

PRESS RELEASE

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Eslyn Henley Richiez Learning Centre Marks One Month of Transformation for Exceptional Learners

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The Eslyn Henley Richiez Learning Centre is marking one month in its new home, continuing to bring transformative change to students, families, and educators following its historic opening on October 13.

The newly rebuilt facility stands as the first purpose-built special education school in the OECS, a long-awaited milestone achieved through the Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports in partnership with the Recovery and Development Agency, Unite BVI, the Maples Group, TigerQi Architecture and Autland Heavy Equipment Co. Ltd. The opening ceremony, which featured contributions from Government officials, regional partners, donors, and supporters celebrated the realisation of a decades-long vision to provide exceptional learners with a modern, inclusive space tailored to their needs.

Since stepping into the new facility, students and staff have already begun experiencing meaningful improvements in engagement, comfort, and daily routines. **Principal Magdalene Alister** described the past month as both uplifting and transformative, noting that students have settled into the specialised classrooms, therapy spaces, sensory areas, and outdoor learning environments with confidence and enthusiasm. “We are seeing measurable gains in student engagement, confidence, sense of belonging, and progress as specialised rooms and therapy areas empower and support their needs,” she shared. “The teachers are grateful for these spaces in which they are flourishing with their students. Families have expressed deep gratitude and pride; their excitement mirrors our own as they see their children comfortably settled in an environment designed for their success.”

The impact is also evident inside the classrooms. **Special Education Teacher Elaine Malone-Lewis** noted that the new environment has improved accessibility, independence, and comfort for students. With well-organised, spacious classrooms, proper lighting, nearby bathrooms, and thoughtfully arranged materials, daily routines now flow with greater ease. She also highlighted the importance of safety features and the sensory room, which provides students with a calm, supportive space to regulate and refocus during the school day. She added that the outdoor classroom encourages exploration and confidence-building, reflecting the Centre’s

commitment to every child's well-being and success.

School Counsellor Tarriesha Dawson echoed these sentiments, explaining that the shift from the previous open-concept accommodation to separate classrooms has greatly reduced overstimulation and improved learning conditions. She emphasised the significant benefits of the Centre's therapy and sensory rooms, which she described as "God-sent," providing safe, interactive environments that support self-regulation and smoother transitions back into the classroom. She stated, "We are grateful for a facility that has been outfitted to suit the many needs of our students, they seem happier, and so are we."

At the official opening, Minister for Education, Youth Affairs and Sports Honourable Sharie B. de Castro reflected on the emotional impact of seeing the Centre completed, an achievement many families, educators, and community members have anticipated for years. Speaking in a post-ceremony interview, the Minister shared that walking through the building and seeing educators' and parents' gratitude deeply moved her. She noted that the design features, from the sensory and therapy rooms to specialised lifts, hygiene areas, and adaptive equipment, were all chosen intentionally to ensure that exceptional learners receive the tailored support they deserve. "This building is not just modern," she said. "It's a statement that every child in the Virgin Islands matters."

The opening ceremony also highlighted the collaborative efforts behind the project, with remarks delivered by Premier Honourable Dr. Natalio Wheatley, Minister for Education, Youth Affairs and Sports Honourable Sharie B. de Castro, Minister of Communications and Works Honourable Kye M. Rymer, representatives from the Caribbean Development Bank, the RDA's Board of Directors, and construction partner Autland Heavy Equipment Co. Ltd. Their contributions emphasised the shared commitment that brought the Centre to life. Donor partners Unite BVI and Maples Group were also recognised for their support in making the vision of a modern, fully equipped special education facility a reality.

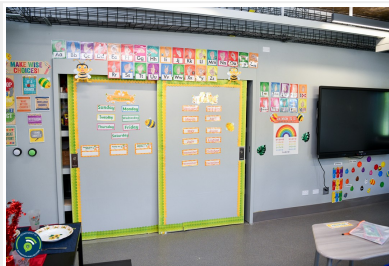
Now, one month later, the Eslyn Henley Richiez Learning Centre stands not only as a new building, but as a thriving, nurturing environment where students are supported, celebrated, and empowered each day. The Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports remains committed to strengthening inclusive education and

ensuring that every learner in the Virgin Islands has access to a space designed with intention, compassion, and excellence.

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