PROVIDING FOR CHILDREN OF THE
CAYMAN ISLANDS WITH
SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS:

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE
SYSTEMS OF LEARNING SUPPORT

Consultant Report Provided to
The Ministry of Education, Training, Employment, Youth, Sport and Culture
Cayman Islands Government
20/12/06

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Compiling this report required numerous hours of interviews with current and past professionals employed within the Ministry of Education, Government agency stakeholders, and most importantly, parents and concerned citizens of the Cayman Islands during the months of October and November of 2006. It may have been uncomfortable for many to provide such direct input, but in all cases, participants were thoroughly honest and passionate in regard to the current system for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN).

The investigation targeted provision of services to children with Special Educational Needs (including Gifted Education) and other barriers to learning (e.g., English as a Second Language, environmental disadvantage, counseling needs, and socio-economics). Previous consultant and Schools’ Inspectorate reports covering services since 1997 highlight that, despite repeated recommendations by those learned professionals, there has been little progress in many critical areas.

Interviews were structured to identify current strengths of systems, barriers to effectiveness, and proposed solutions for improvement. More detail and additional findings and recommendations can be found within the body of the full report; this Executive Summary is provided to highlight priority procedural and programmatic issues for immediate action:

Referral, Evaluation, and Placement

It was found that, despite some guidance within SEN policy, a majority of schools do not practice a systematic referral process based on available data or progressive attempts to intervene and remediate academic skill deficits prior to placement in SEN services. Because of this, students often are evaluated based on teacher intuition or parent persistence. Skill deficits exhibited by a student may not always reflect a specific disability but may actually represent school-wide problems (curriculum) or class-wide problems (poor preparation or poor instruction). As proof, 38% of Cayman Brac High School students appear on its SEN register, nearly triple the international standard. This is even further worrisome since CGHS test scores in English and Mathematics reportedly exceed that of John Gray High School. Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM) strategies are recommended as cost-effective and labor-efficient means to more efficiently identify school-wide, class-wide, and individual student academic deficits. This system activates earlier interventions for children who are struggling academically rather than waiting for them to fail.

The situation at Cayman Brac High School reflects a second problem: understaffing in critical areas of Educational Psychology, Speech/Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, and Physiotherapy. Students may wait for evaluations from a member of one of these specialty groups for up to two years following parent consent because of inadequate numbers within this professional group. During that time, the child is not receiving appropriate services. Also, once a child has been evaluated, it is rare that any periodic
reevaluation is completed later in the student's career. Thus, once on a SEN register, always on a SEN register.

Parents have limited information and participation in the referral, evaluation, and placement process. SEN policy needs to be revised to insure parent participation beyond just the point of signing consent for evaluation. Greater transparency will occur for parents if policy has clear criteria and definitions for SEN eligibility.

**General Provision and Deployment**

Following restructure of the George Hicks High School campus, adequate SEN staffing was provided, adding to successful outcomes currently being realized. In order to equitably achieve this across all four learning communities on Cayman Islands, the following additions need to be made to the SEN Service (detailed discussion and justification given within this report):

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<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Current FTE</th>
<th>Required FTE</th>
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<td>Vision Impaired Specialist</td>
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* FTE equivalent, corresponding with the current SEN profile of one full-time and thirteen partially-funded and non-funded SENC0 positions across the islands, is difficult to accurately estimate.

** It is difficult to determine from centralized data within the Education Department as to how many Support Assistants are actually in service currently. Because data from SEN registers are also unreliable, it is difficult to determine the exact requirement. Additional study will be required within the next several months following the completion of this report.

Inclusive model of educating children with special educational needs is practiced philosophically within Cayman Islands schools, but teachers do not adequately differentiate instruction, and there are insufficient numbers of classroom-based support assistants to make this “best practice” for children successful.

Increased Team decision-making using School-Based Support Teams should be exercised and include greater parental participation. Special Needs Teachers need to be supervised at assigned school sites and report more directly to their principals rather than central office. Educational Psychologists, Speech/Language Pathologists, and Occupational
Therapists need to maintain regular and predictable schedules for their visits to assigned schools so that they can meaningfully participate as members of these Teams.

SEN policy needs to be rewritten to provide more specificity and accountability; service provision needs to be enforced.

Although outside the scope of this consultancy report, the movement by the Ministry towards strengthening vocational education for government schools is strongly supported. Many children with disabilities are highly successful when language demands are reduced and they can successfully work non-verbally with their hands. This can only lead to greater contributions by SEN students to the Cayman Islands workforce upon graduation.

Provision and Deployment to the Sister Islands

Only two Educational Psychologist visits to Cayman Brac and Little Cayman schools were scheduled this past year, and prior to a couple of recent Speech/Language consultations at the beginning of 2006-07 school year, it was reported that no Speech/Language Therapist had served the children of Cayman Brac for approximately two-and-one-half years. Recommendations for increased SEN Specialist staffing is made in order to achieve equity and access for students with special educational needs within this district.

No Early Childhood Intervention program exists on the Sister Islands, and this is a critical need. There is plan to establish such a program for the Sister Islands at the start of the next school year, however.

Cayman Brac High School requires modifications to add ramps, remodel bathrooms, pave pathways and tracks, and provide general access for children and citizens who use wheelchairs. There also is immediate need for an additional 2-3 Support Assistants at that high school to meet the current need.

Immediately, a speech/language therapist needs to begin regular visits to Cayman Brac to address two children with significant needs (one with autism and the other recently receiving cochlear implants). Two such therapists at The Lighthouse School have the appropriate training in these specialty areas and should be deployed.

Leadership and Organization of SEN

Departmental chain-of-command which should provide clear line of communication is confused, frequently causing parents and personnel to “go straight to the top” with concerns. A concise organization chart and description clarifying this chain-of-command needs to be accessible for parents and publicly known to the larger community.

