



FIJI TEACHERS UNION

(THE CHILD OUR HOPE)

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PRESS RELEASE

DEVIANT BEHAVIOUR OF STUDENTS

Behaviour management has become a serious challenge and obstacle for teachers as well as parents /guardians over the past decade.

Cases of negative student behavior, from bullying to the use of vulgar and offensive language, fights around bus stands, substance abuse like smoking suki and glue sniffing are making headlines, and FTU is worried about the impacts these are having on the students themselves, school prefects, parents, teachers and administrators.

Cases of sniffing glue and consuming drugs in schools are worrying, especially when the safety and welfare of other students is concerned.

School heads, teachers on duty and the classroom teachers are draining their energy into addressing behavior management issues which are on the rise.

The Education Minister Honourable Premila Kumar is on record in the print media, stating that drugs have reached primary schools. This is a very serious situation involving our primary school students.

In the newspaper article titled 'Our growing drug dilemma' (FT: 05/06/22) by John Mitchell, Education Minister Honourable Premila Kumar revealed that some primary school students in the Lami corridor had been caught with drugs and related apparatus. Police spokeswoman Ana Naisoro said four juveniles aged 16 and 17 were involved in drug-related activity from January to April this year. 18 cases were recorded by police in 2021 and 29 in 2020.

Via the article, renown psychologist Selina Kuruleca believed the country's 'war on drugs' was no longer an effective intervention strategy. She shared that there was a serious need to better understand the dynamics of the illegal drug trade and how innocent children were slowly being made to be an integral part of it.

The time to act is now because the lives of Fiji's children now hang in the balance and if this negative behaviour is not controlled, it will have serious repercussions on the education system.

The Union is of the firm belief that one of the major causes of deteriorating behaviour of students is the lack of qualified counsellors in secondary schools.

The 1993 Job Evaluation Exercise conducted by external consultants strongly recommended that professional counselors be appointed in all high schools.

The JEE was implemented in 1998, and the first 28 counsellor positions were established in the large category of schools. Those counsellors were teachers who acquired Diploma in Guidance and Counselling from USP at that time. They were remunerated equal to HOD's and had to teach 50% of the load (16 periods per week) and were involved in assisting students with behaviour problems for the remainder.

All correspondence to the General Secretary Fiji Teachers Union, Please.

Branches: Suva, Nasinu, Rewa, Tailevu, Ra, Tavua, Ba, Lautoka, Nadi, Sigatoka, Navua, Labasa, Bua, Taveuni, Savusavu, Levuka.

The intention was to gradually increase the number to cover all the 180 secondary schools. In 2010, however, the interim Government implemented a 10% reduction across the board in all Ministries as a cost cutting measure.

Hence, the 28 counsellor positions were reduced to 4, one at each Divisional office. MEHA then assured that the positions would be reinstated once funds were available. Unfortunately, this has not been done to date despite consistent reminders.

The Union is aware that some 50 teachers were recently provided with training to assist with counselling in clusters of schools. This has been a dismal failure as they are not being remunerated nor paid travel expenses despite the promise.

The Union urges MEHA to establish counsellor positions in all the secondary schools without any further delay. These teachers must also be financially assisted to upgrade their qualification through distance learning mode as was the practice in the past.

Large class sizes prevalent in the urban schools also need to be addressed urgently. The 1993 JEE recommended that straight classes be limited to 35 and composite classes should not have more than 22 children. Almost 30 years down we still have over 45 and, in some cases, up to 60 in a class.

Behaviour management as well as quality education that we harp about cannot be achieved in these overcrowded classrooms. MEHA seems to have completely lost the plot here.

The parents and guardians must also take equal responsibility to instill values in their children. They need to spend quality time with them and periodically visit the school to meet the class teachers to explore means to work together for the betterment of the child.

Children must understand that rights come with responsibilities. They must appreciate the efforts of the parents and teachers to see them through school. While teachers are doing their level best despite the extreme challenges, they cannot do miracles.

The Union fervently hopes that MEHA will treat this matter with the urgency it deserves.

The deviant behavior of students cannot be tackled by MEHA alone. Participation of all sectors of society is a must, therefore, the need to dialogue and collaborate.

It is high time we had a national conversation, in a roundtable or symposium or whatever form, to discuss this crucial issue and come up with ways to work together and find lasting solutions.



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Agni Deo Singh
General Secretary
Wednesday 20th July 2022.