

STATEMENT BY FRED MITCHELL MP FOX HILL
ON REPORTS OF REMOVAL OF THE PRINCIPAL OF
WALTER PARKER PRIMARY SCHOOL

11th January 2011

My colleague Alfred Sears MP and Opposition spokesman on education is away on leave and will no doubt have more to say on the matter of the fate of Shelia Scavella, the Principal of the Walter Parker Primary School. Since I first raised this issue, and having gone to Freeport to meet with the teachers at the school on two occasions with Mr. Sears, I must comment on the report in the Freeport News that Shelia Scavella is no longer the principal at the Walter Parker Primary School.

The report of 6th January says that Ms. Scavella has been given two years leave to pursue doctoral studies.

While no one begrudges any public officer, the desire and right to further his or her education, the Minister of Education Desmond Banister cannot simply let this matter pass without a full and frank explanation of what led to this.

The background to this was clearly a conflict within the leadership of the school. The Minister or his officials must explain what the results are of the further investigations into the governance of the school. The Minister and his officials must apologise to and the teachers who suffered the humiliation of having to make public protests about the school's leadership. That apology should be full and unqualified.

Further, the Superintendent of Primary Schools Sandra Edgecombe should receive from the Minister a letter, which completely exonerates her for any wrongdoing in this matter. She too deserves a complete and unqualified apology for the unfortunate aspersions that were cast on her character as result of the actions of the Ministry in this whole matter. The act of the moving the principal vindicates the actions of both the teachers and Mrs. Edgecombe.

The circumstances under which the school's superintendence was removed from Mrs. Edgcombe's bailiwick left an unsatisfactory impression. It was almost as if the Ministry was seeking to blame the superintendent and the teachers instead of dealing with the actual source of the problem, which was the governance issues at the school as led by the now former principal.

The Minister touts himself as a different kind of FNM, and colleagues on our side do not expect that the kind of sleight of hand, wink and a nod politics from him that is practiced by so many of his FNM colleagues.

Further, if the report is true that the former principal is to proceed on study leave to pursue a doctorate, the full facts must be disclosed including: on what basis was such leave granted; who is to pay for the school fees ; will it be a full in service award? If the answers to those questions are yes, then it is important to explain to other teachers who want to go to school: on what basis was the former principal to jump the line to be given what appears to be an accelerated grant? Does this grant not disadvantage others who want to proceed on study leave?

In the public service, kisses should not go by favour.

The public in Grand Bahama and throughout The Bahamas deserve a full explanation from the Ministry of Education on what they are doing and what is to happen with the leadership of the school and all schools in Grand Bahama.

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STATEMENT BY FRED MITCHELL MP
OPPOSITION SPOKESMAN ON THE PUBLIC SERVICE
ON THE WALTER PARKER PRIMARY SCHOOL AND THE
MINISTER'S RESPONSE

13th January 2011

I am embarrassed for the Minister of Education at his response to the intervention made by me on the leadership issues at the Walter Parker Primary School.

The Minister's response was reported in The Tribune on 12th January.

The Minister can jump up and down all he wants about politics but he should sit down, take a time out and give sober reflection on what his true role is as the Minister for the schools in Grand Bahama.

This is not about any personality. This is not about politics. This is about the fact that under the Minister's watch, the governance at the Walter Parker Primary fell to a new low and the feeling is that the Minister is shielding one individual to the detriment of the system.

The Minister does not have to wait for the House of Assembly to answer any questions on this matter.

He can speak to the Acting Principal of the Walter Parker Primary School today and ask her what she met when she took over the Walter Parker Primary School. He can ask the Acting Principal the following:

Where is the furniture that was bought with school funds while the former Principal was there?

Did Wendy's return a school cheque because of insufficient funds, one of two cheques that were returned last term?

Is it true that at the school, they are literally counting quarters and pennies each day because the credit of the school for hot patties and donuts for their tuck shop has been cut off because bills are owing?

Is the Minister aware of the concern of teachers at the Walter Parker Primary School at the lack of career development opportunities?

By defending as he has the conduct of the former leadership of the school so unequivocally and despite being warned, it is now the conduct of the Ministers' superintendence at the school that becomes the issue and whether given this conduct, this is not a sign of what goes on at other schools in the country and in Grand Bahama.

So I would advise the Minister not to get emotional about this matter, and seek thereby in his emotion to protect an individual at the expense of the greater good. Let the full facts be known and let the chips fall where they may.

The Bahamian people would expect no less.

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