

TTUTA ON TUESDAY

Downplaying School Violence

RECENT STATEMENTS on school violence made by the Minister of Education would seem to deflect responsibility for treating with the problem in a decisive manner. From any perspective, the fact that approximately ten per cent of the affected population are being referred to the Student Support Services Division (SSSD) is empirical evidence that there is a serious dysfunction in our school system.

Schools mirror the wider society. Something has gone awry among us as a society in terms of our socialisation systems and structures. As moral agents that ought to provide social satisfaction, schools are now compelled to make the necessary adjustments in their modus operandi to do

their part in addressing this dysfunction. By downplaying the gravity and extent of the problem avoids effective diagnosis and solution.

The home is the first education institution, a fact to which the minister correctly alludes. What is being done to address this deficiency? Are parents going to be held more accountable for their children's deviant behaviour?

In the past many ideas have been touted such as the establishment of homework centres. These have never materialised. Other interventions such as the vacation revision programme for form one students, conceptualised by the ministry in 2022, also never achieved its goals given the poor level of participation by stu-

dents.

In the interim, schools are faced with unprecedented levels of deviance, without commensurate resources and support systems. School administrators would readily attest to the fact that the SSSD is overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of students needing interventions.

While the minister cited statistics to support her assertion, the reality is that students are only referred to the SSSD or suspended after several levels of interventions have been unsuccessfully attempted.

From unco-operative parents to those that deny their children's acts of indiscipline and others that have completely abandoned their parental responsibility, teachers and school officials are challenged to get one in every ten children currently enrolled in the school system to follow basic school rules.

The existing legal framework that govern schools also places severe restrictions on the options available to

school officials to get students to conform to standard rules of social engagement.

Counselling a child at school to reform offending behaviours is being countenanced by parents. School officials have no recourse in a society that has been weaned by politicians on rights/entitlements devoid of responsibility.

Unfortunately, some children's only purpose for attending school is the receipt of meals and social welfare. Parents of these children make little or no effort to ensure that their children are in a position to take advantage of the schooling opportunity, proudly advancing poverty as their justification. In their eyes, schools represent no hope for a better life or a way out of economic and social hardship.

Unfortunately, the minister's simplistic diagnostic of this social conundrum is deliberate and typical of many politicians, for it avoids the application of politically unpalatable

solutions.

Confronting hard social truths has not been the forte of many politicians since it can result in political suicide. Many task forces and committees established over the years to advise on this issue of school violence would have learnt this the hard way.

A one-size-fits-all approach to education based on the assumption that all of society shares the same notion of the nature, value and purpose of education is the first fundamental error that must be addressed. Unequal social and economic starting points will not result in equal social outcomes.

It is a waste of resources to continue our human capital development thrust with these assumptions. Form must follow function in the conceptualisation of any modern education system. Such a political mind-set while bold and radical, though not new, will ensure greater returns on our educational investments. Our colonial, elitist factory education model has and continues to deter our country from maximising its human capital.

Schools are far too expensive places for social deficits to be expressed in the form of violence and indiscipline. Inequity and marginalisation have an uncanny way of exploding when not addressed in an effective and timely manner.

Even without the ugly spectre of school violence, CSEC results, being the culmination of 12 years of public education, have been telling us that the system has not been meeting the needs of the majority of our students.

Unfortunately, at this juncture in our society, people are more emboldened to reject an educational system that is irrelevant to their needs in a forceful manner. Are we prepared to listen to what the school violence is telling us?

Unfortunately owing to the negative stigmatisation associated with mental health, too many people, including highly qualified professionals, fail to take adequate steps to safeguard their mental health until it's too late.