Restructuring of SEN Management needs to align with the new Governance Model. A senior post with responsibility for SEN needs to be developed so that high levels of
training, support, and accountability can be provided for SEN, Counseling, Gifted and Talented, Early Intervention, and English as a Second Language programs.

The position of Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO) must be upgraded and circumscribed so that there are only four such full-time, highly-qualified special educational needs administrators responsible for the four learning communities. This is required in order to make immediate corrections to the system, validate that policy and procedures are followed, and insure that proper training and services occur in an equitable fashion.

Other government agency stakeholders were interviewed and are highly motivated to explore more meaningful collaboration as part of learning communities and consider braided or shared funding on behalf of students who experience barriers to learning. The Senior Officer should be actively “at the table” in these discussions and providing leadership.

SEN registers maintained at individual school sites evidence many inaccuracies and inconsistencies. At one school visited in October, the register had still not been located. There must be an accurate central office register so that reliable data can be utilized to make informed decisions such as targeting staffing patterns or planning transitions of students from one school level to the next.

**Ordering of Critical Equipment and Materials**

Unreasonable delays occur in the procurement of essential “tools of the trade”. Psychologists, Speech/Language Therapists, and Occupational Therapists have had to wait for up to two years before receiving necessary requisitioned tests. This compromises their work, and sometimes tempts copyright infringement.

Equipment for children with orthopedic impairments has been delayed and also delivered without service contract. In some instances, the delay has been so great that the child has already outgrown the equipment by the time it arrives. A hoist needs to be ordered immediately to protect staff members who lift larger children for toileting at The Lighthouse School.

Combined cost for critical equipment and materials is estimated to be $90,000 immediately and then $45,000 budgeted annually.

**Training and Supports for School Personnel and Parents**

Despite continued encouragement by previous consultants and the Schools’ Inspectorate, differentiated instruction is not occurring in the vast majority of classrooms across all government schools. Training for teachers regarding differentiated instruction strategies needs to occur in a systematic fashion and include continuous in-class support from SEN personnel.
Training for general education and special education teachers is critical in such additional areas as effective behavioral management, functional behavior assessment/behavior intervention planning, Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and autism.

Parents need a Procedural Safeguards Notice to Parents document to clarify their rights under special educational needs policy and procedures for initiating due process should they disagree with a Team’s decision regarding evaluation or provision of services.

**Special Educational Needs Day Schools**

Only minor recommendations related to training supports are given in regard to The Lighthouse School which continues to develop in a very positive direction. For most students enrolled there, greater opportunities for instruction and interaction with non-disabled peers was a shared goal of Lighthouse administration and that of some other schools on the Islands. This could be achieved by “reverse mainstreaming” or shared use of Lighthouse staff and facility by visiting classes.

The Alternative Education Center (AEC) has also made some gains, and the results of the recent Schools’ Inspectorate report continue to be valid. Students within the Transition Program need more direct instruction in work readiness before going out to work placements, as their failure rate in those settings is much too high. The Tutorial Unit requires more intensive psychological service provision and greater coordination with government mental health agencies. Curriculum continues to be an issue there.

Of greatest concern is the Suspension Unit of the AEC and the high numbers of suspensions coming from John Gray High School. The Suspension Unit is not a true Alternative Education program, and it should be entertained whether that unit return to the school site. Additionally, suspension and exclusion from education only perpetuates and even exacerbates disengagement from instruction (dropping out), involvement in the juvenile justice system, and exacerbates social ailments. As an alternative, all government schools should begin to move away from punishment strategies for discipline and be introduced to and engage in more research-supported School-Wide Positive Behavioral Supports (PBS) strategies to reduce the number of student suspension days and consequently increase total days of instruction.

In conclusion, the challenge will be for all to move swiftly forward. Utilizing strong “learning supports” leadership, necessary systemic and programmatic changes will have to be made in order to insure greater success for Cayman Islands’ children who may be experiencing significant barriers to their learning. If recommendations within this report are followed, there will be higher achievement and improved outcomes for all children graduating from government schools, not only those with Special Educational Needs.
Full Report

BACKGROUND

During September 2005, the National Education Conference (“Defining Challenges, Finding Solutions”) gathered input from more than 600 stakeholders regarding the provision of education on the Cayman Islands. This resulted in a document, “A National Consensus on the Future of Education in the Cayman Islands”, which was endorsed and adopted by Legislative Assembly on 13 October, 2005 as the blueprint for reform of the Education Service in the Cayman Islands.

A great amount of concern was expressed by those Conference participants that the special educational needs area required review. Particular issues cited called for earlier identification of children evidencing barriers to their learning. Additionally, “more help with remedial work to enable students to catch up with their peers” was recommended.

The Special Educational Needs (SEN) program for the Cayman Islands has been reviewed frequently over time. One of the first reports that included SEN citations was that of Andrea Millett, Chief Executive of the Teacher Training Agency in England, *Review of the Cayman Islands Education Department (2000)*. Salient recommendations paraphrased from that report continue as major concerns more than six years later:

- Need for wider publicity for the support services offered by the Department so that the public knows more about what has been achieved and about what is on offer.
- By far “the greatest challenge” in meeting special needs of children was identified in meeting the content of IEP’s. Differentiated programming and teaching were found to be “relatively uncommon” in the Cayman Islands’ schools, and teachers perceived their task as delivering the curriculum to the whole class in the time allotted. It was felt that it was a matter “urgent” that mainstream teachers be given training and support for differentiated teaching strategies, supported and enforced by SEN personnel.
- High numbers of suspensions from the high schools was occurring, and the limited capacity of the Alternative Education Center’s Suspension Unit had the inevitable result that students were neither in the school nor in the Unit. Concern was particularly expressed about the use of that Unit and students “falling through the cracks” well beyond the end time of their suspensions.
- It was recommended that parental role in the special needs processes of their children be enhanced by better written guidance on SEN: its various forms, how parents can support their children, where they can find help and how the Department operates it assessment and provision of programs.
Interdepartmental cooperation between Health, Social Services and Education Departments so that the child and family can be placed at the center of the support network needed improvement. Coordination of services at that time was found to not always be effective.

