

**DEANS' ROLES IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF  
SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN AN EDUCATION DISTRICT  
IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

*Rene Jerome Wihby and Arthur Joseph*

This paper, explores, through the lens of a Pastoral Care Model, deans' actual roles in secondary schools, and the extent to which these roles were enacted. A qualitative multi-site case study, was employed to generate pertinent data from six secondary schools in a single education district. The sample comprised 6 principals, 12 deans and 67 teachers. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews to garner the perspectives of principals, teachers and deans. The findings suggest that most deans at the secondary schools, spent a disproportionate amount of their time monitoring student indiscipline. As a result, they were rarely engaged in the performance of their other prescribed roles.

**Introduction**

Student indiscipline is a major concern for schools around the globe (Nichols, 2004) and Trinidad and Tobago is no exception. The middle management position of Dean (Secondary School) in Trinidad and Tobago evolved over the years to address the escalating level of student indiscipline and violence that has afflicted the nation's secondary schools. As a result, indiscipline in schools is probably the main factor that led to the establishment of deans in secondary schools (Galloway & Edwards, 2013). Although literature on middle leaders has been around for many years, their roles have been both under-researched and under-valued as little is documented of their experiences (Moore, 2007; Wattam, 2017). There is only a limited quantity of empirical research on the roles of deans (Bennett, Woods, Wise & Newton, 2007; Murphy, 2011). This paper, therefore, explores, through the lens of a pastoral care model proposed by Best (2007), the actual roles deans enact and the extent to which these roles were enacted. As a result, it is anticipated that the findings will add to the

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sparse body of knowledge on deans' actual roles and experiences from the context of six secondary schools.

### **Literature Review**

According to various researchers, some daily tasks deans enact are: supervision of a form teacher team (Barrowcliff, 2010); patrolling the school during lunch and break periods (Barrowcliff, 2010); checking form teachers' attendance registers (Cowley, 2003; Howison & Semple, 1996); monitoring student absences (Cummings, Dyson & Todd, 2011; Murphy, 2011); inspecting students' uniforms (Carline, 2007; Murphy, 2011); and monitoring students' behaviour (Carline, 2007; Crane & De Nobile, 2014; Goodwyn & Branson, 2005; Murphy, 2011; Nathan, 2011). Deans also prepare referrals for student support services and senior management; collaborate with parents and external agencies (Crane & De Nobile, 2014; Goodwyn & Branson, 2005; Joyce, 2013; Nathan, 2011); track the academic progress of students (Fraser, 2014; Nathan, 2011); process paperwork (Barrowcliff, 2010; Carline, 2007); convene meetings with their form teacher teams (Elliott & Place, 2004; Murphy, 2011; Nathan, 2011); and provide students' pastoral care (Fraser, 2014).

According to Cane (2012), the term "pastoral care" was found in "English secondary schools for over 40 years" (p. 328). The English model was implemented in colonial countries of the British Commonwealth, such as New Zealand, Australia (Lang, 2000) and British-occupied territories like Singapore (Calvert, 2009). However, the term "pastoral care" has not been clearly defined (McLaughlin, 2008; Purdy, 2013) as it continues to evolve (Cane, 2012). Pastoral care focuses on students' non-academic needs (Bell, 1992; Wellington, 2006) as it addresses their social and emotional needs. This includes the occasional necessity for individual sessions with students (Leitch, 2013).

The United Kingdom (UK) Department for Education has defined pastoral care as a means of catering to the well-being of students' academic and non-academic needs (Department of Education and Science, 1989; Lang & Young, 1985). In Australia, it has been defined as providing assistance and guidance to students (de Jong & Kerr-Roubicek, 2007). However, in Trinidad and Tobago, pastoral care is implied rather than clearly stated in the deans' job description. Therefore, this paper, adopted a pastoral care model proposed by Best (2007) in an attempt to explain some of the above tasks deans enacted in six secondary schools. Best suggests five pastoral roles or tasks for Head of Year or deans: "reactive

pastoral casework, proactive preventive pastoral care, developmental pastoral curricula, the promotion and maintenance of an orderly and supportive environment and the management and administration of pastoral care” (pp. 250-251). However, the first three roles are highlighted in this paper.

Firstly, reactive pastoral casework encompasses an open door policy where one-to-one counselling sessions are undertaken with students to provide guidance and support. Students need to feel comfortable in a safe environment before they can reveal their innermost thoughts and emotions (Tucker, 2013). Unfortunately, some schools lack the proper infrastructure to facilitate *tête-à-tête* sessions with students. Fraser (2014) recommended that deans need to have access to a private room to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of their discussions with students.

Although deans engage in counselling sessions, they are not trained counsellors and should be cognisant of this limitation to prevent burn out (Crane & De Nobile, 2014). As a result, it is common for deans to collaborate with other deans to discuss student issues (Murphy, 2011). When deans are unable to handle difficult cases, these cases are referred to trained professionals (Best, 1999; McKinley, Madjar, van der Merwe, Smith, Sutherland & Yuan, 2009), such as The Student Support Services Division (SSSD). The SSSD, a division of the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Trinidad and Tobago, provides support to schools and comprises guidance officers (assigned to both government and denominational secondary schools), and school safety officers and school social workers (assigned to government secondary schools only). Unfortunately, the SSSD is normally understaffed and provide support to schools on a limited basis (Reddock, Reid & Nickenig, 2011). The onus, therefore, is on deans to compensate for this shortfall.

