



## **SPECIAL NEEDS - EXCEPTIONAL ABILITIES**

### **★ The Special Education Connection ★**

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#### **Wellness Tip 1:**

Say to yourself often, "This too shall pass". Remember to keep a positive outlook and not to let negative thoughts steal your joy.



**Contact the Special Education Unit**

**876 – 967-2312**  **specialedu@moey.gov.jm**

## Distance Learning for Students with Special Education Needs

**In March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic forced our schools to close their doors and teachers, parents and school administrators found themselves having to rapidly transition to remote/distance teaching and learning.**

During this period of school closure schools have used several methods to attempt to meet the needs of the diverse learners in their classrooms. Although classrooms have always been diverse spaces, remote teaching and learning has certainly highlighted the vastness of this diversity and underscored the fact that a one size fits all approach to education is not an effective means of meeting the needs of all learners. According to [i]Frumos (2020) temporary school closure has been challenging for most students but may be even more challenging for students with special education needs since these students already face several barriers to teaching and learning even in the traditional school setting. This includes their own learning differences and pedagogical practices which are not specific to their learning needs.

Students with Special Education Needs have the right to equitable educational opportunities. Remote/distance teaching and learning therefore requires a commitment to a rights-based approach which ensures that the curriculum is differentiated and pedagogy adapted to meet the needs of each student. While there are challenges to differentiating the curriculum for learners with special education needs, remote/distance teaching and learning presents an opportunity to continue to apply the inclusive principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in the remote context.

UDL is a way of planning for teaching and learning that ensures access for all learners by ensuring the following:

### **Multiple Means of Engagement –**

Remote/Distance teaching and learning allows teachers to use various innovative approaches to motivate students and hold their attention; this includes various interactive audio and visual media like videos, animation and online games.

Remote/Distance teaching and learning also provides a unique opportunity for students to explore their interests. They can also be provided with choices to decide what area of the content they want to learn first, allowing them to do more manageable activities first and feel a sense of accomplishment and increased motivation.

### **Multiple Means of Representation –**

Remote/Distance teaching and learning allows students to learn via different media; print media, radio or television or online via a computer; this appeals to the different learning styles students will have. Learning Management Systems such as Google Classroom and Seesaw allow teachers to post specific activities for different students, use video instructions or add closed captioning or sign language to content. Screen readers that can translate print to voice can also be used so that students who have reading challenges or are print impaired can have access. However, all students can benefit from these tools.

### **Multiple Means of Action and Expression -**

Remote/Distance teaching and learning not only facilitates students interacting with the content in various ways but also allows students to represent what they have learnt in a variety of ways. Using a personal computer, smartphone or tablet students can produce video responses, create diagrams and drawings, respond via podcasts or speak to a computer that can translate their voice into print. Students who do not have online access can use material in their home environment to create physical products which allow for practical application of content in real life situations.

While teachers explore and utilize various tools to support learners with special education needs during remote/distance learning, parents and guardians also have a responsibility. Parents should ensure that they establish a physical learning space at home for their child and maintain a daily routine which is similar to face-to-face school. Students should be provided with breaks as needed and use positive reinforcement to encourage them to stay on task. Parents should also communicate with their child's teacher on how they may support their child's individual learning needs and also provide regular feedback to teachers so that adjustments can be made as needed and best practices continued.

Where students do not have online access, parents should make arrangements for physical learning kits from their child's school. For students with more severe disabilities these learning kits may involve stimulation activities that an adult at home may have to engage the child in doing. Parents should be aware of their child's Individual Intervention Plan (IIP) goals and seek to work towards these at home. Finally, make everyday activities at home into teaching opportunities and seek support where needed.

[i] Frumos, L. (2020). Inclusive Education in Remote Instruction with Universal Design for Learning. *Revista Romaneasca pentru Educatie Multidimensionala*, 12(2Sup1), 138-142. <https://doi.org/10.18662/rrem/12.2Sup1/299>

### Wellness Tip 2:

"Sleep is an investment in the energy you need to be effective tomorrow." – Tom Roth.

Refresh and renew yourself every night with 6-9 hours of sleep. Your mind, body and spirit will thank you.