Better early intervention programs for children with disabilities needed to become involved earlier in children’s lives.

Introduction of a Directorate-level post for Support Services was needed to more broadly address issues such as child abuse, health and safety, alcohol and drug abuse, race, ethnicity and gender, and parenting support.

In 2001, the Cayman Islands Schools’ Inspectorate produced a subsequent document, Quality and Standards in Special Educational Needs: A Review of findings from School Inspection Reports 1997-2001. Information was gleaned from Inspection Reports on schools during that period of time and many good features were celebrated. Concerns also emerged that have not yet been resolved:

- It was identified that teaching undertaken by SEN specialist teachers was sound and in most cases good. However, at primary and secondary schools, instruction of pupils with SEN in mainstream classes was only “sound or better in just over half of the lessons”, again due to the lack of differentiated instruction being provided by those teachers.

- Although assessments provided by SEN specialists were sound, mainstream classroom teachers rarely carried out day-to-day assessment of the work of pupils with SEN, nor did they make effective use of the assessment data generated from a variety of sources. Therefore, there was no way to monitor progress of these students.

- Annual Individual Education Plan (IEP) reviews of pupils with special education needs were not properly undertaken, were still at an early stage of development, or lacked the external support to be effective.

- In three island schools, coordination of SEN provision was sound. However, in all other schools, there were shortcomings, and in half, the shortcomings were major. Not every school could produce a copy of SEN policy and documents which gave guidance to teachers on implementation such as identification and provision of SEN. Parents needed clearer information regarding policies and guidelines of SEN provision.

- SEN support assistants working with children with disabilities were not suitably trained (e.g. lifting techniques for children with orthopedic impairments) and the role was under-developed. Mainstream teachers had too few opportunities for professional development to help develop skills in the teaching of pupils with special educational needs.

- In many schools, insufficient use was made of computers to support the learning of pupils with special educational needs.

- Services of visiting specialists were not coordinated with mainstreamed classroom teachers in order to further develop good practice in assessment, curriculum planning, and teaching.
The Schools’ Inspectorate recently released June 2006 inspection reports regarding the progress of the two special educational needs day schools: The Lighthouse School and the Alternative Education Center (AEC). It was found that The Lighthouse School was a “very good school, which has made significant progress over the last three years”. Additional professional development activities for teachers and their assistants, particularly to increase knowledge and skills of how to teach students with autism, was recommended.

The AEC program received satisfactory evaluation, with noted improvement since the previous inspection, under its new leadership. Improvement needs included communication among center staff members, curriculum within the tutorial unit, systems of progress monitoring of students’ performance, and effectiveness of some teaching. Lingering problems since the time of the Millett Report again emerged with the Suspension Unit of AEC.

Most recently, an extensive criminology consultancy report, Pre-Disposing Factors to Criminality in the Cayman Islands (June 2006) has been published. The well-researched relationship between literacy/academic achievement in relation to the likelihood of incarceration is high, and therefore, strong recommendations were offered in regard to provision of Special Educational Needs. It was noted that it was “remarkable that educational achievement seems to be low in the Cayman Islands and particularly within the prison population . . . 43.3% reported experience of learning difficulty in school and majority of those indicated they did not believe those deficiencies were addressed in the school system.” It was further noted that the islands currently provide “an inadequate Special Needs Program” which was absent of relevant curriculum for students who have learning deficiencies. Parental support was noted as lacking, and the excessive use of disciplinary suspensions excluding many special needs students from necessary instruction resulted in a recommendation for change in the schools’ disciplinary system.

All content of reports related to the provision of Special Educational Needs (SEN) services over nearly the past ten years provides a meaningful backdrop for the current findings and recommended solutions to follow. Hopefully, the urgency reflected within the most recent criminology report incites stakeholders of the Cayman Islands to proceed quickly with the recommendations of this report in relation to adequate provision for children with SEN and other barriers to learning. The long-term costs of neglect to this critical system are immense financially and in relation to the overall good of the society.
CURRENT STRENGTHS/BARRIERS AND RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS

Review of numerous documents and more than two weeks of intensive interviews with Education Department SEN administrators, all school principals, Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCO), counselors, special education specialists, teachers, community agency stakeholders, and parents on Grand Cayman and Cayman Brac produced consistent findings.

Referral, Identification, and Placement for SEN

- Although there is a sufficient 3-Phase approach to referral, identification, and placement of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), there is no data-based method beyond the occasional use of the group-administered norm-referenced Terra Nova that determines whether a student is referred for testing and services. Children seem to be referred based on teacher instinct, and testing often occurs based on how vocal a parent might be.

Referrals for formal evaluation and subsequent identification for SEN services should be data-driven. School-wide Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM) screenings are cost-effective and efficient to this end. CBM also separates which academic deficits might be school-wide, classroom, or real individual student disability problems.

Using CBM, progress-monitoring is provided for all students termly, and children with significant problems based on that data are provided targeted interventions planned by School-Based Problem-Solving Teams at Phase

Thus, evidenced-based interventions are initiated immediately (Millett Report) rather than waiting for children to fail later on in their careers while waiting for formal evaluations. Many of these interventions can be delivered through research-proven computer software programs, making this a cost and time-effective alternative to hiring additional school personnel.