In the past, pastoral care played a disciplinary role (Joyce, 2013), but researchers indicate that it encompasses more than controlling students’ behaviour (Best, 1999). In Trinidad and Tobago, as pastoral care is implied rather than stated in the deans’ job description, the effectiveness of deans is contingent on their ability to be proactive by establishing a rapport with students (Govey-Allen, 2011). Most deans, however, are unfamiliar with this new role, because in the past, deans performed a “super-disciplinarian” role (Calvert, 2009, p. 270). Today, deans need to be proficient in interpersonal communication with students in order to express a genuine concern for their students’ well-being (Davies, 2010). Unfortunately, the deans’ interaction with students is limited to those who infringe schools’ rules (Howison & Semple, 2000) and they provide a

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limited degree of academic counselling to these students (McKinley et al., 2009).

Secondly, proactive preventive pastoral care refers to the use of form teachers'/form tutors' sessions and school assemblies. During these sessions, form teachers provide pastoral care by building students' sense of loyalty to the school and to each other (Elhaggagi, 2009). They equip students with skills to make informed decisions that prevent the recurrence of unfavourable situations (Best, 1999). The role of form teachers in the provision of pastoral care is important since they are first-level responders (Best, 1990; Cook, 2013). Yet, their roles are not fully documented and vary according to teachers and schools (Cook, 2013; Elhaggagi, 2009).

Galloway (1985) has suggested that some form teachers are indifferent to their form teachers' role as they are responsible for students whom they do not teach and they are only remunerated for teaching a subject (Carline, 2007; Power, 1996). For example, in Jamaica, form teachers used students' weaknesses as an excuse to abstain from providing pastoral care (Cunningham, 2017). Joyce (2013) also reported that since the focus of form teachers was on the delivery of their subject content, they usually devote less time to their pastoral responsibilities. Essentially, it is not uncommon for form teachers to comply with the bureaucratic expectations of the role, spending only short periods in the classrooms to record students' attendance, lateness and distributing important notices (Murphy, 2011). In spite of their importance, form teachers are not trained to perform their roles (Davies, 2010; Marland & Rogers, 2004; Purdy, 2013) and acquire their training while on the job. For this reason, the intervention of form teachers in students' affairs is superficial. Their focus is on the preservation of order and coercing students to conform to the expectations of the school instead of getting to the source of their problems (Calvert, 2009; Lodge, 2006).

It is left to the deans, therefore, to provide guidance and support to form teachers. For example, the support provided by deans might take the form of regular meetings with form teachers (Murphy, 2011) and the efficient handling of matters of student discipline (Govey-Allen, 2011). These meetings can establish an efficacious communication channel between form teachers and their pastoral leaders as they facilitate the desired change (Beddow, 2008).

Finally, developmental pastoral curriculum refers to the implementation of programmes that focus on the holistic development of the child. Children need to be educated about subject matter other than academics, and these curricula must consider the "personal and social

development of the child' inclusive of their 'moral education'" (Best, 1999, p. 19). The success of these programmes is dependent on the level of support provided by senior management (Fraser, 2014; Woodward, 1962). Nevertheless, many pastoral leaders experience frustration when senior management does not place the same value on their contribution as they do on that of their subject head counterpart (Brooks & Cavanagh, 2009; Crane & De Nobile, 2014; Murphy, 2011). Pastoral care, consequently, is accorded a lower status (Mphale, Moletsane & Mabalani, 2015) than is granted to the role of the academic leader. Joyce (2013) posited that heads of department (HoDs) seem to possess more positional or line authority than deans. This contrast of principles practised by senior managers impedes deans' capability to perform their roles since more emphasis is placed on the curriculum than on pastoral care (Bell, 1992; Calvert & Henderson, 1998). In fact, the monitoring of students' academic performance is perceived by senior management as a function outside the purview of deans' pastoral care (Fraser, 2014). For the most part, the monitoring of the child's academic and non-academic development is equally important since each contributes to the holistic development of the child (Hearn, Campbell-Pope, House, & Cross, 2006). Thus, it is paramount that middle managers (HoDs and deans) collaborate to reduce the pastoral/academic divide in their schools (Clark, 2008).

### **Methodology**

The research method selected was a qualitative research paradigm that employed a multi-site case study design in six sub-urban secondary schools from one education district. These schools were selected because of limited resources, time constraints and location as the education district was easily accessible. The available population comprised principals, deans and teachers of 16 secondary schools from the Caroni education district. For this paper, 6 (37.5%) of the schools in the education district were purposively selected. Three of the chosen schools were co-educational government secondary while the other three were single-sex denominational secondary schools.

Five of the six schools selected experienced high academic success in Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) at the form five level and the CXC Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE) at the form six level. These schools, as a result, were selected, because student progress and achievement have been defined as good indicators of effective leadership (The Wallace Foundation, 2013). Therefore, these five schools were deemed as having effective leadership practices at the senior and middle management levels.

