



**Remarks
By**

**The Honourable T. Desmond Bannister
Minister of Education**

**At
Garvin Tynes Primary School's
Autism Awareness Assembly**

Friday, 30th April, 2010

**Garvin Tynes Primary School
Alexandria Boulevard**

9:30 am

Salutations:

Canon Basil Tynes, Rector, St. Barnabas Anglican Church;

Mr. Sidney Collie, Member of Parliament for the Blues Hills Constituency;

Mrs. Carnetta Ferguson, Assistant Director of Education;

Mrs. Olga Richards, District Superintendent for the Southwestern District;

Mrs. Sharon Dean-Laing, Senior Education Officer;

Assistant Superintendent of Police, Paul Rolle; Officer-in-Charge of the Carmichael Road Police Station;

Mr. Michael McGinty, Principal, Bright Horizon, Pompano Beach, Florida;

Mrs. Andrea Simms-Adderley, National Teacher of The Year 2010 -2012;

School Board Members;

Representatives from the various schools;

Teachers;

Students;

Parents;

Ladies and gentlemen

Good morning.

It is my esteem pleasure to be here at Garvin Tynes Primary School this morning for this special Autism Awareness Assembly. I am also delighted that so many special guests who are passionate about this cause are a part of this occasion, namely Canon Basil Tynes, My Parliamentary Colleague, Mr. Sidney Collie, officers of the Special Services Unit and our guest speaker, Mr. Michael McGinty, Principal of Bright Horizons School, Pompano Beach Florida.

As you all are aware, Garvin Tynes is the home of the National Teacher of The Year 2010-2012. Mrs. Andrea Simms-Adderley, who plays an integral part in the administration of the Autistic Unit and the national effort for the inclusion of students with special needs in our schools.

I am certain that Canon Tynes will agree with me that Mrs. Simms-Adderley's selection as National Teacher of The Year serves a divine purpose at this time. She will undoubtedly be an influential voice to educate our populous about the need to include and involve students with special needs in our schools as they are entitled to an education.

I believe that Mrs. Simms-Adderley's achievement is indicative this school's record of excellence since it was opened in 1994.

I also pleased that this observance is being held here at the birthplace of the largest Autism Centre catering to the education of autistic students in The Bahamas.

Since the unit was opened in 1999 with one classroom teacher, a teacher's aide and five students, it has expanded to include a full-fledge Centre which includes three additional classrooms, a computer lab, living skills room and soft playroom. There are presently four trained teachers and five aides to oversee forty-two students: 20 pre-schoolers, 1 primary class of eleven (11) students and a vocational class that also has eleven (11) students.

Ladies and gentlemen, this Autistic Unit is a continued effort by subsequent Governments to ensure that students with disabilities are included in the education system. Evident of this mission in the establishment of the Stapledon School in 1962, The Centre for The Deaf in 1966 and other special units at various secondary schools throughout New Providence and Grand Bahama.

We are by no means patting ourselves on the back for these achievements because we know that there is much more to be done with regard to fully integrating special-needs students in the normal daily school operations. The reality is that we live in one world and One Bahamas and our children should not be segregated on the basis of a challenge or disability whether physical or intellectual.

Since 2007, the Ministry of Education has renewed its focus in the area of understanding and getting a clearer picture of how to strengthen the capacity of our schools to accommodate children with special needs in The Bahamas.

We contracted Dr. Shirley McBride, a Consultant with expertise in this area to do a thorough assessment of our ability to achieve this critical goal. Dr. McBride's candid report indicated that we have tremendous work to do if we are realized this objective. One key component, Dr. McBride cited as essential to this process is greater "Awareness" of the need to include students with special needs in regular schools; preferably in their neighbourhoods.

Gregory Cash, a former student of this school is testimony of what good can occur when children with disabilities are given an equal chance to succeed. Master Cash, who was diagnosed with cerebral palsy as a toddler was raised by parents who refused to allow their son to be stagnated by medical and societal beliefs that he would be slow learner and not be as productive as normal children.

Although he came to Garvin Tynes Primary two years behind his peers, he left accomplished, thriving and defying all expectations of what a special needs student could do. Gregory graduated valedictorian of this school. He was also the school and district finalist in the National Spelling Bee in 2009. Gregory, plans to be an attorney and a sportscaster one day. Our mandate should to be enable more students to become like Gregory Cash, believing that they achieve their dreams despite their challenges.

I believe that what you are doing here today coupled with your partnership with R.E.A.C.H and parental activism has contributed to more of our citizens knowing about Autism and recognizing that children who have this condition need the same love and attention as every one. I urge you to continue to draw attention to this cause so that more people can be educated and embrace our special need students in every facet of our society.

It is commendable that you have invited Mr. Michael McGinty, Principal of the Bright Horizon School in Pompano Beach, Florida. I understand that Mr. McGinty's school has been established since 1978, and has had great success in servicing students with special needs from ages five to twenty-two (pre-kindergarten to 12th grade). I wish to extend a warm welcome to Mr. McGinty on behalf of the Government of The Bahamas and trust that his visit will benefit our Special Needs Programme in The Bahamas.

What is exemplary about Bright Horizons is that each student has an Individual Education Plan for maximum quality education and learning. I challenge all teachers and administrators to utilize this strategy to enable our students to actualize their potential.

The Government of The Bahamas is committed to ensuring that every student throughout The Bahamas has equal opportunity to learn. Our commitment is demonstrated by the fact that it is Goal 4 in the Draft Ten Year Plan on Education which states that: “*All schools must be committed to meeting the diverse needs of students. Therefore efforts must be made to supply resources and necessary conditions that meet the needs of students, regardless of their social and cultural backgrounds or abilities.*”

It is this pledge that I make to you on behalf of a caring Government who believe in the right of every citizen to have access to an education. Again my heartfelt congratulations to Garvin Tynes Primary School one of the greatest primary schools in Our Bahamaland.

Thank you.