### For Your Information

Educational support apps and e-resources may be accessed through the following links:

- [A Parent's Guide to the CSID \(Curriculum for Students with Moderate to Severe Intellectual Disabilities\)](#)
- [Adapting the National Standards Curriculum for Students with Special Education Needs](#)
- [Ministry of Education Youth & Information Library \(e-resources Library\)](#)
- [MoEYI eResources App - Apps on Google Play \(Google Play App store\)](#)
- [National Standards Curriculum \(NSC\) \(Curriculum resources on PEP website\)](#)
- <https://pep.moey.gov.jm/online-lessons> (Videos on the PEP website)
- <https://pep.moey.gov.jm/mathematics-lesson-plans> (Lesson Plans)
- [Wiggle Brain Break cards / Roll Brain Breaks](#)

**In which two parishes would you find the STEP and Llandilo schools? Find out on page 6 in the 'The Pursuit of Excellence' article.**

## A Parent's Story

**"Show your child love, don't give up on him/her. Your child has potential... pray for your child."**

"It is fun!" This was Shaequan Richard's excited, accented response to the interviewer's question about online class just before this interview with his mother Miss Anusca Asphall. Shaequan has mild autism and is currently a student at Belmont Park Primary school.

*Interviewer:* When school closed due to COVID 19 in March what was your first thought as it relates to your son's education?

*Miss Asphall:* I started to worry about how Shaequan will manage being out of school.

*Interviewer:* What was your reaction to the announcement that school would be going online?

*Miss Asphall:* I was worried if it would really work for Shaequan also who would monitor him. At that time I was working.

*Interviewer:* Did Shaequan have a device to access online learning?

*Miss Asphall:* He has a tablet but it has no front camera so he had to use my cell phone. I cannot afford to purchase another tablet as I am unemployed.

*Interviewer:* Describe Shaequan's reaction to online school?

*Miss Asphall:* He was excited but sad about not seeing his classmates.



*Interviewer:* What challenges did you observe with Shaquan's online learning?

*Miss Asphall:* He did not want to write the notes that were posted and when he did ...it was done slowly. There were good days and bad days.

*Interviewer:* What steps did you take to resolve these challenges?

*Miss Asphall:* I researched and gave him fun activities to build his fine motor skills, like drawing and other art and craft activities.

*Interviewer:* What behavioural challenges did you observe during online learning?

*Miss Asphall:* Whenever it was time for Mathematics he would have a melt down, hitting his head on the wall, throwing stuff and breaking stuff.

*Interviewer:* What steps did you take to address these challenges?

*Miss Asphall:* I reached out to the Educational Psychologist, Mrs. N. Barnett in the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information in Region 6. She was instrumental in ensuring that Shaquan's academic needs were met. Mrs. Barnett conducted one to one sessions with me to help me deal with the melt downs.

*Interviewer:* Give two examples of what she told you do.

*Miss Asphall:* She told me to ensure that he has a stuffed toy to help him to relax and calm down and that I should hug him and give a little pep talk.

*Interviewer:* Did both pieces of advice work?

*Miss Asphall:* The stuffed toy relaxed him sometimes but hugging him worked more.

*Interviewer:* Give two examples of academic support Shaquan received from his teacher.

*Miss Asphall:* His Grade 2 teacher, Miss Ingram is awesome! She encourages and praises him. She also gave him virtual certificates of commendations.

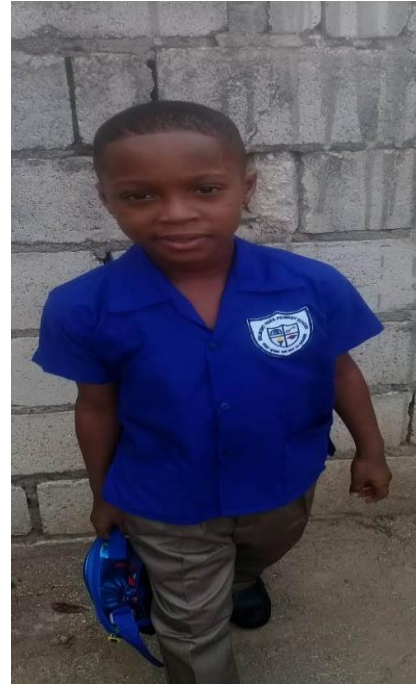
*Interviewer:* Did you and Shaquan receive any additional support?

