

STATES OF JERSEY

Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel Student Suspensions Review Sub Panel

FRIDAY, 23rd OCTOBER 2009

Panel:

Deputy T.M. Pitman of St. Helier (Chairman)
Deputy J.M. Maçon of St. Saviour
Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade

Witnesses:

Ms. P. Ward (Jersey Teachers Panel, N.A.S.U.W.T.)
Mr. J. Ponomarenko (N.A.S.U.W.T.)

In Attendance:

Ms. S. Power (Scrutiny Officer)
Ms. G. Bunting (Adviser)
Professor P. Munn (Professor of Curriculum Research at the University of Edinburgh, Adviser)

Deputy T.M. Pitman of St. Helier:

I apologise for the 10-minute late start, but we did have some issues with members of the public. I will just ask everyone to introduce themselves. Deputy Trevor Pitman; I am chairing this sub-panel. On my right ...

Deputy J.M. Maçon of St. Saviour:

Deputy Jeremy Maçon, representative of the Petite Longueville of the Parish of St. Saviour.

Ms. S. Power (Scrutiny Officer):

Sam Power, Scrutiny Officer.

Professor P. Munn (Professor of Curriculum Research at University of Edinburgh, Adviser):

I am Pamela Munn, the Professor of Curriculum Research at the University of Edinburgh and I am one of the advisers to the panel.

Ms. G. Bunting (Adviser):

Gillian Bunting, ex-teacher.

Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

Deputy Montfort Tadier of St. Brelade Number 2.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Before introducing yourselves, I would just point out that the 2 advisers can ask questions if it is on a technical matter, so I hope you are okay with that, and if you could just introduce yourselves for the record.

Ms. P. Ward (Chair of Jersey Teachers' Panel and Chair, N.A.S.U.W.T.):

Okay. I am Philippa Ward. I chair the Jersey Teachers' Panel which is the organisation that represents all 3 teaching unions in Jersey and the States. I also chair the N.A.S.U.W.T.

Mr. J. Ponomarenko (N.A.S.U.W.T.):

I am John Ponomarenko. I am on the executive of the N.A.S.U.W.T. (National Association of schoolmasters, union of Women Teachers) and I have got a specific brief looking at behaviour in schools.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Okay. Just one final point. As you may have seen, there are 2 gentlemen from the public who are part of the unaccredited media outside. They do like to try and film sessions but they are obliged to ask and they do have to write to Scrutiny to do that. As members of the public, you are quite within your rights to say: "No, I do not want to be filmed." I do not know how you feel about being filmed.

Mr. J. Ponomarenko:

No, I would rather not.

Ms. P. Ward:

I would rather not, no.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

You would rather not.

Ms. P. Ward:

Otherwise we become the topic of the next lesson you teach.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Okay. We will push on then. If I could start, and I am going to be handing around to my 2 colleagues regularly as I can. Obviously Constable Butcher has had to leave. If you could start by telling us your views of the current suspension policy.

Mr. J. Ponomarenko:

Sorry, just before we start, Pip has got to go but I can stay longer, so Pip will field the questions first and then if there is anything outstanding, I am going to answer, okay?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Okay. That is fine.

Ms. P. Ward:

Again, just to stress that I am here in a capacity of representing the views of teachers from all of the teaching unions, so they are not specifically my views. I am happy to comment on them as I share many of them, but they do represent how teachers sort of on the field are viewing suspensions. The views of the current suspension policy and the views of how teachers are feeling is that it is not appropriate for the increasing levels of challenging behaviour that we are facing in our schools. It is not always effective and it is not always appropriate for all situations because it does not necessarily deal with long-term issues and it does not provide adequate support for teachers and, in teachers' views, adequate support for schools in dealing with long-term behaviour issues. The tariff as it stands at the moment is too rigid, allowing you to perhaps not be able to give an exclusion when you feel it is warranted or indeed to be suggested that you should if you do not feel it is warranted, so it can be seen as a little too rigid. It does not seem to enforce or encourage parental responsibility or co-operation and there are 2

lines there. There is and really should be more emphasis placed in teachers' views on parental responsibility, but more importantly there needs to be something done to encourage the co-operation. You cannot deal with any of the issues that the policy tries to cover if the parent will not engage with you despite the best efforts of the teachers involved. In terms of the suspension policy and what it limits, it does not take into account, in teachers' views, the health and safety issues for teachers, the pressures put on teachers, and in the views of many teachers, we are about the only organisation left that has to take the levels of abuse and disruptive behaviour. If it was any other organisation, they would have the person removed and potentially prosecuted. As behaviour is becoming more challenging, though I stress it is always a minority of students - most students do not exhibit this kind of behaviour that warrants a suspension - but from those who do, we really have to deal with way above and beyond what teachers feel they should have to deal with in an educational setting.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Can I just follow? I think is always going to be an issue and it is really good to hear from the teachers' perspective because there are always presumably going to be students who need to be excluded, albeit for maybe a very short period just to remove the immediate risk as we have heard earlier, but I think what we are trying to find out is how to minimise the amount of students. Is there an alternative from your side?

