

2025.03.18

4.10 Deputy P.M. Bailhache of St. Clement of the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning regarding a cancelled booking at Highlands College by the founder of the Transgender Trend (OQ.58/2025):

Can the Minister confirm whether his department cancelled a booking at Highlands College and subsequently recommended that teachers and safeguarding leads should not attend a presentation on 5th March 2025 by the founder of Transgender Trend and, if so, will he explain why?

Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier Central (The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning):

Highlands College and indeed all schools are responsible for bookings and cancelled the booking. I support them in this and the control over their bookings and deciding on the bookings they make. Staff were informed that this was not training organised by C.Y.P.E.S. and therefore not a mandatory event.

4.10.1 Deputy P.M. Bailhache:

The founder of Transgender Trend is a highly respected expert on child dysphoria who was recently awarded a British Empire Medal for services to children. Did the Minister's officials take that expertise into account before firmly discouraging teachers from hearing what she had to say?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I reiterate what was said was it was not training organised by C.Y.P.E.S. It was very clear what it was about because it was well-advertised. Second, questions around transgender in the college are real and require a real sensitivity for young people. If a college or a school are unsure of the content of the talk or have any concerns where it may be welcomed by young people, I can understand why they might err on the side of caution, and I think that is fair and sensible. I would say for somebody who is a specialist and would understand safeguarding, I am quite surprised by the reaction to this because I would have thought that anyone talking about it would say: "Okay, the last thing we want to do is upset a group of people." They were offered alternative accommodation at St. Paul's. They have been offered accommodation in a Parish Hall and almost weekly double page spreads in our local newspaper so the message, whether you agree with it or not and whether parts of our community agree with it or not, is not being lost. This was just about trying to do the right thing at the right time. I am quite surprised that it has had this reaction, and I think it is not really necessary.

4.10.2 Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade:

Would the Minister agree that it is inappropriate that gender ideology discussions between students and teachers are kept from parents?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Is this to do with the question of a booking?

The Deputy Bailiff:

Yes, is this related to the question?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Yes, Sir.

The Deputy Bailiff:

In what way? [Laughter] I was expecting a slightly longer answer than that.

[11:00]

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

The booking for the presentation was in connection with gender ideology and I would have thought there was a linkage between the cancellation of the booking and this particular point, but I can put a different question if you think ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Yes, put a different question.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

In terms of the presentation rejected by the Minister's team, would he agree that attempts to derail a presentation by the nationally recognised academic by a minority group endorsed by the Minister's department ... this presentation that took place at St. Brelade's Parish Hall was once again entirely inappropriate and the bullying campaign by this group, including its C.E.O. (chief executive officer), does little to foster good relations between those with differing opinions?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I have no idea what this has got to do with the booking at Highlands and I do not recognise any of the things that were just said there. Gender ideology is not something that even exists in schools. That is a transference of a belief. Discussions happen in schools and all types of things about relationships. The rest of it in terms of a group and bullying, I have absolutely no idea what that is about. What this does show is why this topic needs to be kept away, and these battles need to be kept away from children because children in our schools just need to be helped to navigate through growing up full stop; all of our children. That is what teachers do and what I do not want is young people to be unwilling conscripts as foot soldiers in a wider cultural war that is going on in the U.K. and across the world but is not happening in Jersey and our schools. I really would ask people to think very carefully about what they are saying about our schools at this time, and I would make a plea: please let us stop this narrative.

4.10.3 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Would the Minister agree that the present guidelines issued by his department are in need of review?

The Deputy Bailiff:

Which guidelines do you have in mind?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

The Minister has issued guidelines to his teaching staff as to how they might deal with this sort of thing and indeed were probably the reason for the rejection of the booking to the department.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

First of all, I am not making a connection between any guidelines and a rejection of a booking. New guidelines were published yesterday. Policy is based upon our equalities law because gender identity is a protected characteristic. That makes sense unless people want to deny our Discrimination Law and the guidelines are exactly that. They are trying to help staff navigate through an extremely sensitive issue for all of our children, a very small proportion of our population and parents. This started off as a question about a booking and seems to be extrapolated into a battle over ideology and I am going to say again, I do not think there is any place for that ideological battle in our schools. We are talking about children, not adults.

