

Three Basic Schools to Be Built By End of September

At least three new early childhood institutions, which are at various stages of construction, are to be completed by the end of September.

The structures are being built as part of Food for the Poor's (FFP) Jamaica 50 Campaign, which entails the construction and refurbishing of 50 of the island's basic schools, over a 50-month period. The three schools – Real Success Basic School in Kingston; Long Hill Basic School in Westmoreland; and Greenvale Basic School in Manchester are slated to be completed by September 20, 25 and 26, respectively. In an interview, Project Co-ordinator, FFP, Marcus Irons, explained that the Real Success and Long Hill basic schools had pre-existing structures which were in disrepair, while there was no previous structure for the Greenvale Basic School. Up to the time of the campaign's launch in June, some 29 schools situated in Kingston, St. Catherine, St. Thomas, Manchester, Portland, St. Ann, St. James and Westmoreland were identified for assistance under the project. Mr. Irons noted that since then, the Charity has accumulated many request letters for assistance, "and we were able to do some more investigations." "We actually have 48 schools now on the list and investigations are pending for a couple of them, probably 18 of them. We investigate when we get the request letters and based on the criteria that we have, we decide if they qualify for the campaign or not," he informed. The Project Co-ordinator said five requirements of the FFP need to be met for schools to qualify for assistance under the project. He noted that the first criterion for selection is the size of the school, pointing out that if the school population is below 25 students, "then it's not really feasible for the campaign." "But, if we do more investigations and we find that if we build the school more students would be (attending) and more community (members) would get involved in the whole building of the institution, then we go ahead and build it," Mr. Irons said. He noted that another condition for assistance is the proximity of the school to other early childhood institutions. "We don't want to build any school if you have another basic school in a one to two-mile radius. We really wouldn't want to cluster them. We want to space them out evenly, so that we don't have an accumulation in one area," he added. "The next thing (is) the lease agreement. They have to have a long term lease agreement, so that (when) we finish building the school, they occupy and use it accordingly for a basic school," he said. Mr. Irons pointed out that certification will have to be provided by the Early Childhood Commission (ECC) or permission given to function as a basic school. The final criterion is a mutual agreement between the ECC and Food for the Poor agreeing to build or renovate the selected schools. All schools will be built in communities where the ECC, in consultation with the FFP, has identified the most dire needs for pre-primary facilities. Mr. Irons further informed that all three schools are being constructed based on FFP's standard six-unit basic school structure. The Real Success and Long Hill basic schools, which previously accommodated 42 students, will now be able to house up to 90 pupils. The Project Co-ordinator also assured that the transition of the students to the new structures should be a fairly smooth process, as special arrangements have been made with the school Boards in this regard. Education Minister, Rev. the Hon. Ronald Thwaites, has welcomed the campaign, describing the initiative as an "extraordinary gift to Jamaica." He added that the 50 institutions will get "the full support of the Government of Jamaica." JIS