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4.1 DEPUTY L.M.C. DOUBLET OF THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION, SPORT AND CULTURE REGARDING ALTERNATIVE EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS AVAILABLE FOR CHILDREN WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES:

What alternative educational options are available for children suffering from mental health issues, such as social anxiety, which are severe enough to prevent them from attending mainstream school?

Deputy R.G. Bryans of St. Helier (The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture):

As you may understand, I have the greatest sympathy for these students and fortunately the numbers in Jersey are very small. Cases of emotionally based non-attendance - the term used by professionals - are usually complex. Young people with long-term entrenched patterns of non-attendance are extremely difficult to engage. At the moment, mainstream schools work with students and families to give emotional support, educational support. This includes providing schoolwork and pastoral support. In some cases an environment for learning is found offsite or within closed areas of the school buildings. Our recent review of inclusion identified the need to develop the provision in this area. As part of the redesign of our services for students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, what we call S.E.B.D. we have been piloting a new scheme for the students Deputy Doublet refers to. The aim is to introduce it from September 2016. It will include teaching those students in small groups in a suitable quiet environment outside mainstream school to meet their needs and provide high quality teaching and learning. The intention is to have a short-term turnaround facility that will help them return to school.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I am really pleased to hear that the Minister is addressing this and I am sure there will be many parents and families out there who will also be pleased. Could the Minister please ... sorry, Sir, I will have to ...

4.1.1 Deputy J.A. Hilton of St. Helier:

Can the Minister explain what happens in the instance when a young person refuses to leave their home? I think he spoke about somewhere outside of school where educational staff could engage with these young people but there will be instances where other people possibly refuse to leave their bedroom in the long term, so I was just wondering how the Education Department deals with that situation?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

I have personal experience of just such a situation. I attended an appeal for one individual young man who had that very situation. He found it very difficult to go to school and I was concerned enough to follow up and speak to the family and the young man, as it happens, and was able to examine it in first-hand detail what the experience of both the family and the young man had to go through. The first instance was of course that we get the school to look at the situation to see what they can do. It is inclusive. Where we can it is really efficient for both the school and the young individual to be working with his peers to release that situation. As it was in that particular case, it was not. It was more difficult than we thought, and that is when we brought in the special educational needs team. It is their intervention that then began to identify what was wrong and, to some extent, we have resolved that situation.

4.1.2 Connétable D.W. Mezbourian of St. Lawrence:

The first part of my question I think has been answered about how the pupils are identified, but I think it is important that they do not suffer additional stress because of having been identified as suffering from stress in the first place. How does the department ensure that these youngsters are not stigmatised further or stigmatised by their peers?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

I totally agree with the Connétable. In that particular case, going back to that instance, it was really important for me to make sure that that did not happen. I say what we did was work very closely with the school at that point in time because the child themselves realises that it becomes part of the problem and the solution becomes part of the problem if you start to take them out of school. What you have to understand is what the children are going through. That is just part of the situation or part of the problem, stigmatisation. What we have to do is really identify what is the core central issue with the child and begin to work on that. In that particular case, and in most of these instances, it is working closely with the school to bring them back into the fold, to bring them along with their peers and for everybody to understand what it is we are trying to achieve.

4.1.3 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Can the Minister inform us if this new facility will be something like the old St. James's school which was closed down because the States were convinced there was no longer any need for that facility, the ages of the children, and the estimated length of stay to reintroduce them back into mainstream school?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

I have no knowledge of the St. James's centre that you described so what I would say to the Deputy is that I do not have that information to hand but I will get it and come back to her if she so wishes.

4.1.4 Deputy M.R. Higgins of St. Helier:

Can I ask the Minister, because I have come across similar cases involving people who have left school, what the policy of the department is if they cannot engage with the individual? If the child will not engage with the service does the Education Department, like some other departments, just simply write the people off and leave them to their own devices?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

I understand where the Deputy is coming from and we have an expression within Education that has been heard many times: we leave no child behind. That really means that beyond our remit, to some extent ... I was at a senior management team meeting talking about the way the special educational needs team deals with the children and the educational psychologist at the time said that he had had colleagues come over from the U.K. (United Kingdom) and were astonished at the amount of work that we do beyond our remit. We talk to all of the agencies involved and where we can we work very closely with things like Social Security, the police, the Home Affairs, depending upon where that child's situation reside.

4.1.5 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier:

What support is available on site, as it were, to assist people going through these sort of problems in terms of either a counsellor a social worker? Do secondary schools still have a social worker attached to them as they used to?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

No, they do not. They do not have the social worker that was for each individual school but we do have, as I say, an educational psychologist and a team that is focused on working with these particular individuals. The numbers are extremely small but our team is more than adequate to deal with them.

4.1.6 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I apologise for losing my train of thought before. The question I wanted to ask the Minister was: could he possibly provide some detail on the numbers of children either to Members, if he is able, or to the Scrutiny Panel, and some further detail or perhaps even a briefing to the Scrutiny Panel on what this new scheme will look like please?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

Yes, I will.