During the period of time in which targeted interventions are provided, CBM progress monitoring is done more frequently (2-3 times per week) to measure the effectiveness of the particular intervention. Only when a child does not adequately respond to Phase 2 interventions, would they be referred for formal evaluation to determine eligibility for special educational needs placement.

- Vision and hearing screenings should be conducted as early as Phase 1 referral. This is basic; children should not be identified for SEN solely because they need glasses or mild or fluctuating hearing loss.
□ SEN policy should have clear timelines for completion of an evaluation process at Phase 3. Because there have been significant staffing shortages in critical areas such as Educational Psychology, Occupational and Physiotherapy, and Speech/Language Therapy over the course of years, there is a huge backlog in evaluations (in some instances, over three years past signed parental consent) and service provision.

Many students appear on Phase 3 SEN registers who have never formally been evaluated per policy. For example, approximately 38% of Cayman Brac High School students are on register, many only identified using the Terra Nova exam, which is contraindicated by the test publisher as a recommended use of this test.

□ Periodic reevaluations of students who have been identified early in their school careers as having special educational needs are rare other than possibly at The Lighthouse School. Thus, no matter how much progress a student may exhibit, once placed on a SEN register, always on a SEN register.

□ Non-categorical SEN placement is not working and leads to a shotgun approach to allocation of funds and service. SEN registers maintained by individual government schools are replete with numerous clinical and even vague diagnoses sometimes unrelated to educational disabilities. One out-lying primary school had still not located their register when interviewed in October.

Parents may not have clear communication as to the reasons why their child requires SEN services. Policy needs to be rewritten to provide clear criteria for SEN eligibility, as this will lead to greater understanding and participation by parents, inform instructional personnel, and allow funding to be efficiently targeted.

General Provision and Deployment:

□ The restructuring of the George Hicks High School campus into four separate schools has had immediate positive outcomes that have addressed significant barriers to learning (excessive disciplinary referrals, attendance, and other engagement problems). Ten additional Support Assistants now support academic interventions for children with special educational needs. The presence of a dedicated Educational Psychologist, Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), and Literacy Coordinator makes this a model site for evidencing how adequate staffing can lead to improved student achievement and character. This needs to be replicated across the four learning communities.
To attain the important goal of transparency and increased parental involvement, SEN policy needs to be more detailed in regard to numerous critical components related to Individual Education Plan implementation. Many existing IEP components are good, but there needs to be more detailed specificity to enforce accountability.

Enforcement of SEN policy at the local level is limited. SEN policy requires annual IEP review, and yet it was reported that some IEP’s have not been updated for years and even lost. (This was noted in the Inspectorate Review of 2001, as well.) When that happens, students get lost in the system, and receiving schools are not prepared to meet students’ SEN needs when transitioning. This allows the child to fail and disengage from instruction over time, particularly in adolescence. The Schools’ Inspectorate should develop extensive monitoring guide steps for IEP compliance when inspecting schools to validate whether policy has been met.

Educational Psychologists, due to over-assignment and lack of time, have historically been utilized as “psychometrists” who merely test and then attend a school meeting to interpret the results, without any meaningful involvement in subsequent interventions on behalf of these children. Understaffing in this critical service area has led to huge backlogs of evaluation referrals (e.g. 53 at Cayman Brac High School, 34 at Red Bay Primary School). Frequency of visits may be as few as every ten days at the large and complex John Gray High School or even only twice annually for some smaller outlying primary schools.

Current Educational Psychologists are trained and motivated to deliver more meaningful services of intervention, consultation, problem-solving, and training on behalf of children and families. Without increased numbers of Educational Psychologists employed by Education, this will be impossible. It is recommended that three more psychologists be added so that the four learning communities are provided timely and regularly-scheduled psychological services. Two additional psychologists would be assigned to and share duties at the more intensive programs at The Lighthouse School, AEC, and Grand Cayman high schools.

Speech/language pathologists have been forced to primarily provide crisis or more medically-based services to children with the most significant needs located at Lighthouse School, including the Early Intervention Program. Some more educationally-oriented service does trickle out to outlying schools, but children with milder impairments cannot be addressed (North Side Primary had a visit from an assigned therapist with the next follow-up occurring approximately 6 weeks later). With that
level of inconsistency and infrequency, no significant outcome can be derived from such visits.

Lack of early intervention (particularly language-based phonemic awareness necessary for early literacy development) and regularity of interventions with these children has a globally adverse affect on the achievement attainment of the student population of the Cayman Islands. Cayman Brac has been severely neglected in this respect (see next section). Also, children at the milder end of the autism spectrum can be successfully educated at their home school sites if there is adequate consultation and support from Speech/Language Therapy regarding assistive communication.

It is conservatively recommended that two additional Speech/Language therapists be added to the corps, with further investigation as to how to redeploy current members such that the four learning communities have increased accountability and dedicated access to these services without losing impact for the most severe communication disorders at The Lighthouse School.

The credentials to practice for one member of this group also needs to be investigated, as though she may be providing valuable service, it would not be recommended to have someone practicing outside of their level of training.

There are three professionals within the Occupational Therapy group, again almost exclusively addressing the needs of The Lighthouse School and Early Intervention Program. As with Speech/Language Therapists, it is impossible for this staff to address milder fine motor disabilities experienced by children living in outlying districts. Also, there seems to be an overly inflated frequency of Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) diagnosis across the islands, and it is the opinion of this investigator (as a psychologist) that the inattention, impulsivity, and over-activity of some children may be the result of ADHD “look-alikes” such as Reactive Attachment Disorder, fetal alcohol or other drug effects, or mild forms of autism spectrum disorder. Occupational Therapists have the additional training to develop sensory integration diets that are highly effective in the management of such behaviors.