Ms. P. Ward:

What we would perhaps like to see in an effective system, I think suspensions per se have to stand because they are a necessary tool in the teachers' toolbox and the schools' toolbox. The recommendations that we have previously put to the Education Department is around alternative provisions so that suspension can be minimised. What we need to start looking at is how we can reduce the risk of suspensions. In the U.K. (United Kingdom) they work on a programme: "How do you reduce the risk of permanent exclusion?" We do not have that here, and I know that is another debate. Perhaps there is a case for it because that final sanction triggers a whole sort of scheme of programmes that can be there to support a student. The policy in Jersey does not seem to flag up something to do that a school can access. The issues are always put back on to the school. You would have thought if a suspension was consistent, if a student was being suspended on numerous occasions, it should trigger the department coming in and coming up with an alternative provision rather than continually a student who causes intense disruption to other learners being put back in the school, back in the school, back in the school. What you have in Jersey is a big difference in what schools are able to provide. Much of that is down to finance, but schools are reliant on the goodwill of their teachers, and this is a phrase we have heard a lot recently, but teachers go the extra mile to try and work with individual students and they come up with incredibly creative programmes that might work but we cannot get funding for; that might work but we do not get support for. The idea that suspensions are supposed to trigger some kind of involvement from educational psychologists and the educational support team, in reality it does not happen. It normally involves a meeting where they talk about it and then nobody offers anything. We need to start looking at a holistic approach where students who are repeatedly suspended can access supervision perhaps even outside of the school where it is a holistic approach, there is counselling, there is behaviour development, there is all the work that is necessary that every school would love to do but has no funding for and, on the face of it for teachers, very little support from above. This is a teacher's view, but they are the people who every day have to try and deal with these situations. That is what we would like to see.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Obviously we have seen the survey results and it would seem to suggest that most teachers think that exclusion is not working generally. Would it be fair to say then that most teachers think that there should be some kind of external department - which is obviously going to cost money - where students could be focused and taught together, as it were?

Ms. P. Ward:

I think that would be vital. I think the provision that is on the Island at the moment for students who are unable to function in the mainstream setting is not enough. It does not meet all the requirements. It is certainly not therapeutic enough and teachers are, if anything, therapeutic people. That is why we came into the job. There is very, very little that we can do or we can see to put these children towards or to point them towards or to engage them in outside of the school setting. I think it is really, really important to stress, and it is probably going to make me unpopular with parents, but many of the behaviour issues that we deal with are not of our making. We have not made a child behave in a challenging manner, but we are doing a very parental job and that takes the role of parental responsibility in a school far too far. If we want to be able to ensure that as many children as possible can be included - because the inclusion can work in a lot of situations on an individual basis - then we need to start looking at what we can provide outside of mainstream education that children can access early on. As it stands at the moment, we have got a very basic provision for key stage 3 and then nothing for year 10 and a small provision for year 11. So, yes, early intervention is great, but what about when they get to the secondary sector? There simply is not a holistic therapeutic approach that would allow these students to then reintegrate back into mainstream.

Mr. J. Ponomarenko:

Could I just add to that, if possible?

Professor P. Munn:

Could I just clarify something because I think it is very important that we all understand what we are talking about here. There is a population of students who get suspended. There is another population who get suspended repeatedly, and it is this latter population that you are talking about. If I understand you correctly, we need more specialist and therapeutic interventions because not all young people who are suspended have severe behavioural difficulties, do they?

Ms. P. Ward:

No, and I think it is ...

Professor P. Munn:

So we need to just be clear who it is we are talking about here.

Ms. P. Ward:

I think it is fair to say that those who are suspended, as a rarity, it is incredibly effective because a lot of students, although they may not say they like school, like being part of school, and to have that privilege taken away, they do not like. I think that there is a whole other issue about what happens to students when they are suspended and where they should be in order to make perhaps the sanctions seem more real to some of them, but on the whole, students who are suspended respond. The core that does not needs more work and in terms of inclusion, if you were to ask teachers' views, they support the concept but would rather see it on a more individual basis so the inclusion can be tailored for individual students rather than a student being foisted into a school that perhaps might not be suitable for their needs either.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

I do not want to put words in your mouth, but you were here for much of what the Minister and the director said. Would I be right in a sense what you are saying is that there is a feeling that too often it has been left to the teachers and the schools how they adapt and follow this policy and that it has not really been guided or enforced from above?

Ms. P. Ward:

I do not know if I would agree with that in such a manner. I think the schools are given a policy and the schools work within the constraints of the policy as best they can. I think the issue is not that schools are left to their own devices within that policy. I think the policy is not appropriate and schools will do their best to work within it, though there are times there may be cases where they are unable to work within the confines of it and then they have to come up with alternative ways of dealing with the sanction that might not be appropriate, but the policy, I think, is the issue rather than the schools themselves being the issue.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

One more point and then I will hand over to my colleague. You probably heard I put it to the Minister whether there was any truth in something that I have heard that there is a situation, at least in one school, where students who have been suspended in the past, now they have returned to the school but they are not actually taught. They are just on the premises. Have you come across such instances?

Ms. P. Ward:

Certainly not an arrangement like that, and I would not comment on any individual issue anyway without having the details.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Sure.

Ms. P. Ward:

Again it comes down to individual students. Yes, we would bring students back in and we try and have restorative meetings and reintegration packages, but it is to what extent the student may wish to involve themselves in that process. If a student is being suspended in the first place, that can often be because they are disaffected and again the school has not got the provision to be able to get that student back engaged again because we have not got the resources.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

How does that work for you though as teachers when perhaps a student has been through their 15 days, they have had 3-hour suspensions, they are back at school but clearly do not want to be, do not want to learn, do not want to be taught? It sounds like you are in a very difficult situation.

Ms. P. Ward:

We are, and that is where an alternative provision or a pupil referral unit would be vital because then we would be able to find a way of engaging that student therapeutically, perhaps outside of the school setting. When a student has come back, it depends often on the reason why a student was suspended. I think more account needs to be taken of the health and safety implications for teachers, and although we are very people-centred, I do not think we can forget that if a student is suspended for 15 days, on occasion it has been because of potential assault against the teacher, it has been because of issues against the people who work in the school, and that is more than we really should be taking to then have that student possibly returned to that school.

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Just on that point, because as we have identified, there are those who have that one-off suspension for whatever reason, we have that small body of repeat suspensions. I am interested in how you view the parental role in this. Do you find that those who are repeatedly suspended perhaps have less parental support than perhaps those who just have the one-off or those who have none, or is there no correlation? What is your opinion on that?