4.10.4 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf of St. Saviour:

I do not wish to enter the discussion about gender dysmorphia or whatever but on the one side we have a campaign in the United Kingdom for freedom of speech in our learning institutes and this is a higher institute. You use the word "children", but they are effectively adults and mainly we call it the university campus. Is he in any way saying that he is the Minister overseeing anything which is less than the right to freedom of speech and debate issues which are real issues because we are seeing them in the media? Our young adults must be surely given the opportunity of debating these issues, as difficult as they are, at the earliest stage that they possibly can because otherwise we will insulate them from this other outside very unkind world, which is right to say about.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

That is a very complex question from the Deputy. Yes, I have no wish to stop the free speech and need to discuss and I have no wish to stop any young person having the confidence to talk about things that concern them. That is the crux of this issue: what would we want for our own children? I would want my children to feel that they can talk about anything with me, and they would feel supported. It is as simple as that. We are here to support children. All the stuff about ideologies needs to go out of the window. I just make a couple of points; I did not want to get drawn into this, but I will because we have moved away from bookings. In fact, I will not. I will keep on bookings so, no, there is no question of stopping discussion, but we have to be really sensitive in the way that we do it so that young people are supported as they navigate through life. It is not easy growing up nowadays. It is quite tough.

4.10.5 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:

I will leave the follow-up and bring it with a question but there is clearly an issue about freedom of speech which is not going to do justice in the questions today, but maybe he needs to go back and just really confirm that this is not basically a curtailment of the right to speak irrespective of a different issue but I will leave it to the supplementary. Very briefly, does he agree with freedom of speech at Highlands?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Absolutely, and there was no stopping this event happening. It just happened at a different venue and these venues have been elsewhere and, as I have said, local newspaper gives a huge amount of paper space to the organisation itself. I really cannot stand here saying ... this was just a way of dealing with sensitivities that might be in the college to look after people, and I want our schools and institutions just to look after everybody. It is really pretty simple and, again, I was very surprised by the reaction to this.

4.10.6 Deputy P.M. Bailhache:

I agree with the Minister that this is a sensitive issue and that is the purpose of these questions. Will the Minister accept that there is a distinction between a watchful, waiting policy with children showing transgender tendencies to see whether they grow out of their anxieties and the Minister's gender affirmation policy encouraging children to choose whether they want to be a boy or a girl and that there is an open discussion to be had on which approach is in the best interests of children?

Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

Can I raise a point of order?

The Deputy Bailiff:

Yes.

Deputy M. Tadier:

I think you might be thinking along these lines already but to what extent does the supplementary not fit in with the original question, which is simply about an email that was sent and a booking that was made. It is not a question about trans policy per se.

Deputy P.M. Bailhache:

My question is about freedom of speech and open discussion. It seems to me perfectly in order.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Do you want to ask your question again in the context of it being about freedom of speech and not wider issues in relation to matters you mentioned?

Deputy P.M. Bailhache:

Will the Minister accept that there is a distinction between a watchful, waiting policy with children showing transgender tendencies to see whether they grow out of their anxieties and the Minister's

gender affirmation policy encouraging children to choose whether they want to be a boy or a girl and that there is a mature discussion to be had on which approach is in the interests of children?

The Deputy Bailiff:

That is no different from your first question, Deputy, and I think it departs significantly from the content of the question that was approved, and I disallow it. Do you want to in the context of freedom of speech?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I think I should ... first of all ...

Deputy M. Tadier:

I do have to raise a point of order here, Sir, because I think we cannot just submit ourselves to best intentions. We do have Standing Orders and Standing Order 10, and part (1) says that a question shall relate to only one issue. A question has been submitted here which related to a very technical administration point and if Members wish to ask questions about any issue, including transgender issues, that is entirely valid, but they should do it by submitting a question about that issue, not about administrative questions that the Minister has fully answered. I think, with respect, your initial ruling should stand and for Ministers to say: "I will answer the question anyway even though it is out of order" leads us into very dangerous territory.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Deputy Tadier is correct, and if the question is contrary to Standing Orders, then the answer should not be given.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

The reason I was going to answer is I think there are some key points to correct something because this has been going on for a long time and I am happy to answer.

The Deputy Bailiff:

That will be the subject of another question on another day.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I was trying to avoid that, Sir.

The Deputy Bailiff:

There it is.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I was trying to cover this now because I think it will be positive. I know you were, but I have a really good answer.

The Deputy Bailiff:

You can communicate that in another form.