

# Attorney calls on Ministry to step up school safety

By Jrucilla Samuel

Local attorney Steadroy Benjamin is insisting that the time is ripe for the Ministry of Education to implement stronger measures to protect students and teachers on school compounds.

Benjamin was speaking in light of Friday's bloody fight at Ottos Comprehensive School which saw one boy receiving quite a few cutlass wounds about his body.

Pastors from the evangelical community had highlighted that the root of such violent incidents lies largely in many homes, which they said, provide poor examples of conflict resolution.

But while Benjamin acknowledges that this might indeed be true, he told The Daily OBSERVER, "It is not enough to say that the problem in fact happens and begins in the home."

of Teachers Vernest Mack, who said the sector has changed between 1981 and now.

"There are more expectations for teachers and students have increased," Mack said. She noted that at the dawn of independence, five GCE subjects was considered a good haul.

"But these days, students are getting 10 and 12 subjects, and the responsibilities for teachers to ensure that students reach these expectations have also increased," Mack said.

But what has remained constant, the ABUT boss said, is the low priority placed on teachers insofar as remuneration is concerned.

"Male teachers are leaving. A teacher's salary cannot sustain a family," Mack said, touching, how-

He believes officials need to take a "positive" and tougher stance and expel students who fight.

"What the education ministry must do," recommended Benjamin, "is to make it mandatory that anyone found taking any weapon onto the school premises be expelled from school immediately."

When The Daily OBSERVER inquired what actions the authorities are going to take, regarding the Ottos fracas, Minister of Education Dr Jacqui Quinn-Leandro told this newspaper they are still awaiting the written report. But she stressed that the ministry won't be taking the matter lightly and isn't ruling out any alternative, including expulsion. She insisted the ministry's dead set on preventing a recurrence of Friday's brawl.

"If the child threatens ever tacitly, not just on pay but on the feminisation of the profession and the implication of that on the male student population.

Many other issues were raised by the two panellists and from the floor, including what could counter the pervasive media influences bent on creating consumer societies.

Arts education as integral and not incidental was also discussed.

The papers presented during the conference, on culture, economics, gender, law, media, religion, and more, will be published for posterity and the benefit of those who missed the introspection.

While analysis and ideas flowed during the two-day session, the same could not be said of the traffic leading to the Jolly Beach site.

the safety of other children, as well as teachers," she noted, "the child cannot be in that school."

Dr Quinn-Leandro added, "We will also have to see if the child is better off in another environment."

But as officials weigh their options, local pastor Dr Rolston Jeffrey of Mount of Blessings Clare Hall New Testament Church of God, remains adamant that expulsion is not the antidote.

Dr Jeffrey told this newspaper that expulsion will only breed greater deviance. But he is cognizant that the times are critical and has renewed calls for authorities to take the bull by the horns and hold all parents accountable for their children's conduct.

The pastor pointed out that as the number of single-parent homes climb and family pressures intensify, so too must parents rise to the occasion and take their role ever more seriously.

And in this era of escalating costs, the pastor cautioned that economics should not dictate the quality and quantity of time parents spend with their children.

Dr Jeffrey emphasised that the quest for material things and the chase for the almighty dollar have their prices. He stressed that parents need to redirect their



attention to what matters — "spending time (with their children) and getting their priorities right."

The Daily OBSERVER understands that the battle to maintain order in the nation's schools is raging. Reports of sexual gatherings, student-teacher-combat, uncontrollable anger, and pupils' use of satanic messages to retaliate against authoritative figures are just few problems plaguing the learning institutions.

Ministry officials have also expressed frustration, feeling overwhelmed by negligent parents and other individuals who look to them for all the answers.

But one official from the Ministry of Finance told this newspaper that parental demands will intensify when education suffers "a further casualty" — one he said Mount St John's won't be able to treat — another chopped education Budget.

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