It is conservatively recommended that two additional Occupational Therapists be added, with further investigation as to how to redeploy current members such that the learning communities again have dedicated access and increased accountability. For this area of service, the Cayman Brac/Little Cayman learning community will not require as much time, and this Occupational Therapist could additionally be responsible for
meeting the needs of the some of the more highly-involved children on Grand Cayman on a part-time basis.

The credentials to practice for one member of this group also needs to be investigated, as though she may be providing valuable service, it would not be recommended to have someone practicing outside of their level of training.

☐ There is no physiotherapist available within the entire service, thus children with orthopedic impairments and gross motor difficulties absolutely have no access to appropriate services. Occupational Therapists in the service have stretched beyond the scope of their practice to assist families with these children, but unless parents have the financial ability to obtain required services off-island, this population cannot be adequately served. It is urgent that a qualified Psychologist be recruited and employed for SEN services.

☐ Current school counselors appear to be well-trained and competent in their duties. Although a leaderless group, they have taken it upon themselves to meet monthly in order to support and train each other. Clear role definitions have not gone out to the sites, and principals are pulling counselors as supply teachers, playground supervisors, cafeteria monitors, and supervisors of disciplinary withdrawal rooms. This invalidates their professional role and dilutes the impact they might have on behalf of significant numbers of children and families requiring interventions.

Based on recent Criminality Report, there are significant dysfunctions within all jurisdictions. With the current number of counselors already stretched to meet the currently urgent need for interventions within the school sites, minimal time is available for interagency coordination of services. It is recommended that the addition of four licensed clinical social workers be considered and assigned to each of the four learning communities. The advantage of that level of social work credentialing is that those particular professionals have the training not only to coordinate with outside agencies but also the licensure to provide direct counseling/therapy services to children and families when required.

☐ Currently, one full-time SENCO exists for the four campuses at the former George Hicks High School. Approximately 13 partially-subsidized and non-funded part-time SENCO positions are filled by available staff employed in other positions at school sites. Some of these SENCO’s have no prior experience or training in SEN. In smaller schools, those SENCO’s may not receive any compensation or release time for this added duty to their regular assignments. Other SENCO’s may be Learning/Behavioral Specialists who carry dual roles, and this takes away from direct interventions with children.
Four full-time SENCO’s with strong knowledge and experience in special needs provision should report to the Senior Officer for Learning Supports and be administratively charged to clarify SEN rosters, develop more effective referral systems, monitor IEP service fidelity, and insure systematic training for teachers and support assistants within the four learning communities. The two large high schools on Grand Cayman should additionally each have .5 FTE allotted for SENCO. This is more aligned with the model in Great Britain, which for the most part is quite effective.

- Inclusive instruction of SEN students within mainstreamed classrooms is a preferred instructional model validated by research that increases positive outcomes, and this is now being utilized widely for children with mild disabilities rather than withdrawal. The concern remains that, in most instances, required instructional support for classroom teachers within these mainstreamed settings from trained support assistants is lacking. Classroom teachers need additional support assistants to allow them to effectively differentiate instruction and make the inclusion model work. An exemplary example is occurring on the former George Hicks campus where ten additional assistants began the school year.

At the writing of this report, a firm report as to the number of support assistants currently within the schools was unavailable. Because the SEN registers are still unreliable, even an expected Support Assistant: Student ratio has minimal utility. This will take further study over the next several months.

- It is reported that many geographic sectors of the Cayman Islands have increasing numbers of children who may speak English as their Second Language. To date, it appears there are two or three support assistants who help students while they initially acquire both conversational and academic language registers. It seems as though tutoring is the preferred intervention, and this is not empirically substantiated as an effective approach. One credentialed Language Acquisition Specialist had previously been employed by the Education Department prior to Hurricane Ivan and this post needs to be redeveloped so that more effective strategies are employed by current assistants.

- The needs of gifted children are largely unaddressed and the creativity and potential contributions of these future Cayman Islands’ citizens remain untapped. Often these students may not be the “high-flyers” in top high school sets, but children who have been relegated to lesser sets due to disruptive behaviors due to boredom while attempting to navigate an undifferentiated curriculum. There was evidence of only two operational programs and one dormant program at the primary schools and none at the
high schools for children who may be gifted or talented. Current activities are provided gratis by existing school staff members due to their dedication to these children.

There is a beginning Draft Policy for Gifted Education for government schools, but it lacks guidelines for screening and criteria for student eligibility. It is recommended that one certified teacher of the Gifted and Talented be employed to finalize policy and to support development of programs for gifted and talented children across the islands.

- An increase of qualified personnel needs to occur within SEN Service for children experiencing barriers to their learning. Consideration must be allowed that corrective action to the huge backlog within the entire system will extend throughout at least the next two years, and that will require slightly higher staffing levels than may normally be needed once the learning communities are fully operational. A summary of recommended staffing pattern from earlier sections follows below and should be equitably deployed among the four learning communities:

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<td>Licensed Clinical Social Workers</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physiotherapy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-Time SENCO’s</td>
<td>4-6*</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LBD/Special Needs Teachers</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Assistants</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifted/Talented Teachers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Acquisition Specialist</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Intervention Teachers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing Impaired Specialist</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision Impaired Specialist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* FTE equivalent, corresponding with the current SEN profile of one full-time and thirteen partially-funded and non-funded SENCO positions across the islands, is difficult to accurately estimate.

** It is difficult to determine from centralized data within the Education Department as to how many Support Assistants are actually in service currently. Because data from SEN registers are also unreliable, it is difficult to determine the exact requirement. Additional study will be required within the next several months following the completion of this report.

- School-Based Support Teams (SBST) are to be actively involved in Phase 2 problem-solving interventions and Phase 3 IEP planning and review. Not all schools utilize this model (John Gray High School, East End Primary, and North Side Primary report this) and rely totally on the appointed SENCO or parapathetic staff to unilaterally move students
through the evaluation and placement process. There is no clear definition of membership or framework for the work of SBST’s. SENCO’s should insure that SBST’s are fully functional and include greater levels of parent participation.