*Miss Asphall:* The Diagnostician in the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information in Region 6, Mrs. Stewart-Harris, sent me a PowerPoint with strategies that I could use at home for online learning.

*Interviewer:* When you compare his behaviour in online classes versus reported behavior in face to face classes, in which space do you think his behaviour challenges are less and why do you think that is so?

*Miss Asphall:* Online classes because I am there to monitor him. Also sometimes I think it is 50/50 depending on his mood.

*Interviewer:* How have you grown since Shaequan's learning has moved online?



*Miss Asphall:* I have learned a lot of school stuff. I have also been helping Shaequan more with his school work and now I have a closer relationship with him.

*Interviewer:* Describe any growth that you have noticed in Shaequan.

*Miss Asphall:* Well he is more settled and confident.

*Interviewer:* What would you say to parents of children with mild autism and other special needs?

*Miss Asphall:* Show your child love, don't give up on him/her. Your child has potential and pray for your child.

*Interviewer:* What would you say to a teacher who has a student with special needs?

*Miss Asphall:* Have patience because you need a lot to deal with those students.

*Interviewer:* What would you say to the Ministry of Education as it relates to supporting children with special needs?

*Miss Asphall:* Continue to be supportive. Keep up the good work and thank you for the support that I have received for my son.

# THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

## The Llandilo School of Special Education and the STEP Centre

### Going above and beyond to serve students with special education needs during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In March 2020, at the onset of the COVID 19 pandemic, it was announced that school could not continue as usual. Many of us, especially school administrators, would have been left with unanswered questions about how to plan for the education of our children. In the face of all the uncertainties however, many schools rose to the challenge, and in some instances, exceeded what could possibly have been expected of them. Two such schools are the Llandilo School of Special Education located in Westmoreland and the STEP Centre located in St. Andrew.

Both of these schools are responsible for educating students considered to be among the lowest functioning. Llandilo caters to students with moderate to profound intellectual disabilities, while the STEP Centre serves the population of children who often times present with multiple disabilities and underlying health issues.

These students require approaches that are very practical, hands-on and concrete in nature. Not being able to engage them in the normal "face to face" context significantly compounds the process to instruct them effectively. Ms. Hilary Sherlock, Director of the STEP Centre, characterized the challenge in serving this population as follows: "These children are also the most difficult to serve remotely as so much of what we as teachers do depends on continuous assessment of and feedback from each child."

Other challenges reported include,

- Lack of or limited access to the internet and devices
- Ineffective use of available technologies

- Stress and frustration caused by the uncertainties of the times and
- Negative attitudes such as lack of interest in the teaching/learning process.

Despite the challenging nature of engaging these students remotely, the results attained by the STEP Centre and the Llandilo School of Special Education in facilitating their students in the current context are highly commendable. The Llandilo School of Special Education reports that they were able to reach 90% of their population, while the STEP Centre was able to facilitate all their students in one way or another.

Other noteworthy outcomes highlighted include,

- improvements in the overall support of the teaching/learning process by parents as well as improvements in parent/teacher and parent/child relationships. This was attributed to the requirement that parent and teacher communicate more frequently and parent and child spend more time together in the completion of school work
- improvements in the ability of teachers, parents and students to use technology to deliver and access lessons and resources and
- improvements on the part of students in the areas taught.

Some parents who were unable to read have also taken the opportunity to develop in this area alongside their children.

In response to the current situation of their students, The STEP Centre went beyond their normal educational programming by including the distribution of groceries as well as games and art supplies to ensure that students were meaningfully engaged.

How were these schools able to achieve such accomplishments during this period? The approach employed by both institutions centered on being flexible and taking into account the needs and circumstances of individual students and their home situations. Students who could not be engaged virtually were sent individualized activity kits. Close collaboration with parents and caregivers has also been hailed as a very important factor in the attainment of the outcomes highlighted. Finally, the commitment and dedication of the staff of the institutions who would have worked tirelessly, combined with the support of volunteers, donors, and other partners, bear out the point that there is no valley too deep, no mountain too tall; with the right attitude and the right approach, we can conquer all.

Despite this level of success, both institutions recognize that there is still more that can be done, as they seek to truly fulfil the mantra of the MoEYI: "Every Child Can Learn ... Every Child Must."

