

5 Oral Questions

The Bailiff:

So we then come to oral questions, and firstly a question which Deputy Trevor Pitman will ask of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture. Deputy Pitman.

5.1 Deputy T.M. Pitman of St. Helier of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture regarding an update of an incident involving the prank discharge of a starting pistol in a school gym:

Following the recent conviction of a teacher relating to an incident where a pupil suffered eye injuries resulting from an alleged prank discharge of a starting pistol in the school gym, will the Minister provide an update on the matter and advise whether the injured pupil's mother has been kept informed throughout?

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

Now that the legal proceedings have been completed by the police, an internal investigation is underway by the Education Department. The teacher is still suspended. This is now an operational matter that will be dealt with in accordance with H.R. (Human Resources) processes and procedures and my information is that the pupil's mother has been kept informed throughout.

5.1.1 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

A supplementary, Sir. I thank the Minister for that, and I would point out that I have always been a supporter of teachers. However, pupils, in my book, come first. I would just like to read from the message I received from the mother.

The Bailiff:

Are you asking a question, Deputy?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Yes, but I need to read this short comment out. It says: "Please help me. I am appalled to see on my son's timetable which he brought home today that he has got this teacher. My son is adamant that he will not attend, understandably so. How can this man be allowed to teach? I have contacted E.S.C. (Education Sport and Culture) but no one will return my emails. Please help me." Could the Minister explain how that fits in with what he has been told? I accept that he may have been not given the right information.

The Deputy of St. John:

First of all, dealing with the emails, as I understand it, the Director of Education has replied to both and all emails that he has received from the lady in question. It may be that at the point that the lady contacted the Deputy that that was not the case and I apologise if there are some short delays during the summer period where some people are on holiday, but my understanding is that certainly all who communicated have been responded to now. The first part of the question was to do with the fact that the teacher still appears on the curriculum and what the public need to understand is that these curricular are formulated some 4 to 6 months in advance, so that is the reason that the person's name, the teacher's name, is still on the curricular. I think I need to point out that the teacher is only suspended at this point and it would be wrong to pre-empt the results of an internal H.R. and procedural inquiry. I think that is really all I have to say on the matter. It is now very definitely an operational matter and obviously things may flow from the results of the internal inquiry.

The Bailiff:

Any further questions, Deputy Pitman?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Yes, please, Sir.

The Bailiff:

A final question.

5.1.2 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Yes, absolutely. Probably the key thing here, we have seen obviously terrible incidents in America like Columbine, Sandy Hook now, and I do not want to relate that too much, but when you read - and it may be incorrect - that there was no actual policy for storing a starting pistol in a school, what assurances can the Minister give to parents that safety is taken seriously, as I know it is generally in schools, but the fact that this incident could happen, what assurances can the Minister now give that this cannot happen again?

The Deputy of St. John:

Firstly, there is in fact a policy in place regarding these kinds of starting pistols and that policy is in place for all schools. They are expected to adhere to national requirements for safe storage and handling of starting pistols, i.e. the guns have to be kept locked away in a secure location and only a limited number of designated staff have access to it. Whether or not the school adhered to this policy will obviously be part of the investigation. However, in response to the Deputy's request as to what assurance I can give to the public, we are now in the process of withdrawing all such starting pistols from all schools in the Island and we have made the decision that it is not that important that schools have access to starting pistols for sporting purposes. There are other things that can be used to start races *et cetera* and we do not see the need for those starting pistols to be available in schools. So we are in the process of withdrawing them from all schools in the Island.