



Ministerial Statement

By

The Hon. Diallo Rabain, JP, MP
Minister of Education

School Closures

March 3 2023

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to update this House and the listening public on essential but difficult decisions that have been taken to advance the Government's commitment to reforming Bermuda's public education system.

Mr. Speaker, as you, the Members and the listening public are aware, the Government's Education Reform mandate involves restructuring the Bermuda Public School System (BPSS) by phasing out middle schools and introducing Signature Schools at the senior level and the creation of Parish Primary Schools with one Primary School in each Parish and two in Pembroke.

Mr. Speaker, this Ministerial Statement will be fundamentally different from those I have delivered over the past 36 months. Previous statements have afforded us the opportunity to celebrate milestones and achievements as we progress our reform agenda. Today, I would like to update you on two significant decisions: the closure of Clearwater Middle School and Heron Bay Primary at the end of June 2023.

Mr. Speaker, I know that individuals in the respective communities are still processing the information shared with them this week. Much work is required to enact these changes, but it is essential that all of Bermuda is informed of the factors that have been considered as the rationale for the decision to close these two schools.

Mr. Speaker, let me take each school in turn.

For Clearwater Middle School:

- Enrolment is low and, over time, will continue to decline. As of February 1, Clearwater had 71 students compared to an average of 225 students at other middle schools.
- There is ample space at other Middle Schools to accommodate the students
- As the Clearwater site is earmarked to become the site of a Signature School, it is more practical to address infrastructure issues with an empty school.

For Heron Bay Primary School:

- Enrolment is low, and as of February 1, Heron Bay Primary had 59 Students enrolled.
- There is ample space to accommodate the students in other primary schools.
- We are currently considering options for expanding our alternative programs to include girls. Currently, the Heron Bay campus already houses one alternative education program.

Mr. Speaker, this decision will be difficult for many, and we know there will be questions and concerns. This week, I and others from the Ministry and Department of Education met with key stakeholders. We want to ensure they are informed of these decisions, the plans for enacting them and the support structures that will be in place to ensure the transition is as smooth as possible.

The transition plan focuses on:

- student enrolment, transition and integration into other schools;
- uniforms;
- transportation;
- staffing options for permanent staff, work permit holders and yearly contract holders; and, importantly,
- the process for students, parents and staff engagement as the decision is enacted over the coming months.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize and apologize in advance for the inconvenience caused to our teachers, students and their families by this announcement. With regard to student and staff transitions, the Commissioner of Education and her Department of Education colleagues will engage in personalized one-to-one processes with each permanent staff member to hear their preferences regarding their redeployment. Rest assured, we have sufficient positions within the Bermuda Public School System to accommodate all permanent Clearwater Middle School and Heron Bay Primary staff, and there are enough places to accommodate the students in other schools.

Mr. Speaker, we know that Clearwater and Heron Bay are unique school communities and important to the larger St. David's and Southampton communities. Losing a significant fixture in each of these communities will be difficult. Through our History and Legacy Committee, we will ensure that the memories of Clearwater Middle School and Heron Bay Primary are cherished, and that their histories and legacy are recognized and honoured.

Mr. Speaker, I reiterate we commit to providing regular updates to those impacted and commit to being available to answer any questions that arise through our various communication channels.

Mr. Speaker, this week has been a very difficult one for our Clearwater Middle School and Heron Bay Primary School families. We appreciate their support and understanding as we navigate this transition while we undergo this process as part of our commitment to transforming public education in Bermuda.

Thank you, **Mr. Speaker**.