In order for SBST to work, decentralization of SEN personnel needs to occur. Special Needs Teachers or LBD Specialists should report to principals and have their offices within school building sites. Once proper staffing levels of specialized SEN staff are achieved, Educational Psychologists, Speech/Language Specialists, Occupational Therapists, and the Physiotherapist should have regular and predictable schedules as to when they will be present at their assigned schools. That way, those highly-trained SEN professionals can participate in a meaningful way as members of the School-Based Support Teams.

**Provision to the Sister Islands:**

- Only two visits by an Educational Psychologist occurred this past year, and by school personnel and parent reports, there has been a two-and-one-half year gap in speech/language therapy service until a couple of recent visits occurring during the first term of 2006-07. At the last visit by the Speech/Language Therapist, approximately 45 students were seen for approximately 15 minutes per session. Parents were told that the next visit by the therapist would be “sometime next term”.

This can not provide any meaningful educational impact, as the preferred frequency and amount of academically-related interventions should be approximately 20 minutes, 4 times each week. Of all districts, this learning community has not received the right amount of SEN evaluation, intervention, and programmatic services it deserves.

Based on recommended staffing levels addressed in the previous section of this report, there should be one Educational Psychologist based on Cayman Brac (currently there are 53 outstanding evaluations currently pending at Cayman Brac High School alone), possibly shared with Grand Cayman part-time following the first or second year of service.

One Speech/Language Therapist (also dually certified to direct Early Intervention Program services or possibly eventually split-funded with the Health Department to provide needed services for adults within that government system), one Licensed Clinical Social Worker (potentially split-funded with another government agency) to provide counseling and interagency interventions, and a full-time SENCO (so that SEN teachers can provide dedicated and focused instruction to children at school sites) are also required.
There must be an Occupational Therapist and Physiotherapist who visit
the island either weekly or biweekly to work meaningfully with children
and their support assistants to follow through with related IEP goals.
Again, some of those personnel and their expenses might be split-funded
in order to provide needed services to adults on island.

- Clearly, successful early intervention has immense positive outcomes for
children in terms of future achievement and behavior. There is no current
provision for Early Intervention Programs on Cayman Brac or Little
Cayman, but that is already planned for the upcoming school year. If
insufficient numbers of preschool children exist to justify a full-time
position for this program, this may be combined with the
Speech/Language Therapist duties for the Sister Islands.

- There currently is one student with Spina Bifida in a wheelchair, and next
school year, there will be two students aided by wheelchairs attending
CBHS. Also, there is a teacher with compromised mobility issues. It was
observed and reported that there are limited wheelchair access ramps to
buildings, insufficiently modified bathrooms, paved pathways and tracks,
and difficult access to the upstairs administrative office. There have been
numerous requests to Education Department for these necessary
modifications, but to date, no significant action has been undertaken. This
needs to be addressed within the next months.

- Two SEN children on Cayman Brac have “urgent” needs that must be
addressed in January 2007. One child recently had surgery for cochlear
implants. In order for her to develop language, she requires immediate
Speech/Language Therapy consultation and services; otherwise, her gains
for language development will be compromised. There is a specific
therapist with specialty in that area currently at The Lighthouse school
who should be deployed.

Also, a student with autism at one of the primary schools requires assistive
communication intervention and support from a Speech/Language
Therapist familiar with the needs of children with autism and usage of
low-tech assistive technology. A different therapist at The Lighthouse
School is qualified and should be sent to Cayman Brac immediately.
(Also, the continued funding of the Support Assistant for this child with
autism needs confirmation.)

It was reported by more than one parent of a child with significant special
educational needs that, upon request for services from the Education
Department, it was suggested: “Why don’t you consider moving to Grand
Cayman?” Such relocation would not be recommended since this removes
the child from the natural supports of the learning community of Cayman Brac.

- Cayman Brac High School has immediate need for 2-3 additional Teacher Assistants.

- The two peripatetic SEN teachers based at the Teachers Centre should each be relocated to one of the two primary schools on Cayman Brac. This will save on travel time and ensure all resources are available in a timely manner.

**Leadership and Organization of SEN**

- When asked about leadership chain-of-command and communication for the Department, all respondents expressed that there is confusion for them between the roles of the Education Officer for Special Educational Needs and the Senior Education Officer for Training and Support Services.

  When principals, service providers, and parents alike were interviewed as to who they approach when needing resources or having complaints, there was no solid consensus. Responses ranged from the Principal of the local school, the Education Officer for Special Educational Needs, the Senior Education Officer for Training and Support Services, and even the Chief Educational Officer and an MLA. Obviously this creates a system of always jumping to the top in order to get needs met.

  Clear organizational chain-of-command needs to be widely published for parents and publicly known to the larger community.

- Literacy Coordinators were hired and deployed by the Ministry at the beginning of this current school year. These specialists bring critical expertise for the improvement of reading and writing instruction for all children. As of the October investigation, Education Department had no one willing to be responsible for centralized training and supervision for these personnel, and this coordination needs to occur to maximize the outcomes of their work.

- Remaining consistent with a Governance Model supporting Learning Communities, restructure of SEN Management within that framework is recommended. There should be a Senior Officer for SEN which would encompass all programs designed to address barriers to student learning (SEN, Counseling, Gifted and Talented, Early Intervention, English as a Second Language). It is even possible that Literacy Coordinators could receive training and supervision from that central post in order to coordinate that initiative.
Under that officer’s supervision, four full-time SENCO’s with strong knowledge and experience in special needs provision should dedicate their time to clarify SEN rosters, monitor referral and provision fidelity, and insure systematic training for teachers and support assistants for the four learning communities. This critical position needs to be upgraded.

