

CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS

SCHOOL INTEGRITY CLUBS

Friday 28th September, 2018

The question may be asked: What is the School Integrity Club? What is the *raison d'être* of the School Integrity Club? As I see it, the School Integrity Club is a unit within a school population consisting of teachers and students, striving towards the common goal of providing for students a non-academic and pragmatic approach to the attainment of positive attitudes and values.

It is expected that students will be enabled to influence other students to abandon negative behavioural patterns and at the same time to adopt high moral and ethical standards.

No doubt, you would have encountered this description before, perhaps in a different form, but its repetition is demanded by the share weight and importance of this project.

The utility of the Integrity Clubs has been recognized and promoted as far afield as India, Kenya and Ghana; and as near home as Jamaica.

We in Trinidad and Tobago also embrace this extraordinary concept and today we have the official launch of our School Integrity Club pilot project. This pilot project is considered necessary in order that we might adopt, amongst other things, the most effective and practical channels that would ensure the viability and durability of the Integrity Clubs.

Six pilot schools have been selected from across the country and an Integrity Club has been established in each of them. From amongst the students of each of the pilot schools, five schools ambassadors have been selected. The schools ambassadors were given special training by officers of the Trinidad and Tobago Transparency Institute and the Integrity Commission. And even a cursory reading of the various schedules will reveal the depth and breadth of this training. At one

session, for example, under the objective “Leadership”, some of the topics were: “types of leadership, qualities of a leader, skills of a leader and outline of the job at hand”. Under the objective of “Communication/Advocacy” some of the topics were: “verbal communications to inspire change, para-language tone; body language”. Under the objective of “Useful Strategies to Achieve Objectives” some of the topics were: “case study, visual aids, effects of competition, problem solving” – and this was not the entire programme.

There can be no doubt that the training that these school ambassadors received was thorough and professional. And this is, as it should be.

I now pay tribute to these school ambassadors – all thirty of them. Selected by Principals and Deans of their respective schools for their exemplary and outstanding conduct and high moral standing, these school ambassadors are stars of the first magnitude of their schools, and are worthy of the title “Ambassadors”.

I salute their courage, their selflessness, their deep sense of duty and responsibility in assuming this very challenging position. No fear constrained them as they took a stand for integrity. No apprehension assailed their minds as they came forward to confront corruption. No indecision supervened as they contemplated the demands of the task that lay to their hands. Not so.

Rather, they were inspired by the lofty desire to preside over the improvement and indeed the upliftment of the ethical standards of their fellow students and simultaneously to inveigh against the corrosiveness of corruption.

I extol these brave and patriotic students, and they have my full and unqualified approbation.

The philosophy of our School Integrity Clubs, blending and intermingling with that of other School Integrity Clubs in other countries of the world, can be compendiously described as the counteraction and eventual eradication of indiscipline, and antisocial and cognate behaviour and violence existing in our schools on the one hand, and on the other, the promotion of the exalted ideals of respect, fairness, compassion, integrity, honesty, patriotism and responsibility.

This dovetails with my description of the Integrity Clubs announced earlier in this address.

Science tells us that integrity is not congenital; integrity is not part of DNA. It is fundamentally a state of mind and therefore it forms the subject of a deliberate choice that one makes for oneself: and that choice is the veneration of moral, ethical and spiritual values and principles.

The concept is to incorporate students in the Integrity Clubs whilst they are still young and their minds are still malleable and receptive.

When these values have been thoroughly ingrained in the minds of our young students; when they grow with these values upper most in their minds; when "integrity" becomes a word freighted with positive meaning and significance; when the word "corruption" conjures up in their minds revulsion, disgust and contempt; then we would be well on our way to establishing that elusive society that is free from corruption and rich in morals and ethics: because, ladies and gentlemen, the children of today will be the adults of tomorrow.

In a speech I delivered at the prize giving function of the Poster Design Project of the Integrity Commission in July of this year I stated:

"I have arrived at the settled conclusion that we must involve the young people in our struggle against corruption and our maintenance of integrity in our society. They are clearly ready to be involved. They would be the future Trinidad and Tobago and must be given an opportunity to contribute to the configuration of their future society". I consider those words to be apposite to the school Integrity Clubs.

I have one observation. I am of the view that along with the implementation of the project, consideration should be given to a follow up plan. This is to ensure that the ideals, values, principles that the students adopted and observed whilst they were in school should be given full opportunity to flourish and prosper when they are out of the school environment. They cannot be left alone to keep their heads above water in the turbulent seas in which they might find themselves. They would need support. The homes, the communities, the churches, the NGO's,

the media could all play crucial roles in assisting and supporting those students in maintaining the values, the moral and ethical standards, the principles for which they had high regard and which they cherish for whilst they were in school.

I consider this follow up plan to be of cardinal importance for these young people.

It would be crass and unforgivable negligence on my part were I to close without making special mention of certain individuals who, quietly albeit effectively, operated behind the scenes and collectively gave this project impetus and thereafter continuing momentum.

I acknowledge the Minister of Education, the Principals of the pilot schools, the Integrity Club Champion teachers of the pilot schools and by no means least the parents.

It was their willingness, their foresight, their commitment and ultimately their fiat, that made this entire project a reality.

I thank them for their invaluable assistance and support and I entreat them to continue in that very generous and considerate vein.

I have reposed no small amount of faith and hope in the school integrity club project. May this pilot project go on to be a resounding success and may its termination in June 2019 herald the establishment of School Integrity Clubs in all secondary schools nationwide.

After the Integrity Clubs are up and running in all secondary schools we would turn our attention to the primary schools, because after all, there is where it all begins.

Ladies and gentlemen we cannot fail these children. We must not fail these children because it is these children who will ultimately save Trinidad and Tobago from moral implosion.