

Willowdene Group of Schools

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Sandra Gayle, Ph.D. (Northern Caribbean University), served the Willowdene Group of Schools as principal and teacher of English Language for a number of years.

The Willowdene Group of Schools is a Seventh-day Adventist co-educational institution that is owned and operated by Central Jamaica Conference, located at 58 Brunswick Avenue in Spanish Town St. Catherine.¹ The school is recognized by the Government of Jamaica through the Ministry of Education as well as the accrediting body of the Inter-American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.²

Willowdene High School came into existence through the efforts of the late Pastor H. S. Walters, who at the time, was the president of the Central Jamaica Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. He had the idea that an Adventist educational institution should be established in St. Catherine which would cater to the educational needs of the young people of the church. After much work and planning, on January 11, 1965 the doors of Willowdene High School were opened.³

The first principal was Pastor Leroy Carter with a teaching staff of four namely, Gloria Grant, Iris Henry, Claire Cole and Leighton McKenzie and there were forty-four students. Grades one to five and forms one to three were the initial classes, with grade six and forms four and five being added accordingly in the following years.⁴ For the next ten years, the high school was housed in the auditorium while the preparatory school classes were held in a small building that was erected at the rear of the auditorium. In the 1976/1977 academic year, the high school classes began in the new building which was constructed, making way for the preparatory school to move into the auditorium where they stayed until 1995, when they were again relocated to their new building which they currently occupy, with students from kindergarten to grade six.⁵

Over the years, the institution has experienced tremendous success academically and numerically.

There are a number of significant milestones in the journey of the institution. In 1967, the high school began writing the Cambridge General Certificate Examinations O Level (GCE) and in 1969 the first graduation exercise for the high school was held under the principalship of Mr. Zadock Reid. In 1977 the first graduation for the preparatory department was held. A pre-school department was added in 2001, and the building was established in 2007.

In 2003 construction of a two-storey science complex began and this was completed in 2005. It includes a biology, chemistry and physics laboratory, and two computer laboratories. In 2005 the 40th anniversary of the school was observed in a year-long celebration during which the science complex was officially opened. In 2008 the auditorium was expanded, and a canteen and cafeteria were added to the building. The computer

laboratory designated for the preparatory school was refurbished and officially opened in 2010, and in 2013, the library designated for the high school was refurbished and officially opened and named the Gloria Grant & Rupert N. Weir Library and Resource Centre.

In 2014 two rooms on the administrative building designated for the Northern Caribbean University graduate school were refurbished and officially opened. In 2015, the name of the institution was officially changed from Willowdene High School to Willowdene Group of Schools. In August 2015 principal Basil Tabannor demitted office after eleven years of service and Peter Williams and Beverley Graham-Harris were later appointed as principal and vice-principal respectively. Regrettably, Graham-Harris passed away in July 2018. In 2017 the School's auditorium was refurbished and named the O. B. McKenzie Auditorium, and the Willowdene Group of Schools Prayer Garden was established.

SOURCES

"History of Willowdene." Willowdene Group of Schools. Accessed 2019. <http://wgs.edu.jm/about-us/history-of-school/>.

NOTES

1. The author acknowledges the contribution of the following people in the writing of this article: Basil Tabannor, Beverley Graham-Harris, Janice Sewell, and Peter Williams.
2. "History of Willowdene," Willowdene Group of Schools, accessed 2019, <http://wgs.edu.jm/about-us/history-of-school/>.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.

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