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In 1988, the teachers' union, Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association (TTUTA), pressured the MoE to convene a National Consultation on Violence and Indiscipline in Schools (Cyrille, 2008). One measure that emerged from this conference was the establishment of a pilot project for HoDs and deans in selected secondary schools. The sixth school selected for this paper participated in the MoE's middle management pilot-programme. As a result, their involvement in the programme was deemed a valuable source of information for this paper. Additionally, there were no adverse reports made to the MoE or the Teaching Service Commission (TSC) that prevented deans from operating effectively in these schools. Hence, the environment of the schools can be classified as stable. One researcher has indicated that the stability of the school's environment was of paramount importance when she considered schools for her sample (Briggs, 2003), and it can be argued that deans who perform their actual roles in a stable environment can provide thick and rich data in their natural environment. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that the sample included different school types in the Caroni educational district and respondents who were able to provide valid and reliable school data. It must be underscored that the schools in the sample constitute an adequate representation of all secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago as they provide a satisfactory demographic and cultural mixture of the nation's secondary schools.

Eliciting data from the three groups of respondents was justified on the basis that they were qualified in providing information on the actual roles deans enacted in their respective schools. Table 1 shows a summary of the respondents from the six secondary schools. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of schools.

**Table 1. Summary of Respondents by Schools**

<b>Schools</b>	<b>Principals</b>	<b>Deans</b>	<b>Teachers</b>
<b>Humming Bird High</b>	1	2	15
<b>Chaconia High</b>	1	2	9
<b>Scarlet Ibis High</b>	1	2	10
<b>Cocrico High</b>	1	2	8
<b>Medallion High</b>	1	3	16
<b>Newberry High</b>	1	2	9
<b>Total</b>	6	13	67

The sample size comprised a total 6 principals, 13 deans and 67 teachers who consented to be interviewed and were interviewed. Table 2 reflects that, of the six principals in the sample, only one received training

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in Educational Administration. According to the data collected, all deans sampled received teacher training ranging from a Teacher's Diploma to the University of the West Indies' Postgraduate Diploma in Education. It is interesting to note that deans received training in their subject specialisation instead of educational administration.

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**Table 2. Summary of Respondents by Qualifications**

Respondents	Qualifications						Total
	Un-Trained	Teacher's Technical Diploma	University Grad without Dip Ed	University Grad Dip Ed	University Grad Dip Ed Ed Admin	M.Ed.	
<b>Principals</b>	0	0	0	5	1	0	6
<b>Teachers</b>	3	7	21	22	0	14	67
<b>Deans</b>	0	1	2	10	0		13

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Deans, as shown in Table 3, were between the ages of 35 and 60, and 69% of deans were between the ages 26 and 35. The ratio between male and female deans was 1:1.

**Table 3. Summary of Respondents by Age and Gender**

Respondents	Age				Gender	
	<25	26-35	36-45	>46	M	F
<b>Principals</b>	0	0	1	5	3	3
<b>Teachers</b>	3	28	19	17	19	48
<b>Deans</b>	0	3	9	1	6	7
<b>Total</b>	3	31	29	23	28	58

As shown in Table 4, individual interviews as opposed to focus groups interviews were conducted with principals. This format enabled principals to share confidential issues that may not have been possible in a focus group setting. Additionally, interviewees preferred to have the individual interviews held in the privacy of their office as their answers were inclined to be spontaneous and given without much reflection. Principals' interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes.

**Table 4. Summary of Individual and Focus Group Interviews Per School**

	Number of Individual Interviews			Number of Focus Group Interviews		
	Principals	Deans	Teachers	Principals	Deans	Teachers
<b>Humming Bird High</b>	1	0	0	0	1	3
<b>Chaconia High</b>	1	0	0	0	1	2
<b>Scarlet Ibis High</b>	1	0	0	0	1	2
<b>Cocrico High</b>	1	0	0	0	1	2
<b>Medallian High</b>	1	0	0	0	1	3
<b>Newberry High</b>	1	0	0	0	1	2
<b>Total</b>	6	0	0	0	6	14

Focus group interviews were used with deans and teachers instead of individual interviews. Focus group interviews complemented other methods of data collection since they provided "in-depth information in a

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relatively short period of time” (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 186). In addition, focus group interviews provided a safe environment for participants as they felt comfortable to answer questions in a social setting instead of being placed under a microscope on an individual basis. Focus groups for deans and teachers comprised two and six participants, respectively. One focus group interview was conducted to interview deans at each of the six secondary schools. With regard to teachers, two and sometimes three focus group interviews were conducted because of the number of teachers at the school. In total, fourteen focus group interviews were conducted with teachers throughout the six secondary schools. Deans' and teachers' focus group interviews lasted approximately one hour and were conducted in a private room at each school. Collecting data from a variety of sources aided in respondent triangulation. In this paper, twenty-one focus group interviews were conducted in a prolonged period of one year “to obtain an adequate representation of different voice in the study” (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007, p. 239).

The interviews were recorded digitally and limited notes were taken. Patton (2002) has suggested that a tape recorder “is indispensable” (p. 348) during interviews. Recordings were listened to three times to confirm the accuracy of the data transcribed. Additional information, such as the informants' tones of voice, gestures and pauses during the interviews, were also noted.