Ms. P. Ward:

I think it would be unfair to categorise as being one particular type. I think we have got a lot of parents who care very deeply about what happens to their students. They may not have the tools themselves to be able to support effectively. In some cases, it is not a lack of desire to support. It is perhaps the lack of understanding on how to do that, although there are a hardcore group of situations where the parents do not wish to engage with the schools and they do not wish to come in and they do not wish to attend a meeting. I was reading a document only yesterday that said in the U.K. a parent is legally required to attend a reintegration meeting. Our parents are not legally required to attend a reintegration meeting and how can you support that student if you have not got parents engaged in some circumstances? I think more needs to be done about the role of parents.

Professor P. Munn:

Are there parent support classes or provision or ...?

Ms. P. Ward:

There are occasionally parenting courses that parents can access, but it is only really when there are outside agencies already involved through perhaps Social Services that that can be in any way enforced. Often the parents who go to these classes are the ones who are already desperate to engage with you and do as much as possible. It is the ones that are unwilling to engage. They may have their reasons. They may be dissatisfied with the school and perhaps there needs to be an intermediary organisation within the Education Department that can mediate and work between the 2 groups of people, the parents and the school, to support that child. This is what this is about. As it stands at the moment, if a parent refuses to come in, we have to take the student back not having resolved the issue and that is beneficial to nobody at all.

Deputy M. Tadier:

John, you wanted to come in before.

Mr. J. Ponomarenko:

The only point I was going to make is it is very, very difficult to represent all teachers in Jersey because all our circumstances are different. The circumstances a teacher at Grainville, for example, is dealing with is very, very different from what is at Girls' College or Victoria College. I think that one of the points about the survey is if you look at the survey very carefully, you will see, I think there were 3 responses from the fee-paying schools. So immediately you cut down the cohort of the number of people who are answering that by half. Then you take out the 20 or so that were primary schools and straight away you can see that the majority of answers to that survey all came from the secondary non-fee-paying sector, and that was a very, very good survey because we do not usually get that volume of return. But not only was it a high volume of return but it was very, very clearly concentrated on one area so that the survey sort of represented the views not necessarily of all teachers because circumstances are different, but they represented the views of that particular group of teachers. That was the point I was going to make.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Yes. Thanks for that. The question I am going to ask is one we did pose to the Education Minister, although it was answered by the director for the most part. It is to do with the support provided to students, the educational support, during periods of suspension, but perhaps you could also comment on the whole area of support for the families as well. We heard from the director that he did identify there were areas that need improvement and there were challenges, although he did not go into any specifics, so maybe you can clarify.

Ms. P. Ward:

Certainly from a teacher's perspective, teachers are more than happy to provide work for a student who

is not in the school building, and I think that is happening more and more. I think it has, in the past, been less evident, but I think, on the whole, that it is happening much more and that is a positive thing. Again, teachers do recognise that without a certain level of parental support, some students may see a suspension as a holiday and some parents may see it as a pointless sanction because students are going to sit at home and play on their computer. I think that is not an issue that the school can necessarily be responsible for. That is a parental issue and the parents have to set their parameters at home. We cannot do that. However, if you have got a group of students who perhaps are suspended more often than the norm, there needs to be provided, perhaps, an alternative provision where they can go and spend a day that is not in the mainstream school. So they are suspended from the privilege of being at school, which is what school is, and perhaps have a different location to go to where that can be dealt with and not only can they get work done; they can also perhaps have some reflection on the incident itself. Certainly we have looked after children if they are suspended from school, they have access to, I believe it is the Greenfields facility, alternative provisions facility, to go and take lessons. Would there be the potential of opening that up? That would be great. We are all very happy to look at more support to make a sanction workable, but the idea that there is not enough, I think that would often be dependent on the parent and the views of the student and how engaged they are with school.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Philippa, can I challenge you on the assertion about the need for parental intervention during suspensions and that parents need to do their own part, and I think that we all probably agree with that in an ideal world, but I think it is also understood that most of these students who maybe find themselves in a position of exclusion, it is because of the lack of parental support in the first place, and therefore to send them home and expect the parental support is probably not realistic. So what can we do to try and get around that problem?

Ms. P. Ward:

At the risk of blue-sky thinking, it comes back to what I was saying earlier. If there was a provision that was available outside of the school ... we have parents who say, you know: "I am really upset with what my child has done here. I support your sanction. I am at work all day though. What can I do?" Well, why not look at a system where there is a place for students to go to have that sanction? It is not going to be in a mainstream school though because that undermines what the purpose of the behaviour policy is.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Has that been put to Education itself?

Ms. P. Ward:

We have certainly in our ... you can see we have got a folder full of recommendations that we have made that Jeremy is going to refer to.

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Yes, you got those in a document we sent up from the recommendation ...

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

They have all those now, have they not?

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Sorry?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

They have all those recommendations?

Ms. P. Ward:

Yes, they have. We brought them to them first. But just the idea of there being a location that people can go to when they are suspended in order to still have a good standard of education, and an opportunity to go over the issues, I think is absolutely a way forward. So you have got really 2 strands of recommendations, you have got the idea of a referral stage, where there is provisions outside the mainstream school for longer term, bigger issues, and then perhaps with people that are suspended more frequently, they may be able to tap into a location to go to, so that the parents feel supported, and can help to, you know, make that sanction run effectively.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Okay. Is it worth pursuing that idea? I am just commenting on an earlier quote that you said. You said that schools cannot be responsible for the students entirely when they are suspended, because there needs to be ...

Ms. P. Ward:

Parents have to take some responsibility for what happens to the student when they are suspended.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Yes, I understand. I am not trying to use that to accuse you, but what I am trying to get out here is, what is the alternative? Who needs to take responsibility? Is that something that the department at large really needs to invest in?

