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FTC: Get facts right

Confederation hits out at Education Minister for 'attack' on teachers

By FELIX CHAUDHARY

EDUCATION Minister Premila Kumar is ignorant of the reality on the ground faced by teachers on a daily basis, says the Fiji Teachers Confederation.

In a statement issued by the Fiji Teachers Union

general secretary Agni Deo Singh and Fijian Teachers Association general secretary Paula Manumanuitoga, the confederation said Mrs Kumar's recent attack on teachers during a tour of schools across the country showed she was unaware of what teachers were going through every day.

"If she had bothered to get some factual information on the large class sizes in urban schools, she would have realised that there is a need to appoint more teachers," the FTC said.

"The confederation advises her to get her facts right and refrain from making derogatory comments in the media, as she is only

doing harm and defeating the very purpose of the responsibility she has been bestowed with."

The confederation said as the legitimate representative of teachers, it remained "ready to work in partnership with the ministry to focus on enhancing quality delivery of education".

"However, we will not tolerate any attempt to publicly belittle or threaten our members or to treat them unfairly."

Questions sent to Mrs Kumar and Education Minister permanent secretary Dr Anjeela Jokhan on the FTC statement on November 5, 8 and again yesterday remain unanswered.

'Appalled and dismayed'

By FELIX CHAUDHARY

THE Fiji Teachers Confederation says it is "appalled and dismayed" with the comments made by Education Minister Premila Kumar during a recent tour of schools across the country.

The confederation, in a statement issued by Fiji Teachers Union general secretary Agni Deo Singh and Fijian Teachers Association general secretary Paula Manumanuitoga, claimed Mrs Kumar directed school heads to lift the morale of students but in the same breath, belittled teachers.

"While the ministry is concerned about the welfare of students, it is surprising that their very own teachers — who look after the students' welfare — are ridiculed," the confederation said.

"The second wave of the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic has affected physical interactions between teachers and students for about half the year.

"However, our teachers ensured the continuity of learning during this period via online classes in the form of Zoom, Moodle and classroom drive.

"Bulk of these teachers used personal money to purchase data in order for online teaching and learning to continue."

The confederation said teachers also made an effort to reach out to students who had issues with accessibility to internet and data by preparing worksheets and delivering them to students.

Questions sent to Mrs Kumar and Education Minister permanent secretary Dr Anjeela Jokhan on the FTC statement on November 5, 8 and again yesterday remain unanswered.



Minister of Education Premila Kumar talks to the teachers at Adi Cakobau School during her visit to schools last week. Picture: RAMA

Teachers need to be 'guardians' Kumar's comments 'unfounded allegations'

By WANSHIKA KUMAR

TEACHERS need to step out of the typical teacher-student relationship and be more of a guardian to children, says Education Minister Premila Kumar.

She said this while addressing teachers at Adi Cakobau School last week.

Mrs Kumar said many students and their families were still reeling from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"So the children are coming back with the mental health imbalance and you need to work with the children," she said.

Mrs Kumar said teachers would need

to have lot of patience with the students — guide them, talk to them, and deal with them just like friends — so they could openly share their issues.

"And do not just close the door on them, you know, that typical teacher-student relationship, maybe you need to step out of that role and be more of a guardian to the child."

Mrs Kumar said Year 12 and Year 13 was very crucial for students and she asked the teachers to pay a lot more attention to them. She also encouraged the teachers to ask the students to get vaccinated.

"ACS is always known for couple of things, first one is that ACS produces

leaders, national leaders and it is obviously the teaching and learning that takes place in a school.

"And I know ACS provides a balanced education, education in every sense of the word to a child — so you believe in holistic development of a child. That's why ACS students, they excel in sports as well and we've seen during national games or during any inter-school competitions, the students from ACS they do very well.

"And that is the fighting spirit that ACS is known for and I would like to see that fighting spirit amongst the teachers and students so that the students, despite COVID-19, they'll be able to excel in their studies."

By FELIX CHAUDHARY

EDUCATION Minister Premila Kumar has been criticised for saying teachers have poor oral and written communication skills.

A statement by the Fiji Teachers Confederation issued by Fiji Teachers Union general secretary Agni Deo Singh and Fijian Teachers Association general secretary Paula Manumanuitoga said the minister did not provide a basis for her statement.

They also labelled her comments as "unfounded allegations".

"She also accused teachers of not upskilling themselves while the fact remains that teachers in both primary and secondary schools have upgraded their qualification from diploma to degree and then postgraduate diploma, and many have also completed

their masters," the FTC said.

"General unsupported scathing public attacks on teachers at a time when we wish to build up a conducive learning environment is void of any logic or rationale."

The confederation claimed the ministry's own records would show that a vast majority of teachers upgraded their own qualifications at their own expense "as there is hardly any budgetary allocation for in-service training".

"Honourable Kumar should upgrade their salaries to the correct band as per the JEE (Job Evaluation Exercise) 2017 which MEHA is in breach of."

Questions sent to Mrs Kumar and Education Minister permanent secretary Dr Anjeela Jokhan on the FTC statement on November 5, 8 and again yesterday remain unanswered.

No hugs or shaking hands for Years 12, 13

By LITIA CAVA

EDUCATION Minister Premila Kumar says Years 12 and 13 students have been instructed not to hug or shake hands with their friends at school.

She said this was part of the COVID-19 safe return

to school protocols and guidelines. Mrs Kumar said students must wear masks at all times unless they are involved in sporting activities.

She said students would also be advised to wash their hands regularly.

"They will be hitting staggered lunch and recess

hours," she said.

"They will be also told not to hug their friends when they see them for the first time. So such practices will be stopped and children will be told as to why they cannot do this. There will be a lot of awareness on the dos and don'ts and we will put reasoning

behind it so that children understand the situation.

"If they want that level of protection, they cannot do a number of things they usually did previously."

Mrs Kumar said 176 school principals and child protection officers had been trained in basic psychosocial support.