The data from the interviews were transcribed using voice recognition software “Dragon Naturally Speaking” Preferred Edition 10.1 (Fogg & Whiteman, 2003; Matheson, 2007). Voice recognition software has a 98% accuracy rate, which is much higher than “human transcriptionists” (Matheson, 2007, p. 549). The data were stored in a computer archive with each interview recording being filed according to school and participant. These files will eventually be destroyed to protect the confidentiality of respondents. Upon completion of the transcription process, transcripts were made available to research participants for checking.

Data analysis involved three phases: “data condensation (reduction), data display and conclusion drawing/verification” (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014, p. 12). Inductive coding and deductive coding of the raw data retrieved from the interviews was undertaken (Onwuegbuzie & Combs, 2010). As such, codes and themes were generated from the raw data and were informed by the Pastoral Care Model described in the literature review. Partially ordered data matrices were used to input the most relevant data from the interviews. For each

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case, a meta- matrix was created to capture the relevant experiences of principals, deans and teachers. Then, using the meta-matrix, the triangulation of data sources method was employed to compare and contrast findings. Themes that emerged from the matrix sought to clarify any change and addition to the data displayed. All the single cases were displayed simultaneously to triangulate findings across the multiple case sites and to make links to theory and the literature. At this final stage, the authors engaged with interpretation and cross-validation of data to determine patterns, themes and trends derived from the data analysis (Miles et al., 2014). The three groups of respondents provided data for the following research question: From the perspectives of principals, deans and teachers, what are the actual roles deans enact and to what extent are these roles enacted in the schools of the sample?

## **Findings**

This section provides an analysis of the data across the three data sets (principals, deans and teachers), which gives an interpretation of the roles enacted in practice. Six themes emerged from the data analysis: provision of pastoral care, monitoring of student discipline, tracking students' academic progress, supervision of form teachers' activities, role as bridge and role beyond the call of duty.

### **Deans Provision of Pastoral Care to Students**

The meaning of pastoral care is often misconstrued as its definition keeps changing. Pastoral care encompasses a multitude of tasks that target the non-academic development of the student. According to the information provided by the principals, the provision of pastoral care manifested itself in the form of conferences with students and parents. This was corroborated by the principal from a co-educational secondary school who indicated:

*Deans sit down and talk to the children with their parents.*

Principals praised the efforts of deans as they maintained good relationships with parents. Another principal from a denominational secondary school for girls asserted:

*You do see them coming on the phone and making contact. They developed this close relationship with parents. You see it happening with form teachers' conference.*

All principals of the sample, however, agreed that most deans possessed insufficient experience in terms of implementing pastoral care toward students. One principal affirmed:

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*We feel that the deans sometimes lack the experience and the  
pastoral approach. I think this is sadly lacking with our deans.*

This dearth of experience often manifested itself in the manner in which the deans treated students. It was reported that many deans did not display a compassionate demeanour whenever they interacted with students. Another principal, also from a co-educational government secondary school, specified:

*There is a particular dean who the students have a serious issue  
with because of his approach, very aggressive.*

Deans agreed with principals' perspectives that they (deans) were responsible for providing pastoral care. One dean from a denominational secondary school for girls mentioned:

*We do not have a guidance officer, so we have to provide pastoral  
care to students and at our form level. As a result, deans  
conducted conferences with parents.*

Counselling sessions were common during these meetings as deans provided guidance to students and parents. However, some deans were accused of being unprofessional when they interacted with students. Pastoral care was rarely provided to students because students found the deans to be indifferent and unapproachable. One dean from a denominational school for girls indicated:

*There is a particular dean who is rough and quite abrasive when  
she speaks to students. She exacerbates the situation and the  
students hate her.*

Teachers shared the principals' and deans' perspectives that the latter were responsible for providing pastoral care to students, but were unable to do so in a professional manner. One teacher from a co-educational secondary school suggested:

*The deans suppose [sic] to provide pastoral care...that is why they  
have a reduced timetable.*

According to the teachers, deans convened conferences with the parents of habitual offenders as a means to provide pastoral care. Evidence of this is seen in the statement of a teacher from a denominational secondary school for girls, who explained:

*Sometimes the deans organised parents' meetings and parents-  
teachers' conferences.*

Conversely, some deans were unable to provide pastoral care to students since they did not treat them with care and respect. Many deans did not display a compassionate demeanour whenever they interacted with

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students. For instance, one teacher from a co-educational government secondary school explained:

*There are some deans in this school who don't handle situations well with the kids. Honestly, and personally, they don't handle it well. It's the way they go about it.*

In conclusion, principals, deans and teachers from the six secondary schools agreed that deans were responsible for the provision of pastoral care to students. This responsibility took the form of conferences with students and parents. On the other hand, principals, deans and teachers agreed that some deans were unable to employ a pastoral approach whenever they interacted with students. Most deans were seen as using a militant approach which was considered to be a hindrance to the establishment of a rapport between students and deans. It can be argued that this is why some deans did not visit students as often as they should.