Ms. P. Ward:

I think that is something the department needs to invest in. An investment in any alternative provision would be better than what we currently have, which is very little alternative provision and, yes, I would like to see the Education Department investing in stepping in a little bit quicker, triggering a different range of facilities or options or programmes that little bit quicker. Because as it is there may be a school where you have suspended a student 15 times in one term - and it has been relevant, and it has been necessary for the benefit of the school and/or the student - but then where do you go for the 16th day? Surely, before we even get to that stage, unless it is one continual suspension for a serious issue, somebody higher up the chain should have said: "Right, you can now tap into this", or: "Have you thought of tapping into this?" There needs to be a much stronger education support team who come up with ideas and places we can go, rather than sit around a room and listen to us and then not say: "Okay, have you tried this?" or: "Would you like to tap into this?" or: "Here is a referral form for this." We need something a little more proactive than what we are getting.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

I have got just one question, which I guess does lead on from that. We heard from the Minister when he was questioned about, how did suspensions which have clearly got to a point where the school or the pupil, that relationship, is no longer working. How does the process work where a student might be then ... Perhaps the parents have suggested: "Child X needs to go to this school" and are schools then almost forced to trade pupils who are having problems? Is that a reality or ...?

Ms. P. Ward:

Trading students? I have not had any indication from teachers that trading students is a reality. I think there are cases where parents are talked to about the idea of perhaps a fresh start somewhere else. And indeed managed moves can be very, very effective, but the difficulty of things like managed moves in Jersey is that the size of the Island and the ranges in cohorts that each school has, there are some schools that are absolutely fantastic with the therapeutic work that they do, well above and beyond what is in their description to do, you know, with a lot of goodwill, which makes a lot of schools very effective.

But if you are just managed moving people to those schools because you know those schools will do their best to handle these situations, then you are putting an awful lot of pressure on those schools and you are overloading those schools with some incredibly challenging behaviour, hoping that they are going to be able to pull it off. But the more you give them, the harder it is going to be for them to be effective.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

But neither of you are aware of a situation where a school - and we will not name any schools - has been told: "There is nowhere else for pupil X to go, you are going to take him"?

Ms. P. Ward:

Schools are aware of situations where some of the fee-paying schools have asked the person to leave, and the ones that perhaps have an extra space than somebody else has been encouraged to take a student. Yes, we are aware of that happening.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Is that "encouraged" in brackets, is it?

Ms. P. Ward:

I am not going to be led on that, but certainly they have been encouraged to take a student, and often that student comes with some challenging difficulties that, in all honesty, adds to the burdens that schools are already facing. I think there is pressure sometimes put on the school to take somebody, and that pressure can be put on because they need to find somewhere for that student to go. But also they know that school might be very good at what it does, but the more pressure you put on it, the less good they are going to become.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

So I guess you would be saying that the schools are not perhaps considered in that enough, because I would imagine that there could be quite big problems there.

Ms. P. Ward:

The social, economic, you know, situation across the Island is so different that, for example, some of the schools that are close to the town centre have a high number of challenging students because of the cultural and the financial mix that we have got. I think there is sometimes not enough consideration made when they are placing students in some of these schools, to the already very high level of diversity in those schools, and I think a lot more consideration needs to be made. In terms of an organised, managed move, I think schemes of organised, managed moves can be effective and they should perhaps look into setting up something like that, but it would have to be done with a view to very careful investigation into what school would be appropriate for somebody to be sent to. On an island this small, often students at school A are already going to be socially interacting with students at school B and you might just be moving the problem rather than helping.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Yes, just very quickly. I may have misinterpreted something I heard a moment ago, but to put it in crude terms, is it fair to say that there is a phenomenon that certain of the public schools are being used as a dumping ground by the fee-paying schools for troublesome students?

Ms. P. Ward:

I think certain schools are being used as a dumping ground for other students. I could not say they are all from fee-paying, I could not say they are exclusively from fee-paying. I think in the views of the people at the chalk face, sometimes they feel like a dumping ground, yes.

Deputy M. Tadier:

That must be deeply worrying.

Ms. P. Ward:

It is worrying and it is very difficult to manage for the teachers involved. This is a group of people that have spent a year training to do this job, will happily access certain training and want to do a good job, and are confronted by students being put into their schools that are going to make it that much harder. I think it does happen, yes. I would be lying if I did not say I thought it happened. But I could not comment on any individual.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Sure, we fully understand that.

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Just one question on something you raised, about reflection, because obviously the student is as much a part of this process as anyone else and has a responsibility. But the reflection side, from where you stand, what is the effort that goes into allowing the student to reflect on what has happened?

Ms. P. Ward:

Again, it is very much dependent on the issues, as I am sure you would understand. The reintegration meetings are normally carried out by people that know the student quite well, such as the head of year or head of house. But depending on the severity, it would move perhaps to senior management, and I think efforts are made by all people in schools to try and talk through the situation, and I think sometimes the teachers will spend a lot of time on that reflection process. But often with the bigger, more serious issues and more serious cases, the incident in itself, the individual incident that a suspension may be given for, is part of a much bigger picture and more therapeutic work needs to be done, I think, around the needs of that student, those individual students.

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

What guidance is provided to schools on the application of the suspension policy?

Ms. P. Ward:

I think the management teams in schools are given the tariff. I do not think there is enough information for teachers about that tariff, I do not think there is enough access for teachers about that tariff. There are obviously concerns to be raised about the tariff itself, and whether it is as good as it could be, or is as appropriate as it could be. Schools are given the guidelines from the Education Department and they have to work within those.

Professor P. Munn:

Has there been any whole school training about these guidelines?

Ms. P. Ward:

Not to my knowledge, and I have only been here 5 years, and I have not experienced any specific whole school training on the guidelines. Though I have certainly in my own school, experienced behaviour management as I say, as a whole school, and a whole range of information, ideas, lectures, that staff have been able to tap into. But I do think there is perhaps a lack of knowledge for teachers outside of senior management about what the policy is. It is their responsibility to look at policies, but the tariffs and things normally remain with the senior management team.

