

STATES OF JERSEY



SCHOOL CLOSURES

**Lodged au Greffe on 8th December 2020
by Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier**

STATES GREFFE

PROPOSITION

THE STATES are asked to decide whether they are of opinion –

to request the Minister for Education to take the steps necessary to close Jersey's state-run schools from Monday 14th December 2020 for the remainder of the current school term, with provision provided for vulnerable children and the children of key-workers as the Minister considers appropriate and practical.

DEPUTY R.J. WARD OF ST. HELIER

REPORT

Many islanders are growing deeply concerned that Jersey's schools remain fully open for students, despite an alarming rise in the number of positive cases of Covid-19 being recorded. At the time of writing, almost 4,000 islanders have signed a petition calling for the schools to be closed a week early.

Several private schools have already taken the initiative and announced that they will close from Monday next week.

The local representatives of the NEU, NASUWT, NAHT and Prospect unions have all publicly spoken out about the concerns their members have about continuing to work in these schools. Some have called for the schools to be closed earlier.

Whilst the medical advice from Acting Group Medical Director to the Education Minister confirms that their view is that there is no medical reason that the schools ought to be closed, there are concerns which must be addressed which do not constitute medical concerns, but rather the practical concerns there are with effectively running schools in such adverse circumstances.

We know that many parents are now unilaterally taking their children out of school (and the Education Minister has confirmed that a "flexible" approach will be taken for absences), many teachers and staff members are having to self-isolate and cannot physically attend their schools, and a number of student groups are having to stay at home in response to somebody testing positive that could have had contact with other members of those groups.

On the evening of Monday 7th December, States Members received an update on how schools had been affected between 3rd and 7th December (see Appendix). Forty-five minutes after we received this, we were further updated that St Saviour's Primary School nursery was having to close because of staff shortages.

If I was to attempt to list all of the schools affected by staff shortages or student groups having to stay home, it would be out of date by the time this debate happens. This situation is changing every day, and the schools are facing great uncertainty.

The unions have spoken on behalf of their members, describing many of them as feeling "terrified". A poll of Prospect members found that almost two thirds wanted schools to close immediately, with only 3% believing they should stay open until the end of term. The representative of the Headteachers' union was quoted in the media as saying "*the current capacity for many schools is extremely difficult and may not be sustainable because of the demands of the pandemic and staff absences as a result of this*".

There are serious practical difficulties in asking schools to remain open, but at risk at short notice of having to overhaul their plans, if just one staff member too many has to self-isolate, or a child is tested positive and a class group is sent home.

By declaring that schools can close from this Monday, they will have certainty and be able to plan effectively to meet the best interests of their students, and for the staff to have the peace of mind that they are safe and can enjoy Christmas at a much lower risk.

If the Minister deems it appropriate, she can make provision for the schools to continue to provide face to face teaching for vulnerable children and the children of key-workers, as was done during the schools closure earlier this year.

Financial and manpower implications

This proposition has been lodged to call for emergency action to be taken, in response to a rapidly developing situation. It is therefore unclear what financial and manpower implications there could be, but equally there is no telling what the implications could be of not taking this action and having to adopt a reactive approach to unpredictable changes which could occur next week.

Monday, 7 December 2020

The Department for Children Young People, Education and Skills has been advised of the following Covid-19 cases in schools and colleges from 3 December to 7 December 2020:

Le Rocquier School

A student has tested positive for Covid-19 on 3 December 2020 and is currently isolating at home, along with the rest of their household following the public health guidance.

Victoria College Preparatory School

A member of staff has tested positive for Covid-19 on 3 December 2020 and is currently isolating at home, along with the rest of their household following the public health guidance.

Beaulieu Convent School

A student has tested positive for Covid-19 on 3 December 2020 and is currently isolating at home, along with the rest of their household following the public health guidance.

Rouge Bouillon School

A student has tested positive for Covid-19 on 4 December 2020 and is currently isolating at home, along with the rest of their household following public health guidance.

St Saviour School

A student has tested positive for Covid-19 on 4 December 2020 and is currently isolating at home, along with the rest of their household following public health guidance.

Haute Valleé School

A student has tested positive for Covid-19 on 4 December 2020 and is currently isolating at home, along with the rest of their household following public health guidance.

St John's School

A student has tested positive for Covid-19 on 4 December 2020 and is currently isolating at home, along with the rest of their household following public health guidance.

Grainville School

Two students have tested positive for Covid-19 on 5 December 2020 and are currently isolating at home, along with the rest of their household following public health guidance.

Grainville School will be unable to accommodate Year 7, Year 8, Year 9 students at school on Monday 7 December because of the number of staff currently having to isolate. The school has contacted affected parents directly.

Online learning will continue, with hard copies available for those without online access.

Les Quennevais School

A student has tested positive for Covid-19 on 6 December 2020 and is currently isolating at home, along with the rest of their household following public health guidance.

Bel Royal School

A student has tested positive for Covid-19 on 6 December 2020 and is currently isolating at home, along with the rest of their household following public health guidance.

Two year groups and the Additional Resource Centre (ARC) at Bel Royal School have been told to isolate as a precautionary measure, to allow the track and trace process to be completed.

Mont à l'Abbé Nursery

Mont à l'Abbé Nursery will be unable to accommodate students at school from 7 December 2020 because of the number of staff currently having to isolate. The Nursery has contacted affected parents directly.

Plat Douet School

Two students have tested positive for Covid-19 on 7 December 2020 and are currently isolating at home, along with the rest of their household following the public health guidance.

Two year groups and the afterschool club have been informed and have been asked to isolate at home, as a precautionary measure, to allow the track and trace process to be completed.

Rouge Bouillon School

Two students have tested positive for Covid-19 on 7 December 2020 and are currently isolating at home, along with the rest of their household following the public health guidance.

Highlands College

Three full-time students, all of whom are in the same class bubble, and a member of the support staff have tested positive as part of the on-site testing programme conducted at the College by the testing team. They are all isolating at home.