### **Monitoring of Student Discipline by Deans**

Deans maintained order among the student population by patrolling the school's compound, corridors and playing field to ensure a safe environment for students. To illustrate, one principal from a co-educational government secondary school remarked:

*To ensure that there's discipline on the compound, they have regular patrols on a daily basis to control the students.*

Conversely, most principals reported that some deans were noticeably absent during the students' lunch break. To support this view, one principal from a co-educational government secondary school said:

*The lunch hour you don't see them there.*

To counteract this deficiency, principals established a patrol roster for deans to monitor student discipline. However, this strategy was thwarted by the deans since they preferred to fraternise with colleagues instead of monitoring students' behaviour. Deans from four of the six secondary schools operated from the staffroom since the infrastructure of their respective schools prevented them from being on the ground floor with their students. Given the fact that they were in the staffroom, many deans were not visibly present to monitor student discipline in the schools. To support this view, a principal exclaimed:

*I've told them to get out of the staffroom! They are sitting in the staffroom where there are desks and chairs.*

Students from three secondary schools were considered to be well-mannered. As a result, the deans' presence on these compounds was deemed unnecessary, unlike the case of the other secondary schools of the

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sample. The principal from a denominational secondary school for boys explained:

*Hands-down, no other boys' school is like this one. So you find the deans would not spend that amount of time dealing with disciplinary aspects.*

Deans disagreed with principals' perspectives that they were not visible in the school. One dean from a denominational secondary school for boys explained:

*I would like to think that I am very visible and very punctual.*

However, some deans conceded that they were not present throughout the day. One dean from a co-educational government secondary school confessed:

*I am not visible during recess and lunch time breaks.*

Furthermore, deans from three secondary schools agreed that they were rarely needed since their students were self-regulated. One dean from a denominational secondary school for boys reported:

*We do not have a discipline problem here. We have incidents, but it does not take up too much of our time.*

Teachers expressed similar sentiments to the principals that deans were not visible in the school. One teacher from a denominational secondary school for boys declared:

*I feel the deans could be doing a lot more in terms of patrolling the school. They want the portfolio of a dean but they don't want the responsibilities.*

It was reported that most deans were absent during students' lunch periods and the assemblies that were held later. The high noise level was indicative of their absence as it took an extremely long time to settle students for the after-lunch session. One teacher from a co-educational government secondary school noted:

*After lunch the school's environment is noisy and very restless. The deans are nowhere to be found.*

Teachers from three secondary schools reported that deans at their schools did not encounter many discipline issues as their students were self-regulated so there was not a need for them to patrol the compound. For example, one teacher from a denominational school for girls explained:

*Our school does not have a discipline problem, so the deans do not have to patrol during lunch.*

As shown above, most principals and some teachers agreed that student indiscipline continued at a high level since the presence of most

deans was not felt during critical periods of the school day. However, most deans disagreed with this perspective. Also, principals, deans and teachers from the other three secondary schools agreed that deans were not visible in these schools, because their students were self-regulated.

### **Deans Tracking Students' Academic Progress**

Prior to the formalisation of middle management positions in secondary schools of Trinidad and Tobago, dean of discipline and dean of studies were performed by different individuals. With the official appointment of deans, these two separate functions have now been merged. From the data analysis, most principals agreed that deans neglected the latter role since their time was monopolised with the handling of student discipline.

Although student indiscipline is common in most of our schools, it was more exaggerated in two co-educational government schools and one denominational secondary school for girls of the sample. In these schools, students from the lower forms (Form One) were characterised as academically, emotionally and psychologically challenged. Therefore, this cohort of students tended to exhibit a higher level of indiscipline that warranted the constant attention of deans. To exemplify, the principal from a co-educational government secondary school indicated:

*You have so many problem children with so many of these behavioural concerns. You get overwhelmed in any one day and probably your enthusiasm wanes as the day prolongs [sic].*

It can, therefore, be argued that the level of student indiscipline placed significant demands on the deans' time, and, as a result, they were unable to effectively monitor students' academic progress. Another principal, also from a co-educational government school, indicated:

*Deans do not pay much attention to the fact that they have to monitor examinations results. They look at it as strictly from discipline, and they are so overwhelmed with issues on some days.*

For this reason, principals constantly reminded deans to perform this role, but their attempts proved futile. One principal from a co-educational government secondary school explained:

*It is part of their duties and responsibilities of deans to monitor the performance of students. We have raised that in management meetings, but I don't think that is happening.*

Moreover, principals indicated that they wanted deans to analyse students' examination results rather than merely signing their report books as such analyses would identify students who needed their intervention. This failure of deans to analyse students' examination results is reflected

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in a statement of another of the principals from a co-educational government secondary school, who mentioned:

*They just sign the books but to say to really peruse the books, no they do not.*

Some deans shared principals' perspectives that their colleagues were unable to track the academic progress of students. Deans at schools classified as "high risk" by the MoE were generally overwhelmed by the level of indiscipline. One dean from a co-educational government secondary school asserted:

*We have a huge problem in terms of discipline. A lot of our time and energy is spent in dealing with that.*

Although it was reported that most deans expended their time with discipline issues, other deans monitored students' academic progress, albeit in a limited way. One dean from a co-educational government secondary school explained:

*We monitor mainly students who are discipline problems. This is to see how best we can assist them in improving in their academics. We pull their cumulative card to check their discipline history.*

Despite this limited level of monitoring, it was reported that the HoDs at one secondary school worked in tandem with the deans to track the academic progress of students. A dean from this school, a denominational school for girls, affirmed:

*We both [HoDs and deans] make recommendations. We collate the data in terms of improving students who fall outside the catchment area of success.*

Most teachers shared the perspectives of principals and some deans that deans' role as disciplinarians prevented them from monitoring students' academic performance. As a coping mechanism, deans merely signed students' report books since they did not have the time to put any emphasis on tracking students' academic performance. One teacher from a co-educational government secondary school indicated:

*Deans pay a lot of attention to the discipline aspect of the students. The academic progress part, I do not think the deans have ventured into that area.*

Echoing the sentiments of other teachers of the sample, another teacher from a co-educational government secondary school indicated:

*They [deans] may be frustrated, constantly dealing with students. That would take a toll and prevent them from doing other things.*

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Conversely, a few teachers agreed that some deans tracked the academic progress of students. A teacher from a denominational school for boys described the approach of one dean at her school. The teacher stated:

*One dean, in particular, deals with my form class. She checks their report books, and if they failed a certain number of subjects, she would document it and call in their parents.*

The sampled teachers from one secondary school expressed the view that both HoDs and deans collaborated in the monitoring of students' academic progress. For example, one teacher from this school, a denominational secondary school for girls, stated:

*They [HoDs and deans] came up with tables to show progress reports of the students.*

As has been noted, most principals, some deans and most teachers from the six secondary schools expressed dissatisfaction that deans did not monitor the academic progress of students since they were preoccupied with handling discipline issues. On the contrary, some deans disagreed as they tracked the academic performance of students who were referred to them. However, it must be underscored that the HoDs and the deans from one denominational school enacted this role together.

### **Deans' Supervision of Form Teachers' Activities**

The responsibility of supervising form teachers' activities is another of the prescribed roles of deans. However, all deans encounter challenges to enact this role, because the deans' job description does not clearly delineate what these form teachers' activities involve. In addition, none of the major education stakeholders, namely, the MoE, the TSC or TTUTA, has issued any documentation to clarify this issue. Deans, therefore, perform a traditional role where they monitor students' regularity and punctuality with the form teacher.

Most principals of the sample agreed that the deans performed this role. It was reported that deans visited classrooms to ensure students arrived to school on time and assisted form teachers when they were absent from school. One principal from a co-educational government secondary school explained:

*They make sure the teachers are there for roll call and take the roll if the form teacher is absent.*

Yet another principal from a co-educational government secondary school underscored:

*Deans meet with form teachers from time to time. They advise form teachers on how to carry out their business in the form class.*

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On the contrary, at one co-educational government secondary school, deans were unable to monitor form teachers' activities. The pastoral care structure in most secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago follows a horizontal or year system format where deans are responsible for an entire year group. This horizontal structure enables deans to interact directly with form teachers and to provide the support they require. In this paper, it was observed that this structure was not present at one secondary school of the sample. The principal from a co-educational government secondary school clarified:

*With the present system, we only have three deans. We haven't assigned anybody to any particular form level.*

Most deans shared principals' perspectives that deans supervised form teachers. Of the schools sampled, it was reported that deans organised meetings with form teachers to garner the type of support they needed to provide. One dean from a co-educational government secondary school stated:

*We liaise with the agencies and at the level of the form teacher.*

In addition, deans reportedly performed the role of form teachers when some form teachers neglected their responsibility. Another dean from a co-educational government secondary school indicated:

*I would take the roll books, especially if I see that certain roll books were not taken by form teachers.*

On the other hand, the deans from one secondary school of the sample were unable to enact this role due to human resource constraints. As a result, deans were not assigned to a particular form level. One dean from this school remarked:

*We don't have deans operating at a form level basis to start with. So in my humble opinion, there is no big relationship between the dean and the form teacher.*

A minority of teachers shared the perspectives held by principals and most deans with regard to the role of monitoring form teachers' activities. Deans held informal meetings with form teachers and purportedly provided the support that form teachers required. One teacher from a co-educational government secondary school stated:

*They meet us on the corridor. They would ask, "How is your class going?" and things like that.*

On the contrary, the majority of teachers felt that some deans did not liaise with form teachers and did not provide the support they needed. It was mentioned that some form teachers were left in the lurch as their deans did not visit the classrooms or enquire about their students' well-

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being. Echoing the sentiments of other teachers, one teacher from a denominational secondary school for boys explained that deans should:

*Occasionally check on the class. Check, not to say pick up on you but to assist. Anything wrong miss? Anything needs to be done? Play a proactive role.*

In the case of the one co-educational government secondary school, where deans were not assigned to form levels, support for form teachers was not provided. As a result, it was reported that form teachers took up the slack. One teacher from the school explained:

*Form teachers have to be a dean. They have to monitor students' performance in their form class, because deans are not assigned to form levels.*

The analysis has indicated that most principals, deans and a minority of teachers from five secondary schools of the sample were satisfied with the approach deans employed to monitor form teachers' activities. However, the majority of teachers disagreed. A lack of support from the deans was notably evident at one co-educational government secondary school. At this school, the pastoral care structure could not be fully utilised since there were only three appointed deans. Form teachers at this school, therefore, enacted the role instead of the deans.