Mr. J. Ponomarenko:

I mean, I have to admit that the policy is there, but there is certainly pressure from the department put on head teachers to suspend as little as possible. So the tariff may be there and it may be a guideline, but I believe that they are told to only, you know, exclude at the absolute worst possible scenario.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

So it is almost a paper policy in many instances? Is that fair to say?

Mr. J. Ponomarenko:

I am not going to be led on that. **[Laughter]** But there is pressure put on to suspend as little as possible, I would say that.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Is that the feeling across the schools? Are you aware that ...?

Ms. P. Ward:

I think there is ...

Mr. J. Ponomarenko:

Within the secondary, non-fee-paying schools.

Ms. P. Ward:

I think teachers feel that they are being asked to come up with more internal suggestions and solutions and be creative, which most of us are happy to do, but I think some people feel it is almost a routine suggestion that we come up with something alternative to suspension. There are times where suspension is necessary, and by being more creative we are perhaps reducing the strength of the sanction.

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Just on that point, we had the Minister in earlier, and we were referred to all the other alternatives to a suspension that is there, and suspension is seen as the last option. We were not given which of these other alternative methods seemed to be effective, or which are perhaps not so effective. I mean, what do you think about the other alternatives, you know, what are they, do they work, in your opinion?

Ms. P. Ward:

Other alternatives: I do not think anyone would be able to find a list of other alternatives as in: "This is what you can do." I think it comes down very much to the schools being as creative as they can be. Again, that puts a lot of pressure on the staff involved in that. In terms of what works, I think a therapeutic approach works, but is that appropriate in a mainstream school? In a primary school it is perhaps possible because of the small numbers, but in a secondary school there is not that capacity to have somebody in a therapeutic manner with you all day. Alternative provisions: there is the Education Support Team, and each school has meetings that can link into those and use outside organisations. But as I said previously, talking about things is not always giving you an effective solution or suggestion. So I think, from a teacher's point of view, an ordinary teacher's point of view, there does not always seem to be areas you can tap into easily.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

I have been the Vice-chairman of the Vulnerable Children's Review. One of the recommendations we made was that all secondary schools would have social workers. That certainly, from what we were told, seemed to work well in one school. Have you got an opinion on that, whether that would be positive?

Ms. P. Ward:

I think that is very, very important. I think that it is vital because other agencies' involvement is how you tap into a lot of resources and a lot of schemes. I think teachers would like to see a lot more involvement from outside organisations and outside agencies. Perhaps a social worker in every school would be an effective way to tap into that. I think caution needs to be used in terms of the social worker suddenly becoming responsible for avoiding perhaps some sanctions, or responsible for being the creative one, which means they are not tapping into some of the outside stuff, and the bigger behaviour challenges are not being addressed on a wider scale across the Island. I think there is a social policy that needs looking at in the Island in terms of sanctions and behaviour. But I think access to outside organisations and communication between outside agencies is vital and I think it would help schools, yes.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

There is limits on sharing data, is that one of the problems?

Ms. P. Ward:

It can be, because you are not always aware ... there may be a student that is already in a system with another outside agency, and the school may not be aware, and there are many times when you accidentally cross each other's boundaries. For that child you need consistency and they need something tailored to them, and if you have got different people doing different things without telling anyone, that can be a problem. So I think it would help to have better information sharing going on between organisations to support children.

Professor P. Munn:

Can I ask just a quick question while we are talking about these kinds of supports. I noticed in your survey, there are some comments about teaching assistants. I wonder if you would you like to say anything about the kind of help that is available, one on one, for children who have particular difficulties and how effective you think that help is, you know, through teaching assistants or any other mechanism?

Ms. P. Ward:

Certainly. I am just going to be quick, because I am going to have to go in 10 minutes. There is 2 different strands. The support workers that come through perhaps the autistic provision, that are funded by the Education Department, can be very effective. They can work with students in a classroom, they can work with students outside a classroom. That seems to be a reasonably effective use of support staff. Schools are massively hampered by a lack of funding for key workers for behaviour issues, for example. I am not saying it should be the responsibility of a teaching assistant to manage behaviour. I think there needs to be something else put in place for that, but certainly funding is a massive problem. You may have a student that, if you could just have the resources to have somebody with them all the time, to support them in lessons, to support them one on one out of lessons in, again, a therapeutic way then perhaps you would find that that child can access school more easily. But there is no funding for that. Some schools are struggling to fund even for students who have been given up to X number of hours' support, because of the number of instances going on in their school and the range of children. There is not the money to cover every single issue that we have.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

If I could just follow on from that, before I hand over to Deputy Tadier. That lack of funding and thus professionals to deal with it; do you think that contributes perhaps to problems that are really medical or learning difficulty based not being picked up? They are just seen as the symptoms of the destructive behaviour, rather than what is really there, you know, young people who need help?

Ms. P. Ward:

I think if we had more money we would be able to pick up things quicker. We have to try and prioritise within the school because it is a mainstream school and with the inclusion policy as it stands, you have to try and cater for every need from gifted and talented to educational needs or Records of Needs. It is very difficult to cater for all, and I think the schools would like to cater for all but simply do not have the funding to do that. More funding would allow us to perhaps intervene earlier. The early interventions at primary need to be established much greater ... much more than in the secondary sector.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Okay, the next question we did already ask before to the Minister. It is, what steps are taken across the board to make sure that suspensions and extreme behaviour is treated consistently with all schools?