### Wellness Tip 3:

What's on your self-care checklist this week? Learn your self-love language and spend some time prioritising you. Whether you go for a walk, treat yourself to a small gift or spend time on a hobby, remember it could make a difference to your mental and physical well-being.

**Do you or someone you know have a child with special needs?**

**The Special Education Student Support Team (SST)** of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information, provides support to children with physical, intellectual and learning disabilities, and those who have medical conditions which may prevent their full participation in the general education setting. We offer a wide range of services designed to help children with special needs maximise their potential. Services include full-battery assessments, screening, consultations and other activities. Services are provided at no cost to the public with the goal of early identification, early intervention, and support for children with special needs. The Student Support Team (SST) also provides capacity building services to parents and teachers.

The SST consists of a coordinating officer, clinical and educational psychologists and educational diagnosticians. Services are available all year round, during the opening hours of the MoEYI.

If you are interested in making an appointment, or want to learn more about the services provided by the SST, reach out to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information's regional office closest to you.

*Please note that, given Covid-19 restrictions, services are now offered online. Please call the Regional Office of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information closest to you to get further information.*

**See page 12** for contact information for the Regional Offices of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information

## Through the Eyes of a Child

### Lajanaye's Story

**Living with Charcot-Marie Tooth Syndrome is no life for a child because that one thing that defines childhood is compromised; mobility.**



For as long as I can remember, I have been immobile. A harsh reality that I live with every single day. Only my mother and father remember my best smiles, my vibrant kicks and arm movements from birth which later turned to baby steps. Only they can remember my first years of walking and pulling down the things from the dresser, playing outside with my older sister and cousins, climbing the grills and other high places; running wild around the house and screaming in my happy voice. I often wonder if these early years replay in their heads and if they sometimes cry or feel dejected, knowing that their little girl is no longer able to move.

I am Lajanaye Clarke; a very unique name for a very unique girl. I was a healthy newborn baby and flourished as I grew. That is, until age 6 when I was diagnosed with Charcot-Marie Tooth (CMT) syndrome. CMT was named after three physicians who first described it in 1886; Jean-Martin Charcot, Pierre Marie of France and Howard Henry Tooth of the United Kingdom.

It is a hereditary neurological disorder which causes damage to the peripheral nerves; tracts

of nerve cell fibers that connect the brain and spinal cord to muscles and sensory organs. These nerves control movement and convey sensation by carrying feelings like pain and temperature from the hands and feet to the spinal cord. They also control balance by transmitting information about the hands and feet to the spinal cord and then the brain, so that the brain knows where to place the feet when walking and where the hands should be placed to reach something. CMT is not a life-threatening disease but it is a lifelong, progressive disorder that presents daily challenges as the patient ages.

Living with Charcot-Marie Tooth syndrome is no life for a child because that one thing that defines childhood is compromised; mobility. My worst days are full of feelings of loneliness, frustration, sadness, fear and anger; but although those feelings will never leave me entirely, I have learnt over time to adapt and continuously adjust to changing limitations. My most difficult times have come from my interaction with persons who take no time to gain an understanding of what people with disabilities go through and make no provisions for them.

My years at primary school were my worst years. I started at about age 7 when I had just started losing muscle control but I could still walk; not the strong walk I had before, but rather a walk that was characterized by frailness. Because of this I was jeered and belittled by children and even some adults who worked at the school. I was called some of the most depressing names to describe a person with a disability; like handicapped and bend-foot etc.



I can remember going home one day and telling my mom that I never want to go back. When it was time for me to leave that school, I was elated. I had done my GSAT exams and passed for Tacky High School. At first I was disappointed because that was not my first choice and it is not a traditional high school. Eventually I was able to overcome that disappointment, so much so that for a moment I even forgot that I had a disability. I was just excited about going to high school, like any other child, but no sooner had I wrapped my mind around the idea, it was thrown out the door.

I was informed at registration that the school was not in the position to accept me as they did not have the facilities there to accommodate students with disabilities. My best option I was told, would be to seek a transfer to another school which could accommodate me. I was so disappointed that I felt a part of my heart break. At that time, I felt it was nothing more than indifference; I was too young to understand that they just wanted me to be admitted to a school that could better cater to my needs. Now, I can understand that it was the best they felt they could do for me.

