



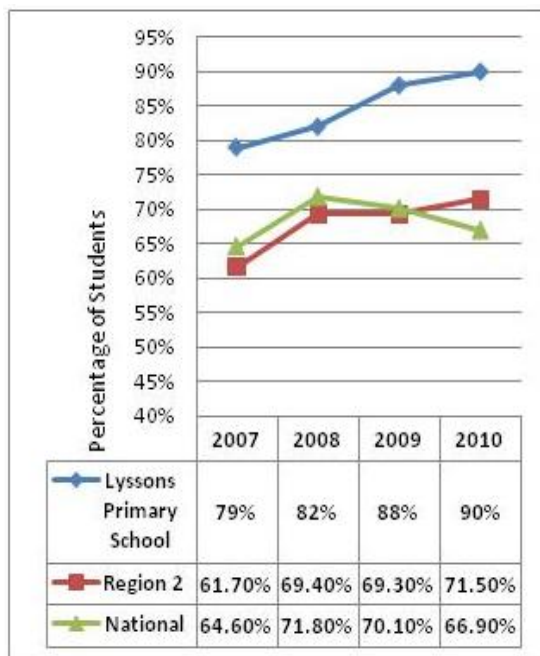
## EDUFOCUS NUMBER 4

### IMPROVING LITERACY THE LYSSONS PRIMARY WAY: THE QUALITY OF TEACHERS AND LEADERSHIP MATTERS

Ena Barclay, Principal of Lyssons Primary School, is animated and passionate. She has explained the reasons for the success of her school very plainly. Lyssons Primary is one of the most successful primary schools in Jamaica because it has always had strong leaders, high expectations for both students and teachers, and highly motivated and committed teachers.

#### DILIGENT JOURNEY TOWARDS EXCELLENCE

Located in St. Thomas in eastern Jamaica, Lyssons Primary School was opened in October 1972. It started with 88 students and by the end of year one had a total of 392 boys and girls. The rapid growth continued and within five years, the school had grown to more than 800 students. Today the school caters to 1,142 students and continues to receive more requests for places than it can satisfy. Parents want to send their children to Lyssons because of its long history of outstanding academic and non-academic achievements. In the last few years, the school has attained better mastery levels in national examinations compared to its peers across Jamaica and within its Education region.



**Figure 1:** Mastery of GFLT over time (2007 - 2010)  
Source: Student Assessment Unit

“The numbers continued to grow because the standards from the onset was quite high”

Ena Barclay

#### WELL EQUIPPED WITH PROFESSIONALS

Mrs. Barclay explained that the school is well equipped and is the site of a Literacy Resource Centre, established with corporate sponsorship. The Centre has computers, books, audiovisual equipment and computer software, which are used by teachers to support their literacy lessons. But really the success has been based on the more intangible assets of the school. She noted that from the inception of the school, the first principal was a mentor to all the teachers and ensured that they received continuous professional development, a tradition that has been maintained by all subsequent principals.

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Mrs. Ena Barclay, Principal

As principal, Mrs. Barclay has always set high standards for her teachers and holds them accountable for the results the students achieve.

She has championed the fact that teaching is a profession and as such, has insisted that the teachers:

- **Prepare for class:** complete lesson plans, identify resources needed for lessons and maintain a classroom which is conducive to teaching and learning.
- **Pursue professional development opportunities:** attend seminars, conferences, workshops and share information with each other. The school provides tangible support for these activities.
- **Set high standards** for and have high expectations of the students.
- **Care** for and nurture students.
- **Show respect:** treat children, parents and other teachers with respect.
- **Maintain a professional image:** be well presented for school.

The result of this, she feels, is that the children are well taught and feel comfortable asking questions, and

they are developing new skills while enjoying their learning experience. The performance data, both at Grade Four Literacy Test (GFLT) and the Grade Six Achievement Test (GSAT) is simply a reflection of an overall nurturing and focused educational environment.

As a leader, Mrs. Barclay is clear about her role and that of principals in general. “A leader must be visible and give confidence to the staff”, she says. A good principal holds the teachers accountable, but he or she should also listen and give guidance, be a mentor for young teachers and a facilitator of strong relationships between teachers and the parents/community.

### HOW DO WE TAKE-OFF?

Although the school has always done well, upon becoming Principal in 2003, Mrs. Barclay challenged her staff to think about the need for continuous growth and the importance of change. She did not believe that they could “just stay on the plateau”, so she asked two simple, but important questions of them: What do we need to do to improve? How do we take off? Together they decided that take-off could come if they:

- Improved literacy
- Improved numeracy
- Improved discipline
- Expanded to meet the demand for spaces

### IMPROVING LITERACY AND NUMERACY

Lyssons has used all available resources to maintain the high standard for which it is known. But the most important resource has



Lyssons Primary School Students

been its people, its leaders and its staff. Together, they make universal mastery look highly attainable.

**Cooperative Planning:** cooperative lesson planning sessions are held weekly, where teachers discuss their grade level strategies, share information with each other and plan interventions for individual children and groups as needed.

**Data-Driven Planning:** The vice principals and senior teachers analyze the examination data to identify areas of weakness and then together with responsible teachers, take necessary steps to bring about improvement.

**Special Education:** The Special Education Unit and the resource room coordinators work with the class teachers to schedule special lessons for children with identified needs.

**Engaging Parents:** The school is proactive in soliciting total buy-in from parents concerning expectations and policies regarding parents’ attendance at grade meetings and PTA meetings, attendance of their child at school, and procedures for resolving issues and support for the child at home.