

3.14 Deputy T.M. Pitman of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture regarding support for gay and lesbian young people:

Does the Minister believe enough has been done within both the formal and informal education systems to support vulnerable gay and lesbian young people? If not, what new initiatives, if any, is the Minister planning to improve the situation?

Deputy J.G. Reed of St. Ouen (The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture):

I believe the right education structures are in place to support all young people whatever their sexual orientation, although I am aware that there is always room for improvement. In secondary schools, sex and relationship education is firmly rooted in the personal, social and health education curriculum. This is designed to support pupils through their physical, emotional and moral development and help them to deal with difficult moral and social questions. In that context teachers are expected to be able to deal honestly and sensitively with sexual orientation, answer questions and offer support without directly promoting any particular orientation. The pastoral system in schools is structured to provide initial support to individual pupils who may disclose that they are of a particular sexual orientation and to offer guidance as to where they might access additional support. Outside of school, youth workers provide help and support in many different environments from youth clubs to street and outreach work, and through the youth inquiry service offer confidential counselling. They have a unique role in that they are able to develop an open relationship with young people within which very effective sex and relationship education and sexual health promotion can take place.

The Bailiff:

Thank you, Minister, your time has expired, I am afraid. Senator Syvret.

3.14.1 Senator S. Syvret:

The policies in practice in the department, as just described, do indeed sound, on the face of it, to be good and wise policies. I was just curious as to how the Minister reconciled those policies of his department with the rabid extraordinary homophobic speech he delivered in this Assembly when we were debating the age of consent issue?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I would like to disassociate myself with any idea that I have made any particular homophobic comments that would upset or offend various groups in our society. I fully expect and acknowledge that as Minister for the Education, Sport and Culture Department I have a duty of care for all young people and I aim to ensure that as a department we fulfil all of those obligations.

3.14.2 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Like most other Members in the House I am sure, I very much welcome the news that the Minister will be standing up firm and erect on behalf of gay sexuality. I would just like him to clarify, does he plan any new initiatives and does he think they can be funded from within his present budget? Thank you.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

There is one particular new initiative which has come out of the view of the youth service which I believe will help to improve and provide support for young people in general. This is what we are looking to further develop in the year ahead.

3.14.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Minister feel that enough is being done in particular to counter-prejudice young gay and lesbians in schools or in society?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

It is early days obviously of my heading up this department but I believe, yes, we are.

3.14.4 Deputy J.M. Maçon of St. Saviour:

As I am aware, there is a great education programme as regards to sex in the P.S.H.E. (Personal, Social and Health Education) curriculum yet the Minister had described that there is relationship education. When was this brought in because I have not experienced it? Thank you. **[Laughter]**

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I can only inform Deputy Maçon that this does take place and I am just sorry he did not experience it for himself. Thank you.