

21.07.19

**11 Deputy R.J. Ward of the Minister for Children and Education regarding absence from primary and secondary schools: (OQ.171/2021)**

Will the Minister state, as a percentage, the overall absence rate in both primary and secondary schools during the final week of the summer term, additionally giving the highest and lowest absence rates identified in each sector without naming specific schools?

**Deputy S.M. Wickenden of St. Helier (The Minister for Children and Education):**

During the final week of term the overall absence rate for children in reception and above, in primary schools was 18.4 per cent and in secondary schools it was 27.7 percent. Therefore the overall attendance rate for primary schools was 81.6 per cent and secondary school it was 72.3 per cent. The highest absence rate across the whole week of primary school was at 45.7 per cent and the lowest was 6.1 per cent. At secondary school, the absence varied between a maximum of 44.3 per cent and a minimum of 8.8 per cent. It should be noted that these figures are based on data that we have currently received from the schools and that they may be revised by subsequent data quality updates. It should further be noted that the pupils in years 11 and 13 have been excluded as they have completed their exams and were largely on study leave. Additionally, one school has been excluded from the figures because of data recording issues, which are now being addressed.

**4.11.1 Deputy R.J. Ward:**

What plans does the Minister have to ensure that these high absence rates do not occur again in September? What are the reasons he thinks these absence rates were so high in that last week of term?

[16:30]

**Deputy S.M. Wickenden:**

We are working across the C.Y.P.E.S. (Children, Young People, Education and Skills) Department to get ready and make sure we are ready for September. We are keeping an eye on the rates of COVID within children across the summer term, across early years, and the summer schools that have been going on, and we will have a plan that we are working on in place based on the information as it happens over the summer holidays. Work is already happening to make sure that we can keep education levels at their highest level. I must stipulate, though these appear high in level, compared to December of the last week of school where the absence rates were 46 per cent and 81 per cent in secondary schools rather than the 18 per cent and 27 per cent in July we have seen much better educational outcomes and attendance during towards summer holidays.

**4.11.2 Senator T.A. Vallois:**

Can I ask the Minister whether he will consider providing States Members with an updated position and strategy for schools and early years sector at least 2 weeks before the autumn term begins for 2021?

**Deputy S.M. Wickenden:**

I see no problem with updating certainly Scrutiny and States Members on a briefing about what it will look like when we open schools as we get closer to the time.

**Senator T.A. Vallois:**

I thank the Minister for his answer.

**4.11.3 Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Would the Minister answer the second part of Deputy Ward's question when the Deputy asked about the reasons that led to the situation in the Minister's understanding?

**Deputy S.M. Wickenden:**

Sir, I believe Standing Order 10 says that a question shall not ask for an expression of opinion and that would be my ...

**The Greffier of the States (in the Chair):**

Sorry, Deputy, are you raising a point of order?

**Deputy S.M. Wickenden:**

Okay, Sir, can I raise a point of order? In Standing Order 10(6)(b): "A question shall not seek an expression of opinion." Is that correct?

**The Greffier of the States (in the Chair):**

That is what the Standing Order says, yes.

**Deputy S.M. Wickenden:**

Yes. Sir, in your opinion, does the question ask me what my opinion on the schools is in breach of that Standing Order?

**The Greffier of the States (in the Chair):**

I do not think so. The question is asking what the reasons are for the absence rate ... sorry, if I could just finish the point. I suppose the questioner assumes that the department would have made an assessment for the reasons. If you have not, obviously that is the answer.

**Deputy S.M. Wickenden:**

Okay, Sir. The absence was due to COVID. Parents who had decided that they did not want to put their children into the school environment before the summer term and normal absences, they were the 3 reasons why children did not attend school.

**4.11.4 Deputy I. Gardiner:**

What steps will the Minister take to ensure that these reasons will be mitigated in September?

**Deputy S.M. Wickenden:**

We have got a plan being headed forward. If somebody still has COVID in September, depending on what the rules that S.T.A.C. and C.A.M. (Competent Authorities Ministers) come up with, it depends on whether there will be an attendance. Normal absence through sickness and normal absence will still be normal absence and parents who decide that they do not want to bring their children to school will be marked probably down as unauthorised absence; it depends on the situation we are in in the Island for COVID.

**The Greffier of the States (in the Chair):**

Final supplementary, Deputy Ward.

**Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:**

Sir, I think I ...

**The Greffier of the States (in the Chair):**

Sorry, Deputy, you were too slow, I have already called Deputy Ward to give the final supplementary.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Sir, I am happy to give way because I know that the system is slow at the moment; that is why I have not got my camera on.

**The Greffier of the States (in the Chair):**

I will allow Deputy Doublet but after that we will move on because we do need to try and get through the Order Paper as best we can.

**4.11.5 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:**

I would like to ask the Minister, what mitigations he thinks might be needed in the wider community to give parents that certainty about feeling confident to send their children to school?

**The Greffier of the States (in the Chair):**

I am going to step in, I am afraid, because the question is about the overall absence rate and that supplementary is very broad about mitigations in general in the community, so I do not think it is in order. Deputy Ward.

**Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:**

Sir, it is to prevent absences in the schools, it is directly related to absences.

**The Greffier of the States (in the Chair):**

I think the question was about overall absence rates and that supplementary is a much broader question. Deputy Ward, final supplementary.

**4.11.6 Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Does the Minister have data on how many of the absences in the last week of term were recorded as unauthorised absence and what action will he be taking on those unauthorised absences?

**Deputy S.M. Wickenden:**

In primary school the unauthorised absence was 3.9 per cent and in secondary it was 3.8 per cent, which is about standard in the unauthorised absence across the schools. Any absence due to a parent not wishing to put their child into school due to fear of COVID was marked as authorised absence. The unauthorised absence was the standard absence from schools.