For my mother too, this situation was a slap in the face, forcing her to face the 'real reality' of having a 'disabled child'. She made the decision to get me a wheelchair to help me move around more easily. She also reached out to the Ministry of Education Region 2, and they presented her with an alternative school; Brimmer Vale High. I was not enthused about this choice because it was not a traditional high school either, but I had to make up my mind to deal with it.

It was there that I found an angel; the Principal, Mrs. Evorine Henry-Tracey. Brimmer Vale High School did not have any special facilities for a child in a wheelchair but Mrs. Tracey made sure that they accepted me and that my needs were catered to in the best way they knew how. For example, the school did not have any ramps to make it easy for

my wheelchair to move from class to class and they made ramps for me. The Ministry of Education Special Education Unit also provided me with a shadow to assist me with my mobility issues and any other help needed because of my disability.

In the beginning I suffered from unfavourable comments from my peers because they were just too young to understand. I felt left out because I was the only one who looked different. Mrs. Tracey again stepped in and spoke openly at general assembly about persons with disabilities and how to respond to them. From then on, the students gave me their support. They became my personal escorts, purchased my lunch and generally took very good care of me.

The teachers were Mrs. Tracey's wings and they sheltered me. They took me as their own and helped me to reach my full potential. I remember in Grade 8 when Ms. Pink, my form teacher at the time, told me that I was going to enter the National Spelling Bee Competition. I said to her "...but I didn't sign up for anything", and she said she knew that but she wanted me to enter anyway.

This was a week before the competition and I wasn't at all confident about going before so many people in a wheelchair. My main thought was that I would fail terribly. Ms. Pink set about training and motivating me and the outcome was that I placed fifth of about 69 spellers. I was so proud of myself. Ms. Pink also helped me to express myself the best way I knew how; through music. She allowed me to sing in general assembly and sometimes in class and that made me feel important.

Another wonderful memory is of when I was in Grade 9 and Mrs. Gilmore encouraged me to enter a back to school competition that was being advertised on Smile Jamaica. The competition was about creating videos saying what you wanted for back-to-school. Mrs. Gilmore supported me and I sent in my video about my need for a wheelchair, since mine was worn. I was granted with just that; a brand new wheelchair.

My high school experience was not all glitter; but the love I received from the students and teachers at Brimmer Vale was remarkable and it helped to keep my spirit alive. This was especially true towards the end of grade 10 when, just as I thought my life was getting better, my muscles started to weaken more and I lost my ability to write. I felt so lonely and angry but I managed to stay alive because of the people around me. My classmates helped me to write and it wasn't a bother to them because they were more mature and compassionate.

My teachers supported me very well with preparing for my CSEC examinations. Some preparations were more difficult than others because all my subjects relied on the use of my hands and so I was at a disadvantage. This was the most frustrating year of my life because I wanted to do well so badly, but my hands had failed me. I had to just look at the board in Math and POA class and try to process everything in my head because I couldn't practice and no one could help me with that.

Even with these difficulties I still tried to keep my mind open, but then the Corona Virus came and completely turned my world upside down. Online learning now became the way to learn but I was without a device to access my classes as my phone was damaged. I reached out to the Special Needs Coordinator at the Ministry of Education Region 2 and she found a way for me to get a phone as well as phone credit to add data. With these I was able to access the learning platforms to attend my classes.

Exams came and I managed to do all of my exams with the help of my scribes; my borrowed hands. I did not sleep well for the two months it took for the results to be published. All I ever wanted to do was to make myself proud but I was so worried; I was not confident that I had done well. On the evening the results came out, I tried anxiously to log onto the CXC website to see my grades, but I could not get on. My sister came to assist me but she read everything first and just told me that I had done well. She jokingly withheld the laptop from me

at first but then she rested it on my lap. My eyes scrolled down the page, looking for the grade for each subject, and this was what I saw:

- EDPM (1)
- POB (1)
- OA (1)
- Home and Family Management (2)
- Math (2)
- English Language (3)
- POA (5)

Tears started to stream down my face at the joy of achieving more than I believed that I could do. I cried because of what I went through to reap all of that and I cried because I did it without the help of my hands. I only failed POA because I couldn't get enough practice, but I am still proud.