☐ Decisions across all sectors should be based on data, and attention must be given to develop a central office data system that can be used to analyze programmatic outcomes and needs. There must be an accurate SEN register maintained at Education Department so that students do not get lost when transitioning from one school site to another. Currently, the basic EXCEL software program appears insufficient to meet this need.

☐ Except in maybe one or two instances, SEN providers are internationally certified and highly qualified for their area of service. Their work is generally excellent. For providers whose credentialing is insufficient, those persons can continue to support children but need to have their role limited and supervised.

☐ Some Education Department personnel possess strong expertise with low-incidence handicaps (autism, cochlear implants, etc.) and high-priority training needs (e.g. Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, behavioral management, differentiated instruction). More structured and timely deployment of these specialists by senior management is required.

There will always be the need to bring practitioner-experts to the Islands as consultants to help support training for certain specialty areas (autism) or larger-scale initiatives (Curriculum-Based Measurement strategies), but much training can be achieved “in-house”.

☐ Clear expectations for job duties and performance are not communicated to newly-hired SEN and other Support Service personnel. New hires are left on their own without specific orientation to the service, or island culture in general. Improved induction is necessary, as some individuals nearly left or did leave the service shortly after arrival because they lacked those supports.

☐ Upon interview, other government agency stakeholders presented as highly motivated for collaboration and for considering shared resources. It is clear, that although certain individuals have sat on each others’ Boards (cooperation) over the years, there has been limited meaningful communication and commitment to creatively co-funding services (collaboration). The Learning Communities framework is ideal for this “braiding” of services and needs to tap this identified strength.
For example, comprehensive Alcohol and Other Drug education, prevention, and intervention services were identified by all agency stakeholders as significant initiatives that must be undertaken. Additionally, the Division for Child and Family Services personnel have offered to provide training to school sites but have met with no meaningful follow-up from Education. These same professionals would also like to participate in the induction process for newly hired personnel and recommend meeting quarterly with the school counselor group. The Counselling Centre is attempting to establish group counseling opportunities at school sites within the learning communities, but they need centralized Education Department supports to overcome scheduling and parental consent complications.

☐ The Senior Officer should be actively attending and providing leadership at any interagency meetings.

### Ordering of Critical Equipment and Materials

☐ Significant history exists for all SEN professional groups (Educational Psychologists, Speech/Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, and Physiologists) of not being able to procure the “necessary tools of the trade” in a timely manner despite apparent availability of budgetary funds. Testing kits and protocols necessary to conduct fair and valid assessments have either been excessively delayed within the ordering process or simply not ordered. For example, one internationally standard and essential test for measurement of cognitive abilities used by psychologists is the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children – Fourth Edition. This was requisitioned shortly after its publication and release just prior to Hurricane Ivan, reordered the following March of 2005, and only finally received for use in September 2006. This was nearly two years subsequent to the initial signed requisition. In the meantime, psychologists were forced to use an outdated instrument, whose norms were developed with a North American population in the 1980’s. This hardly leads to valid information about a child for eligibility purposes.

Also, requisitions for related test protocols are not processed for excessive periods of time, and they eventually run out. Specialists are forced to make a decision as whether to either stop their work for several months or break copyright laws with the hope of stapling newly-received protocols to photocopies if an order ever arrives. In one instance, one practitioner, in frustration, ordered materials (which arrived within a week to ten days) on her own credit card and battled for reimbursement.

To correct for the shortage of necessary test kits and protocols for all the professional groups, it is estimated that $50,000 will be necessary
immediately, and then, approximately $25,000 budgeted annually for this purpose.

Children with the most significant SEN needs often require specialized equipment such as wheel chairs, standers, hoists, and assistive technology devices. Again, when any items have been requisitioned, it takes months and even years before that order is processed and received. There are instances where the child has already outgrown the requisitioned equipment by the time it arrives, and there is one example of a wheelchair (exceeding $1000 value) that sits empty and unserviceable because of that reason. Also, if forced to use equipment that has been outgrown or worn out, there is increased likelihood that a student may actually incur long-term damage to their joints or connective tissue.

Wheelchairs and other orthopedically-related items have typically been ordered without maintenance agreements, against the recommendation of service providers. Such specialty items need frequent adjustments and repair. In frustration and so that the students do not get hurt due to equipment failures, the OT staff bought their own tools after several requests to the Department and creatively rigged together broken parts. Although this is noble, there is increased chance that injury could occur if the equipment is not professionally repaired.

Some of The Lighthouse School children have toileting needs that require lifting. As those students become older and much heavier, lifting by adults becomes nearly impossible and could possibly cause industrial injury to backs or even injure the child if they were to be dropped. A hoist to perform this task has now been on order for a significant amount of time, and despite numerous attempts to expedite the order at the Education Department, this still has not transpired.

Approximately $40,000 needs to be allocated to meet immediate equipment and software needs, and $20,000 should be budgeted annually for these required SEN expenses.

SEN employees deserve to have the tools of their trade, as this compromises the services and safety of children with SEN. This must be corrected.

Training and Supports for School Personnel and Parents

Based on reports from all school sites, differentiated programming and teaching continues to be “relatively uncommon” in the Cayman Islands’ schools. Consistent with the 2000 Millett Report, teachers perceive their task as delivering the curriculum to the whole class in the time allotted and
are cautious that not doing so will result in poor annual test scores which might be used as teacher performance evaluation criteria. Teaching to “multiple intelligences” was also encouraged by participants at the September 2005 Education Conference. Training for differentiated instruction must not be delayed any longer, as without this “best practice”, children with special needs are excluded from an equitable education.

