from the Ministry, met with the Chief Inspector of ISIC and various other members of staff with specific responsibilities in order to determine suitability prior to the contract being awarded. Mrs. Bowerman answered specific queries ISIC had concerning government’s request to have baseline inspections carried out on all of the government schools within a relatively short period of time and was able to provide an overview of the education system in the Cayman Islands and the requirements for the inspections. ISIC, in turn, were able to respond to queries by the Lead Local Inspector and the Ministry about the proposal received from ISIC as it related to how the inspections would be organised, and the quality assurance of the process.

**4.** **How did ISIC arrive at their judgements?**

All inspectors used the Cayman Islands ‘Handbook for School Inspection and Self-evaluation’ as the basis for inspection. This was sent to ISIC well ahead of time so that they could familiarise themselves with it. The Ministry also ensured that schools received a copy of the inspection handbook prior to the actual inspections taking place if they did not already have one. This handbook has always been the basis for school inspections in the Cayman Islands. As in all inspections, the handbook is used as a guide and does not replace professional judgement. Judgements are made by using professional expertise to interpret evidence in the light of guidance from the handbook and within the context of each school. Judgements must be corroborated by secure evidence and agreed by the team in the broader context of the whole inspection.

**5.** **Were the Government schools judged too harshly?**

Judgements were made after taking into consideration a range of evidence from direct observations, interviews with staff and students, questionnaires completed by staff and parents, scrutiny of documents provided by the school, including students’ written work and performance assessment data. The inspection handbook was used as a guide, along with inspectors’ professional expertise and experience. The Lead Local Inspector took part in all fifteen inspections, providing a local perspective, continuity and quality assurance that all judgments and evidence matched. All evidence gathered from every inspection was also sent to the UK to undergo further quality assurance procedures.

**6.** **Why was there no feedback provided to schools right away – after the inspection was completed?**

Before the start of the inspections ISIC’s Chief Inspector and the CEO of the Consultancy came to Cayman to meet with the Minister for Education and the Ministry education team to discuss the inspection process. As it is not commonplace to have all schools inspected within one academic year, it was important that all aspects of the process were thoroughly thought through and discussed. Based on advice received from ISIC given their experience in conducting schools inspections, it was decided that, because the main purpose of these baseline inspections was to provide an overview of the entire government education system within a relatively short period, it would not be advisable to provide feedback to individual schools immediately after each inspection as this may have resulted in a biased outcome overall due to the timing and sequence of inspections planned throughout the year. Schools were advised of this decision.

**7. Were the inspection reports sent back for ‘correcting’?**

When the draft reports were received from ISIC, they were sent to the individual schools for a ‘factual check’. This is a standard process followed after school inspections are completed.   However, many of the comments received from the schools went well beyond ‘factual accuracy’, and questioned actual judgements.  This was understandable as the schools would have had nothing by which to gauge how their school compared with other similar schools, either locally or internationally.

Where the comments received from the schools related to factual accuracy (for example, the enrolment figures at the time of the inspection, or issues of clarity), the reports were amended accordingly. However, no changes were made to the judgements in any of the reports as these were agreed by the inspection teams as a whole and by the Chief Inspector of ISIC.

**8. What are Government schools supposed to do now?**

Following all inspections, schools are expected to produce an action plan for addressing the issues that have been identified. Each school has an assigned Senior School Improvement Officer (SSIO). The SSIOs will provide support and challenge to Principals and their Senior Management Teams in putting together an action plan which is carefully prioritised and based on the inspection findings.

The aim of all concerned should be to determine what needs to be done to raise standards of achievement. Good leadership and management will motivate staff to rise to the challenge of providing more effectively for the needs of all our students.

**9. How will government support schools to improve?**

The Ministry has produced a comprehensive action plan for all those involved in the education of our children. This includes Ministry and DES personnel as well as school leaders and provides a clear delineation of accountability. It will be closely monitored to ensure accountability from all concerned. Schools will be required to submit regular updates on their action plans and to evaluate the impact of the actions they have taken.

The Education Bill, 2015, once finalised and passed into law, will provide the legal framework to ensure that educators are held accountable for the standards students achieve, and will recognise the need for schools to have the required support and resources to carry out their job more successfully.

School inspections provide the evidence for what needs to be done. The new Education Law will provide the legal backing to ensure that schools, the DES and the Ministry work together to follow through on the recommendations, so that our students can have access to the quality of education that they deserve.