### **Beyond the Call of Duty**

In 2007, the MoE published a green paper on the operations of schools in Trinidad and Tobago. This document contains deans' job descriptions and their roles and responsibilities. Nevertheless, deans execute other roles which are not outlined in their job descriptions. Most principals expect deans to surpass the established parameters of their job description. To illustrate this, one principal from a denominational secondary school for boys said:

*As a denominational school, we do things above and beyond what the ministry says is their basic job description.*

Additionally, most principals from the sample agreed that deans participated in extra-curricular activities, while a minority of principals did not share this view. To demonstrate, one principal from a co-educational secondary school indicated:

*The deans coordinate graduation, religious [Eid/Divali/Christmas] programmes, and other major functions, such as achievement day.*

Deans' roles also included the organisation and supervision of sporting activities. Another principal from a co-educational government secondary school stated:

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*They are involved in cricket and football and managing the sporting teams.*

Conversely, a minority of principals disagreed that some deans participated in extra-curricular activities. Unlike most deans, some deans stayed within their zone of indifference as they did not engage in any activity that fell outside of their job description. One principal from a co-educational government secondary school hinted at this with the statement:

*Some deans have to be more prompt and be present when school functions are taking place. That in my book is what makes and separates a lot of schools.*

Deans from the six secondary schools agreed with the principals' perspectives that they executed duties which do not constitute part of their job descriptions. One dean from a denominational secondary school for girls said:

*I think first of all that is outlined by the Ministry documentation and then of course as the need arises.*

Similarly, to attest to deans' execution of additional duties, another dean from a co-educational government secondary school, stated:

*We take charge of different functions in the school like graduation, Divali, Eid, Mother's Day, and Father's Day programmes.*

Teachers from the six secondary schools shared some of the views of the principals and deans. Teachers expressed the view that deans took on the responsibility of coordinating extra-curricular activities. One teacher from a co-educational government secondary school explained:

*They help out with things like graduation, barbeque [fundraiser] and sports' day, organise events and things...*

According to the teachers, deans also coordinated intramural sports in their respective schools. This view is supported by another teacher from a co-educational government secondary school, who stated:

*I think they would organise a cricket match for form three, and our form three dean took charge of it.*

In summary, some principals, deans and teachers from the six secondary schools agreed that deans took charge of extra-curricular activities. Some of these activities included religious functions, current and social events and sporting activities. However, a minority of principals disagreed.

**Role as Bridge**

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The role of bridge, performed by heads of department, was originally conceptualised to provide a link between senior management and teachers. This role requires two-way communication where information flows upwards from teachers through deans to senior management and similarly downwards from senior management to teachers. All principals, in this paper, felt that deans also performed the role as bridge like their HoD counterpart. According to these principals, the deans provided a link between senior management and form teachers. For example, one principal from a co-educational government secondary school indicated:

*The deans will deal with the form teachers. They are supposed to be the link between administration and the teachers, because deans attend meetings of middle management and relay matters to teachers on student discipline.*

Like principals, deans also perceived that they enacted the role as a bridge between principals and form teachers. One dean from a denominational secondary school for girls reported:

*Our role is crucial since we provide the link between form teachers and principals. Discipline matters are handled more efficiently.*

The teachers agreed with the principals' and deans' perspectives that the latter provide an important link between form teachers and principals. One teacher from a denominational secondary school for boys remarked:

*Changes in policies on student indiscipline are channelled to form teachers through the deans.*

As it relates to the role as bridge, principals, deans and teachers agreed that deans performed the role as bridge along with the HoD counterpart.

### **Interpretation and Discussion**

The results of this paper provide some insights into the experiences of deans in six secondary schools in an education district in Trinidad and Tobago. It was evident from this paper that most deans were not engaged in the enactment of their prescribed roles. A key observation gleaned is that the position of dean is missing from the Education Act (1966) of Trinidad and Tobago. Although this statutory document governs the operations of schools, the roles of deans in secondary schools were officially non-existent until 1988, when they were introduced as a pilot project in selected schools to curb an increasing wave of student

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indiscipline. The failure to address the role and importance of deans has continued to be evident in the disparity between HoDs and deans where deans do not possess positional or line authority although they are expected to supervise form teachers' activities. A lack of teacher-training programmes for secondary school deans has compounded the issue where HoD preparation is favoured over the preparation of deans.