Ms. P. Ward:

I will pass this one over to John in a moment, I apologise. I think consistency is vital, provided the policy that you are applying is appropriate and does cover the range of needs you have got in schools. The schools in Jersey are not consistent in terms of their demographics, in terms of their budgets, in terms of the students and the parents' involvement, and the numbers of staff in there. If you have not got consistent schools, it is difficult for schools to be consistent in the policy. But it comes back to the policy not being effective. If the policy covered the range of challenging issues that schools deal with, then perhaps they could apply it consistently and demand that consistency. If the policy is not fit the purpose, then it is hard to apply it consistently. So I think you have to look at more than just: "Is every school doing exactly the same thing?" Otherwise, if we were doing exactly the same thing, there would be students that we would not be able to support as well as we do, and allow to be as successful. So I think the policy has to be looked at before consistency could be assured. But I would say that the Education Department need to ensure that schools are being consistent.

Mr. J. Ponomarenko:

Can I just come in. I think, and I cannot give sort of, you know, statistical evidence on this, but on the working party I was at there was one teacher that had worked both in a fee-paying school and a non-fee-paying school. One of the things that he particularly felt, that in the fee-paying school the student was more harshly dealt with for something that would not be quite as harshly dealt with in a ... He thought that was a pattern that he had noticed, if that answers your question. But again, it is just an observation from a teacher that has worked in both areas.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Yes, I think that does help. But presumably the fee-paying schools do not necessarily have to abide by quite the same rules as the other schools? I am just speculating there.

Ms. P. Ward:

I can just add on to that. I think for teachers, and this is the feelings of teachers, they are expected to pick up, as I said at the start, on issues that very few other organisations would have to be subjected to. I think they feel that from a social policy perspective, if young people are not challenged on their behaviour early on, it becomes a bigger problem later on. I hate to refer to cases, but as we have read before now in the papers, seen on the television, if young people are not appropriately dealt with outside of school for big issues, why would they then expect to come into school and follow a rule about not swearing? So I think there is a much bigger Island-wide issue that has to be considered as well as the school issue, in terms of what consistency and what consistent message young people are getting. They have to be responsible for their behaviour and they have to learn, as we all do, what is appropriate behaviour in a society. If they are finding that they are not dealt with appropriately outside of school, then it is difficult to deal with them appropriately inside of school.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

You are just a drop in the ocean really, are you not?

Deputy M. Tadier:

So just to summarise the answer here, it seems from my perspective that there is always going to be a tension and a contradiction between consistently applying the policy where we have heard earlier, and I think from yourselves, that you need to take every incident on its own merits. You need to decide on that ... So perhaps it is the case that the policy itself needs to be sufficiently flexible so it can be applied consistently.

Ms. P. Ward:

I think there does need to be flexibility in terms of things like the tariffs and the options available. There needs to be somewhere in that policy a list of available options, available alternative things that can be tried, as part of that policy, to run concurrently with that policy. So that maybe a student does deserve a suspension but is there something else we can tap into that would support that student, as well as supporting the other students in the school and the staff in the schools on the whole?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

One other issue, on the extreme behaviour. Do you have any personal experience of situations where perhaps a teacher has been attacked by a student, a student has been suspended, then that student has been literally put back into the same school?

Ms. P. Ward:

I am aware of some instances, yes.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Are teachers, or that particular teacher who might have suffered that, would they be considered in that process, or really you have no choice because that is your job?

Ms. P. Ward:

My experience is that they have had a brief chat about it but, no, has their health and safety or their emotional well-being been considered? I do not think enough, no. I think there are teachers that are subjected to intense verbal abuse and on occasion, as we have seen before, physical abuse and physical assault, and that student has come back to the school. That would not be acceptable in other organisations, why should it be acceptable in schools?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Would you say that the actual head teachers of those schools then are really being forced to work within whatever is put on them from above? Because that sounds like a situation that really should be dealt with at the top.

Ms. P. Ward:

I think so. I think it should be dealt with higher up, and that is perhaps where something like managed moves or, again, referral units or alternative provisions outside the main stream. Because you also have to take into consideration that the student attending another school may also provide an issue there and we have to look at what the actual incident was. Again, it comes down to individual incidents. Is a student perhaps aggressive by themselves or was it an incident with that teacher? But either way, I think, much more consideration needs to be made over an appropriate placement for that student.

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

What work is undertaken with students following periods of suspension to reintegrate them into the school environment and try to prevent similar situations from arising again?

Ms. P. Ward:

Are you talking about people who are more regularly suspended or in general?

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

In general. Let us start with that.

Ms. P. Ward:

In general, I would say that the reintegration meetings can be very, very effective. There is a lot of sort of pastoral support in the schools for dealing with the student and trying to talk to them about the issue that has happened. That is very effective with students that are not suspended regularly, because the suspension is then a very effective sanction for them. For longer term, bigger issues the level of pastoral support and programmes in place, I believe is very, very high. I think the provisions made for target-setting, appropriate behaviour support, access to various different programmes and provisions within that school, I think, is high. But again, it comes down to looking at next steps and what is outside that school, as a school can only do so much. A mainstream school has to be fit for everybody in that school, and the resources and time that goes into dealing with perhaps the more extreme end of behaviour is taking away from dealing with other types of school issues, such as students that need a bit of academic support. A lot of time is spent in schools on dealing with behaviour management and many teachers feel that it is to the detriment of every other child in that school, that perhaps does not have those issues themselves.

Professor P. Munn:

You do not see a connection between academic difficulties and behaviour?

Ms. P. Ward:

Do students see those connections?

Professor P. Munn:

No, do you?

Ms. P. Ward:

Do I? Yes, of course I do. I think it is worth mentioning, though, the reason I mentioned: "Is it students?" I think some students do perceive that naughty children get more stuff.

Professor P. Munn:

Yes, goodies for baddies.

Ms. P. Ward:

That is very unfair for what is the vast majority of students, and I think that is why it is so important that schools do not have sole responsibility for putting in programmes of support, because they have to support the other students into making the most out of their education. If all the resources are going into supporting challenging behaviour, then those resources cannot be used for the other students.

