

Government to take over private early childhood institutions ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The Government will be moving to convert private early childhood institutions to publicly run facilities.

This was disclosed by Minister of Education, Youth and Information, Senator the Hon. Ruel Reid, who said the process is slated to begin in September this year, with the conversion of the Jamaica House Infant School.

The Minister was speaking at an awards function for the Project for the Advancement of Early Childhood Education (P.A.C.E.) Canada, at the Terra Nova All-Suite Hotel in St. Andrew on April 28.

It is anticipated that at least 50 per cent of the institutions will be transitioned by 2020.

The Minister said the aim is to transition as many of these institutions that have been registered and are working towards meeting the 12 legal operating standards for certification, "to public (tuition-free) institutions."

"We will therefore now take control of these institutions, put the management in place, appoint new Boards, and the Boards will be responsible for governance of those schools within the regulations as directed by the Early Childhood Commission (ECC)," he said.

Mr. Reid noted that this change is necessary given that over the years, the Government has been contributing to the over 2,400 privately run early childhood institutions through the provision of stipend, nutritional support, school materials and training.

He added that the Government has also assisted these institutions by placing at least one trained teacher in them, and has supported a programme to provide teacher assistants who are well trained.

"It is an anomaly, because Government ought not to be putting its money into institutions that are private...so we now have to make the adjustment and move them directly into the public realm," the Minister said.

He further informed that an Early Childhood Education Task Force has been set up which will be chaired by Professor of Child Health and Development, Maureen Samms Vaughan, and co-chaired by Chairman of the ECC, Trisha Williams-Singh.

"They are to give me a full report on the status of the early childhood sector, all the development needs that are required, and the way forward to make sure that they are meeting all the goals and aspirations that are so articulated," Mr. Reid said.

He further noted that all the programmes to transition the private early childhood institutions to public facilities are to be outlined and the timeline established, in order to track the progress.

In the meantime, Mr. Reid thanked P.A.C.E. Canada for its contribution to the advancement of Jamaica's early childhood sector.

He noted that since 2014, P.A.C.E. has partnered with the HEART Trust/NTA to provide early childhood teacher certification, which has resulted in 86 teachers being certified up to level 2 to date.

"P.A.C.E. Canada has also provided over CAN\$500,000 in funding to early childhood institutions and basic schools, teacher-training and (other) projects since 2014," he said, noting that CAN\$100,000 has been committed to the sector under the project for 2017.

The project has been partnering with the Government for 30 years, providing support to more than 300 early childhood institutions across the country through donations, teacher bursaries and training, and computer education programmes for students.

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