The provision of pastoral care by deans in secondary schools, however, is not overtly stated but implied, since the term "pastoral care" cannot be located on the deans' job description (MoE, 2007). This lack of explicit focus on pastoral care probably explains why various researchers (Joyce, 2013; Murphy, 2011) have agreed that pastoral care by deans has not been extensively researched. The findings of this paper also contribute to the current debate on the pastoral and academic divide where academic issues are accorded a greater focus than pastoral concerns (Clark, 2008). Thus, it is unlikely that deans and teachers are au fait with the provision of pastoral care in Trinidad and Tobago. This misunderstanding has manifested itself in the unprofessional conduct of deans with students. Monitoring student discipline is one of the deans' prescribed roles (MoE, 2007). In this paper, low visibility of deans was reported during student lunch and break intervals. This finding supports the clarion call of students for greater visibility of deans in their schools, especially during assemblies (Fraser, 2014). Students' perspectives of the deans' roles were, however, not considered in this paper. The researcher's knowledge of the secondary school system in Trinidad and Tobago has provided a lens for explaining the deans' behaviour. Some deans handle student indiscipline on a daily basis and use the break and lunch intervals to reinvigorate themselves before they teach their next timetabled class, while other deans use these periods to compensate for lost teaching time. Another possible reason is that some deans want the status and salary of a middle manager but do not want the responsibilities associated with the position as they are more interested in the advancement of their career than the welfare of students. This is also a perception shared informally by principals, some deans and teachers. Another prescribed role of deans - the monitoring of student discipline - is one of the most demanding duties among deans and is an underlying reason for their inability to track students' academic performance. Tracking students' academic performance is another of the dean's prescribed roles (MoE, 2007). Their role as disciplinarians, however, has taken precedence and greater attention has been focused on students who are referred to them by teachers (McKinley et al., 2009). Although this finding was applicable to that study, it could be inferred

from this paper that deans are unprepared to enact this role with all students, as they are not adequately trained. In addition, some deans appear to have become nonchalant about this particular role in schools with high-achieving students who are self-regulated.

A third prescribed role of deans is the supervision of form teachers' activities (MoE, 2007). In this study, the majority of form teachers felt neglected, as they were not given the support they needed. It can be inferred, as suggested by Cook (2013) and Elhaggagi (2009), that deans are unable to assist form teachers beyond the traditional administrative expectations of monitoring students' absences and signing of report books, since their roles have not been explicitly documented. Hence, this role is subjective and open to interpretation. Earlier studies revealed that HoDs performed the role of a buffer, conduit or a bridge (Feist, 2008; Wattam, 2017). Moreover, the findings from this study revealed that deans enacted the role as a bridge between senior management and form teachers. But, little is known about this role because of the absence of literature on secondary school deans (Bennett et al., 2007; Crane & De Nobile, 2014; Murphy, 2011). As a result, it is worthy of further research. The roles performed by deans in this current study, were often congruent with their job description. However, when asked by the researchers to identify other roles, it was interesting that the respondents identified tasks that were not prescribed. The evidence provided by this paper is consistent with findings reported in the literature (Nelson, 2015; Scott, 2015) concerning the perception that deans were in charge of students' clubs. Although these tasks are necessary for the management of the schools, the researchers of this paper were convinced that some deans were either not cognisant of their actual roles or experienced difficulties, which debilitated their performance. Hence, another area that is worthy of further research.

### **Limitations**

As this paper focuses on only 6 of the 16 schools in the Caroni Education District, there may be limitations in terms of the extent to which generalisations can be made to the other 10 schools specifically and also to schools elsewhere. Hence, the findings could have benefitted from including schools from other educational districts. Nevertheless, the schools selected were satisfactory representations of secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago according to school types, academic performance, discipline issues and general governance.

Also, this paper is based on the perspectives of principals, deans

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and teachers. It was not the researchers' intention to observe deans enact their actual roles in their respective schools. Respondent triangulation (Kempster & Parry, 2014; Torrance, 2012), therefore, was used to mitigate the absence of observation. Thus, the findings and interpretations of the data from these six schools were tempered with caution and contextual understandings.

### **Recommendations**

It is evident to authors of this paper that the position of dean was an afterthought as this position is not included in the legal framework of Trinidad and Tobago (Education Act of 1966). As a result, deans do not possess positional or line authority, although they are required to supervise form teachers' activities. In this light, it is strongly recommended that the MoE, the TSC and the teachers' union (TTUTA) address this inconsistency in the deans' job description (Fraser, 2014). Furthermore, deans need the support of professionals who are able to diagnose issues and to provide pastoral care. For that reason, guidance counsellors should be assigned to all secondary schools to facilitate the development and implementation of a pastoral care programme since deans are not trained counsellors.

Another significant finding of this paper was that the majority of deans operated from within the staffroom, since they were not relocated to another room upon their promotion. As a result, they were not visible on the school's compound. Deans need to be positioned closer to their students as this will enable them to establish rapport with and provide pastoral care to their charges. Additionally, deans need to have access to a private facility to conduct confidential sessions with students and parents. It is crucial, therefore, that deans be relocated from the staffroom and be properly accommodated elsewhere in the school.

### **Conclusion**

The main focus of this paper was on the actual roles deans enacted in the administration of secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. Findings indicate that secondary schools lacked a pastoral care structure. It is the view of the researchers that the roles deans enacted were provision of pastoral care, monitoring of student discipline, tracking students' academic progress, supervision of form teachers' activities, role as bridge and roles that went beyond the dean's job description. While some deans

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performed these roles, most deans did not, and were ineffective in fulfilling their pastoral responsibilities. Their performance was perfunctory as roles were enacted on a limited basis. Although deans added value to the administration of secondary schools, their contribution was less than what might have been possible.

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