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

How does this apply to parents, just looking at the other ...?

Ms. P. Ward:

I think a lot of teachers rely on the pastoral team to have a lot of communication with parents, a lot of discussions with parents. Unfortunately, with challenging behaviour, I am sure the parents do sometimes feel that only the negatives are picked up upon, and that is very sad. It would be great if we

had the resources to pump into promoting the positives. I think that is just what every teacher would like in an ideal world. I think efforts are made to engage the parents, parents are invited into meetings. Again, it comes down to how much that parent can, is able to, or wishes to get involved with the school.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Why do you think that certain schools on the Island seem to have more suspensions than others?

Ms. P. Ward:

I think you would need to look carefully at what those suspensions were for, and then look at the school. I think some schools have a higher range of challenging issues to deal with than others. Certainly some of the non-fee-paying schools deal with issues that are more challenging than some of the fee-paying schools, and that needs to be taken into consideration. I think the social make up of the catchment area needs to be taken into consideration as some schools find that, aside from any behaviour issues, they also have to deal with issues of poverty, they have to do with issues of language, cultural backgrounds, cultural differences, and I think that can have a massive impact on the numbers. Although without having all the schools' numbers in front of me, I could not look direct you to look at that anywhere.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Is there an element that bad behaviour is contagious or that if a school starts to have a few suspensions then that makes it more likely to have even more?

Mr. J. Ponomarenko:

I did a bit of research on that, and we could find very, very little on the internet in terms of research into this area. But it was one of the key questions of our survey, and you will find ... I think it was question 8 on the survey asked that particular question, and every single teacher answered that having students that had a negative attitude towards school quickly influenced others, and others were dragged into the fold as well. So whereas a teacher might expect to have 2 children that might be misbehaving, you would get the copy cats, with you know, 2, 3 or 4 getting involved with the misbehaviour as well. That was absolutely unanimous by every single teacher in that survey.

Deputy M. Tadier:

If I could just carry on with this idea. Is there a possibility that certain schools, because they have already got a few children with behavioural problems, that they can attract others. So if they were trading - and we heard that it is questionable whether trading occurs in Jersey in that sense - that they would simply send these students to that school because they are known to be able to deal with them? That in itself ... they can almost be perversely, a victim of their own success, if you like?

Mr. J. Ponomarenko:

That is part of it but I think mainly, especially with sort of, new students coming to the Island, it is the schools who have empty places, which tend to be those schools anyway.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Sure, sure. I think that is it for that one.

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

What support and training are available to teachers in promoting positive behaviour and managing negative behaviour?

Mr. J. Ponomarenko:

There are courses, definitely courses, put on by the Education Department. You cannot fault them for

that. There is critical skills training, there is SOS training. The training is there but I would say that it works with a lot of students, but there are certainly always those that you cannot influence, no matter what you do. So generally, I would say, quite effective, but certainly some that are outside the scope of what it can do for you.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

With the differing levels in some schools, and obviously we cannot identify schools, how much impact do you think whether parents are fully engaged in what is going with their children, how much does that become involved? Obviously we heard about different ... social deprivation, et cetera, but how much do you think whether parents are fully engaged in what their children are doing with their lives, how much does that impact on these figures, do you think?

Mr. J. Ponomarenko:

I think it makes a massive difference and there are reward schemes for schools for getting parental involvement. I think that was also very much a very good idea. But yes, you have to get the community involved; if you get the community support, you have a much better chance of dealing with the problem than if you are alienating some of the parents.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Is that left to the schools to develop individually, those sort of approaches?

Mr. J. Ponomarenko:

Yes it is, really.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Is it fair to say it is a hit and miss thing really? I suppose it depends on what resources the schools have?

Mr. J. Ponomarenko:

I think there are certain schools that do not need to promote a positive image because historically they have the positive image. So it falls on the other schools then to try and catch up by promoting themselves in a more positive light than maybe they feel that the society sees them at that moment in time. But money and effort does go into doing that, you know, to try and engage the local community, definitely. I do certainly welcome it, it is a good idea.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Can I just come in there. It is not directly related to that question. From your general experience, I think we would all agree that prevention is better than cure, and if Jersey - and I am sure elsewhere - resources are limited, could there be a better use of resources between the prevention side versus dealing with suspensions once they have occurred and, if so, how can we invest in that?

Mr. J. Ponomarenko:

That is a very, very difficult question to answer. In fact, I do not think I am qualified to answer it.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Maybe I should put it in more simple terms, then. What could we do on the prevention side?

Mr. J. Ponomarenko:

What could we do on the prevention side? I mean, schools do have their own sort of internal units for dealing with problems, and I mean, in the one that I particularly work in, the minute that a student goes to the unit because they have misbehaved in class - we are not talking about suspension, he is just out for the one lesson - parents are immediately informed. So you try to do sort of little short things to do. You

know, little short punishments, short sanctions, nothing major. The fact that the parents are involved helps. I think what we have found is that there were quite a lot of students originally went to it, but after they had been once it stopped. But it is the repeat offenders that you cannot get to, and it is the repeat offenders that the internal mechanisms just cannot deal with.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

In your experience, do you think parents of suspended pupils - and obviously you can only comment on those you have had direct experience of - feel that the system works?

Mr. J. Ponomarenko:

That is very varied. I mean, I would say that in most schools the majority of parents are very happy with what they have got. In most schools that is true. But I just think, it is the ones where they are regularly excluded, they are brought in from work for interviews, they are the ones that are probably dissatisfied with it most. But in general I would say most parents are happy with the school that the child goes to.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

They are quite willing to co-operate?

Mr. J. Ponomarenko:

I would say so, yes.