Additional training needs listed by schools included areas such as effective behavior management, functional behavior assessment/behavior intervention planning, working with children who may have Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), inclusion, and effective teaching strategies for children with autism spectrum disorders. In many cases, knowledgeable and competent professionals already exist within the Service to support these professional development activities on a renewable basis; to date, those individuals have not been deployed in the role of trainers.

A network and regular process of meeting will enhance the expertise and professional development of the entire Learning Supports staff. Additionally, policy and procedure should be developed for financial support and release time of personnel to attend international professional conferences. Currently, it is told that decisions regarding such attendance are made fairly arbitrarily.

Based on SEN policy, parents are to receive copies of that policy, the types of support available to students with special education needs within Cayman Islands, a statement of parents’ involvement in assessment and decision-making, and guidelines for recording and acting upon parental concerns, among various other things. There is no evidence that this occurs, and at all parent forums, complaints arose that it was not clear where parents might go when they disagree or have serious complaints regarding SEN provision.

A copy of SEN policy may not have much utility for parents, given its complexity and detail. It would be recommended that a separate document, Procedural Safeguards Notice to Parents, be developed which clarifies parents’ rights and due process once their child is within the SEN system.

Special Educational Needs Day Schools (The Lighthouse School and AEC)

Consistent with findings of the Schools’ Inspectorate this past year, the Lighthouse School appears to be moving in very positive directions under most recent and current leaderships. Students there still need greater exposure to non-disabled peers. A suggestion which is supported by this writer is that of having the facility utilized by students from other school
sites, integrating them into activities with students at Lighthouse (“reverse mainstreaming”). Also, there need to be reintegration goals provided from the sending schools so that Lighthouse students are placed there with the intention of increased mainstreamed education or community experiences in the future.

Currently, the Early Intervention Program for SEN housed at The Lighthouse School is under the administrative guidance of that principal due to her expertise in that area. However, EIP would be more appropriately under the umbrella of the Early Childhood Unit for Cayman Islands, now temporarily housed within the Schools’ Inspectorate. Currently, there is very little transition planning when children move from the Early Intervention Program to Year 1 placements, and services apparently are inadvertently discontinued when this change of enrollment occurs.

There should be requirement for large-scale and comprehensive “child find” developmental screenings held within each of the learning communities so that children with disabilities can be identified at younger ages prior to becoming school-age. Early intervention is frequently critical to long-term outcomes for children with disabilities.

Children educated within the Alternative Education Center’s (AEC) tutorial program arrive most frequently from the former George Hicks campus. Although current policy requires that each student be psychologically evaluated prior to admission, this frequently has not occurred due to psychologist unavailability.

Records historically are not easily forthcoming from the sending school so there is no initial guidance as to instructional levels or effective behavior management strategies.

With the recent addition of an Educational Psychologist for the four George Hicks campuses, this hopefully will resolve. Legitimate interventions utilizing “functional behavior assessment” and “behavior intervention planning” must be attempted at the sending school prior to referral to AEC programs.

The psychiatric status of the children educated within the Tutorial Program has become notably more complicated over the course of years. Many students regularly take psychotropic medications to adequately manage mental health disorders. It should be recognized that these students have severe emotional disabilities which will persist into adulthood.

AEC staff members need greater supports from an Educational Psychologist and improved linkages with community agencies,
particularly the Health Department (who will later be involved once these students enter adult systems).

The Transition Unit at AEC serves students who have been ultimately excluded from their studies at John Gray High School. This is their last chance to address some academic deficits, and the final outcome is to transition them successfully into the world of work. At the time of this investigation, many of these students had lost their work placements because of poor social skills and work preparedness. These skills need to be taught and over-rehearsed prior to placement at work sites within the community. Otherwise, fewer employers will be willing to cooperate with the Transition Unit.

Based on prior Inspectorate reports, the Suspension Unit of AEC has probably been the most problematic over time. Students with short-term or moderate-term suspensions due to acute or chronic misbehaviors are sent from John Gray High School as disciplinary consequence. Most frequently, minimal or no coursework accompanies these students, and staff at AEC have to quickly generate academic tasks that might be appropriate for these children.

Because suspension appears to be a popular approach to behavior management at the high school, the Suspension Unit is frequently at capacity, and when there is no room, students end up staying at home missing long periods of instruction. This exclusion puts these adolescents at an increased risk of social exclusion, disengagement from achieving (dropping out), and involvement in the juvenile justice system.

Previous investigators have suggested that Suspension Unit students be served at the high school site and not in an alternative setting. The Suspension Unit really is not a SEN or even Alternative Education Program, as the curriculum does not change from that at the John Gray campus.

Further discussions should occur between John Gray administration and the Education Department as to whether it might be more appropriate to develop a true alternative program at AEC that would better serve those students with patterned or chronic misconduct. Also, the number of suspensions at all government school sites could be systemically reduced by application of scientifically-proven School-Wide Positive Behavior Support strategies rather than the continuous ineffective use of exclusion by suspension or expulsion.
IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Extension of policy and provision to students in post-secondary settings.

2. Government responsibility for SEN children educated at Cayman Islands private schools.

3. Necessity as whether to legislate SEN policy.

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED


Pre-Disposing Factors to Criminality in the Cayman Islands, researched and written by Yolande C. Forde, Consultant Criminologist, June 2006.

Alternative Education Centre Inspection Report, Cayman Islands Schools’ Inspectorate, June 2006.

The Lighthouse School Inspection Report, Cayman Islands Schools’ Inspectorate, June 2006.


Review of the Cayman Islands Education Department, Anthea Millett, Consultant, April 2000.

Ministry of Education, Education Department, and Cayman Islands Schools’ Inspectorate internal memorandums and communications.
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  Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCO)
  Learning and Behavioral Disorder (LBD) Specialists
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  Speech/Language Pathologists
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