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Year 9 PACE students (from left to right) Akeen General, Kashekia Daley, Jonassi Swaby and Nadiyah Abul-Jabbar, who spoke about their experience of moving from George Hicks High School to the smaller school.

The re-organisation of the George Hicks High School into Heritage High, Leading Edge, New Horizons and PACE in September 2006 appears to have been met with apprehension and curiosity by students returning for that school year. Despite being informed of and being given the opportunity to have an input in the changes, this presented uncharted territory for the young people and filled them with uncertainty about what to expect.

Cayman Net News spoke with four Year 9 students from PACE: Nadiyah Abul-Jabbar, Jonassi Swaby, Akeen General and Kashekia Daley, about their experience of the changes to the educational system. All four were students during the time of the former George Hicks High School and have lived through the changes brought about by the new system.

The students agree that they initially had doubts about moving to a new school, primarily because they would not see friends who would be going to one of the other schools. However, they also agree that there are benefits to their academic and social development that would not have been attained in the larger school.

"We can talk to teachers about what is happening in class more easily," Kashekia said in reference to the ease with which teachers can now be assessed. According to the students, this has resulted in better relationships with teachers, which has had a knock on effect on their academic performance.

Additionally, "The length of lessons has moved from 30 to 50 minutes so we have more time to settle down and learn," Akeen pointed out. There was overwhelming agreement with this point as, according to Jonassi, under the previous system it would, "take us about 20 minutes to settle down and then the class would be over."

The improvement in grades is a testimony to the benefits of the smaller schools. "My grade in Spanish has improved from D to B," said Nadiyah. The other students mentioned improvements in Mathematics with Kashekia moving from E to C, Jonassi moving from a B to B+ and Akeen moving from Set 3 to Set 2B.

There is evidence that academic improvement has taken place in all of the new schools. When interviewed for this series Marlene Ricketts, School Leader for New Horizons, spoke about the efforts she had made to improve academic performance amongst her students. "I set a grade



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point average (GPA) of 3.0 that was achieved by at least fifty percent of Year nines. Those who did not (reach that target) were in the high twos; a definite improvement on previous years.”

Steven Clarke, School Leader at Heritage High School, explained that they have now started collecting statistical data that will provide a good basis from which to measure progress in the future.

Perhaps one of the areas in which it was most surprising to hear students' comments was on the benefits to their behaviour and general discipline. "We can't use a large campus as an excuse for being late for class," Jonassi Swaby from PACE pointed out. "There aren't many places to hide and security is always on the lookout so we can't do [anything]!" added Kashekia Daley.

According to this group of students the smaller schools create "less places to hide", thereby making them more aware of their behaviour, in keeping with one of the motivating factors for the re-organisation.

Mr Clarke of Heritage High School said students' concerns about being separated from friends came out during the consultation period but that there was now "a greater sense of belonging and greater identification" amongst students for the schools they are in.

These views will be encouraging to the architects of the re-organisation whose ultimate aim is to increase educational attainment levels amongst school leavers. Gareth Long, Strategic Development Advisor in the Ministry of Education said, "What we proposed involved a massive amount of work". He added, "The Ministry's view is very positive. This is a well thought out scheme that has received a lot of buy-in and will guide the thinking (on the provision of education) for the future."

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