Deputy M. Tadier:

I think what came out when Pip was talking was that suspensions are effective for teachers, in the sense that they deal with a very real problem in a very effective way. They remove the problem pupil from the floor or the classroom. But that there will be problems down the line, both politically for us and for the department, if there are too many. On one level simply because it is embarrassing, but it also has implications further down the line for other departments. So if someone is suspended and that is not effective, they will go on perhaps to offend and then there are all sorts of policing issues, possible health issues and I certainly know there are examples in Jersey of that. So is there a sense in which it is a double-edged sword, so what works for teachers does not work for the society necessarily?

Mr. J. Ponomarenko:

I think that one of the things about teachers is that they are trained and they have gone through an extensive period of training, working with young people, and part of the training does give them the skills to mediate, to negotiate, to try and get the best out of them. I think that sometimes, outside the school environment, you know, parents do not have that, so you have always got this problem that children have been dealt with in 2 completely different ways when they do something wrong.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Obviously we are interviewing a number of parents in private sessions, so it will be interesting to see how their views pan out with the Minister's and, you know, if the whole outlook is all knitting together. We have heard the Minister's opinions, now we are hearing yours - which is great, the sort of workers at the coalface - do you think we are being optimistic to think that all 3 will tie up?

Mr. J. Ponomarenko:

I doubt that very much. I would doubt that very much.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

You have only got 5 minutes, I am afraid, to finish, so perhaps before we come up with any final questions, could I ask you if you have anything you want to put across to me?

Mr. J. Ponomarenko:

Yes, I was wondering if it would be possible for me just to open the debate, and just raise some issues with you that perhaps have not been considered at the moment.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Certainly.

Mr. J. Ponomarenko:

I mean, one of the things that really concerns us as a union is that the Island at the moment is absolutely committed to this principle of inclusion. It sounds absolutely fine because you are talking about what sounds like a fair society and that people are not marginalised and this kind of thing. It sounds idyllic. But the more we think about it, the more we believe that it is seriously flawed. I do not want to be flippant here, but if I could give an example, supposing I bought yourself, Mr. Pitman, and you Mr. Maçon, a comb for Christmas you would be treated in exactly the same way, but are you being treated fairly? I would suggest not. One shoe fits all just does not work, and that is exactly what inclusion is, it is one shoe fits all. So what you are having is you have your students coming to schools that really are not right for them. They might have had issues at home, they might have not been fed, they might have been assaulted. You do not know what the background of a particular student is, yet he comes into school and we are trying to teach him algebra. I want to say that what we are offering these students is wholly inappropriate for his needs really. Therefore we question the whole principle of inclusion, which we have kind of touched upon at the moment, because what we would like to see is where students are not fit to go to school, we want to see more units built. You know, alternative provisions outside the schools themselves, and we feel that that would help enormously. But we just feel we are hitting a sort of a brick wall because, like I say, the Education Department at the moment is absolutely committed to that kind of principle of inclusion, which we think might be seriously flawed. I think that we are also concerned about what we see as a little bit of secrecy really. Secrecy possibly from the general public as to what the conditions are like in certain schools; but also secrecy within the schools from the teachers, because quite a lot of incidents and things that happen are not relayed to us so we never know what is going on. I have been given several reasons for this. I mean one reason that I was given was because if staff found out about the number of exclusions and what they were for they would be depressed because it was very damning. We feel we have a right to know this. We feel especially if there has been a serious incident we would like to know that the next student coming into our class, whether they have been violent or not. We feel we have a right to know that. We also feel that we need to know we have been supported properly so if, for example, a student has gone through the system and they have got to the end of the system and the next thing should have been exclusion and it has not happened, then, you know, we feel that the exclusions and the reasons for them should be published by schools so that staff can know what is going on. It does not happen; it just does not happen. So we are in the dark as to how big the problems are within our own schools, and that was why that recommendation came on our original submission. I also think, and I think that this must not be lost sight of, is a sort of human element of this. I am a case worker, which means that as a union representative I work with teachers that are struggling or having difficulties, you know, either in their personal lives or in the classroom or whatever. Over the last 3 years I have dealt with 3 teachers that have been so traumatised by what they have had to go through they have just never gone back to work. It is not only the human factor but it is also wasteful of resources, because if all these people are off sick somebody somewhere is paying for them. I just feel that this is an issue that should not be lost sight of. You know I would like the department to publish figures and let us know the figures, for what they are paying in terms of teachers' salaries when they are not at work because they are at home, you know, ill or off with stress, long-term and short-term. So I think that is another issue that really needs to be considered. I think that as long as you have got this inclusion policy, you are always going to have a tension. You are always going to have a tension within schools whereby the teachers are saying: "We have got these problems, please exclude more" and you are always going to have the Education Department saying: "The suspension

numbers are getting high, we are going to exclude less.” The whole problem with inclusion is you have this group of people that are definitely going to be in the wrong place. They are either going to be out of school when they should not be, or they are going to be in school causing mayhem. So this is why we desperately feel that the whole inclusion process should be reviewed and that for certain groups of students there should be alternative provisions outside the schools for them really.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Can I just ask you what response you have had from the education authorities to those issues?

Mr. J. Ponomarenko:

Right, we gave the education authority the list of our recommendations, what we wanted, and what they said to us was that: “We are just about to start inclusion review, that might address some of the issues that you are concerned about, and we would like you to go on it.” In fact, I have been on that and then they gave us the promise that if our issues were not resolved we could come back to them afterwards.

So that inclusion review is now coming to an end. I have to admit I am very disappointed with it, it seems to have been very biased towards more inclusion rather than less. So what will happen when the results of that review comes out, I suspect is we will be going back and saying: “Okay, can we have another look at these again?”

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

I am sorry, but I am going to have to end it there. Would you be willing for us to talk to you again if necessary?

Mr. J. Ponomarenko:

Yes.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Thank you. It has been very informative, to say the least.

Mr. J. Ponomarenko:

Thank you. You are welcome.