

2.11 Deputy T.M. Pitman of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture regarding ...

Will the Minister clarify why, given the criticism contained within the Sharp Report from the principal, vice-principal and a third teacher at Victoria College regarding their failure to act appropriately in relation to allegations of child abuse at the school, all 3 were allowed to resign rather than being sacked?

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan of St. John (The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture):

I do not feel able to comment on decisions that were made in 1996 and also I have already made quite clear in previous answers to previous questions my difficulty in making any kind of reference to a confidential and sensitive report. However, and if it helps, I can assure the Deputy that policies and procedures in relation to child protection are comprehensive and thorough today. Staff who work with young people are required to attend training in this area and all staff in education are required to act appropriately in relation to child protection issues at school and in accordance with those policies and procedures.

[11:00]

2.11.1 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Thank you and I do appreciate this happened a long time before the Minister took office. However, my concern is, and the Minister is probably halfway there, can he confirm that given that people were allowed to resign rather than be sacked, that no such individuals would be employed within the Jersey education system again because it is very different to have retired or resigned on your C.V. (curriculum vitae) than being sacked. I am sure the Minister appreciates that.

The Deputy of St. John:

In the hypothetical case that criticism was handed out and reported in a case involving child protection in today's education system and if that criticism included a failure to act appropriately in relation to allegations of child abuse at a school, then I can confirm that those people would have their employment terminated.

2.11.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

Will the Minister confirm that he is supportive of the Committee of Inquiry into child abuse and does he agree that this inquiry would be an appropriate way to look at whether there was an inappropriate response in the past from schools such as those mentioned by the Deputy? Will he be asking the Chief Minister to make sure that this area is thoroughly investigated as part of any forthcoming Committee of Inquiry?

The Deputy Bailiff:

It is very much at the periphery but it fits in.

The Deputy of St. John:

I have already said I am not prepared to comment about past problems with child abuse.

2.11.3 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Unlike the Minister, I obviously had the benefit of being employed at Education at that very time. My question really arises out of this. This caused huge debate at the time and it was made quite clear that ordinary people like us would have been sacked if such an occurrence happened. Now I was employed by the States. Is there a difference in policy between that and a school which is not a State school like Victoria College? The final point on that question, does it mean that those people who were abused, because we would have to agree it was very badly handled, I think, would those people be open to try and get compensation in the present climate?

The Deputy of St. John:

I can only really answer as regards my responsibilities for schools and I can confirm that all schools would fall into the same category because I have a statutory requirement to educate all children that live in Jersey.

2.11.4 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Is the Minister then saying that this scenario could not happen again? It would be a dismissible offence? I think that is what he said.

The Deputy of St. John:

I cannot possibly say that it cannot happen again. That would be going beyond because, of course, things do happen but what I can say is that people would be dismissed.