I must thank my parents who brought me into this world and who keep on supporting me. Thanks to the Special Needs Coordinator in the Ministry of Education Region 2, Mrs. Avarine Bradshaw, who stood by my side and motivated me to stay strong. I must thank Mrs. Henry-Tracey for giving me the privilege to study at Brimmer Vale High School and the team of teachers who were my scribes and my caretakers who carried me around. I must also thank my friends and family for the encouragement throughout the years. I am truly grateful for all the love I received over the years. Now that I have passed my CSEC examinations, I am waiting on God to prepare a job for me as I would love to enter the world of work.



## Planning Your Child's Success in the Remote Learning Environment

**Be sure to include time for breaks, meals, and physical activity in your schedule. Be generous with the number of short breaks during learning time...**

If you are wondering how to create learning spaces when you are tight on space and money, do not worry. Here are some simple ways you can encourage and create specific spaces for home learning.

- ✚ **Choose a location based on your child's learning preferences** - Think about how your child likes to learn and engage with the world. Ask yourself if your child likes to move around or can sit quietly for long periods of time? Do they need to work in closed-in spaces to focus, or are they okay with open areas? As best as possible, match the location to what works best for your child. The location can be a dedicated corner of a room, the dining table, the corner of a room, a desk if available or you can create a learning box for learning supplies that your child can take to the space. You could even use a small tray or the ironing board or make a lap-desk from sturdy cardboard that your child could use while sitting on a chair somewhere in the house.
- ✚ **If possible, have a space that is just for learning** - This includes attending classes, doing homework, studying, etc. If this is not possible, and you'll be using a shared or multipurpose space, do what you can to let your child know exactly when it's time to use the space for learning. Putting up your child's timetable in the learning space at the beginning of each day can help signal to them that it's time to use the space just for learning. Clear away all other materials from that space and make sure to have your child's learning supplies set up in an organized manner. If your space is small and limited and you have more than one child who will need to use it, try staggering the use of the shared space by giving each child their own schedule for using the space.

The learning box will become very useful for these situations. Give each child their own box to organize and store their learning materials and they can take it to the learning space when they are scheduled to use it. If your child will be doing online learning, be sure the space is close to a power outlet and has a place for their computer or tablet so they don't have to leave the learning space to set up their device.

- ✚ **Remove distractions completely** - Once it's time for learning to begin, get rid of distractions. This includes distractions which you as the parent may create as well. Turn off the television and put cell phones on silent if they are not part of the learning process. If your child learns best with background music, turn it down as low as possible. Make sure the games on the tablet or laptop they are using are turned off and ask your child to close their social media and mute the audio and video notifications.
- ✚ **Personalize the space** - Make creating the space a fun project. Have your child join in choosing the space and setting it up with all the learning materials needed. If it is a movable space e.g. if you're using sturdy cardboard or a learning box, let your child decorate the box or cardboard.
- ✚ **Create comfort** - Choose a chair that your child can comfortably sit in for long periods of time, and ensure they have a large enough flat surface that can accommodate their books, tablet and other learning supplies. Do they need an object to become comfortable? Some children with sensory challenges may do well with a small weighted blanket to comfort them and help them focus. Do not use a bed as a learning space; you don't want your child to fall asleep in the middle of their lessons! Be sure to include time for breaks, meals, and physical activity in your schedule.

**Wellness Tip 4:**

Have you checked in with yourself today? Have a conversation with yourself about how you're feeling, and why you're feeling that way. Track your mood and be aware of triggers in your environment.

**Do you or someone you know have a child with special needs? Contact your Regional Special Needs Coordinator.**

**Region 1 – Kingston & St. Andrew**

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<https://www.instagram.com/moeyiregion7/>

**Special Education Unit (SEU)  
Upcoming Events****National Disability  
Awareness Week Observance****Nov 29 – Dec 5 2020**

Virtual engagement of parents of children with disabilities to share strategies for optimizing sleep, nutrition, behaviour management & psycho-social well-being. Join experts in these areas on our social media platforms during the week and at a virtual town hall meeting on December 3, 2020.



We hope you enjoyed reading this inaugural issue of **Special Education Matters; A Newsletter on Matters of Special Education**. Your feedback is welcome. Share your thoughts with the Special Education Unit by sending an email to [specialedu@moey.gov.jm](mailto:specialedu@moey.gov.jm).