

### **3.8 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour of the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning regarding bullying behaviour in young people (OQ.80/2025):**

Will the Minister advise what actions, if any, he intends to take in schools following the recently published statistics in the Jersey Children and Young People's Survey Report 2024 relating to the engagement by young people in bullying behaviour, including but not limited to using mobile phones, tablets, online gaming and social media; and, if none, why not?

#### **Deputy R.J. Ward: (The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning):**

I thank the Deputy for her question. I am mindful that the report was published last week. The findings of this survey provide valuable data and as such we need time to properly consider and review the report. Statistics Jersey will present key findings from the survey at the next meeting of the Children's Outcome Executive Committee on 16th April, and this will enable wider Ministerial review because it is an issue that extends beyond education. I would like to make some points regards use of mobile phones because we have looked - I have looked - very carefully at what is happening there. If I may, I will try not to go over the minute but there is some information. I will do my best.

#### **The Bailiff:**

Well, the normal is one minute, 30 seconds is the test, so you have a ...

#### **Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Put the stopwatch on and I will make it, I promise. In primary schools, no primary schools allow phones in schools. If children are given a phone by their parents, usually in year 6 because they are walking to school and back, it is given in at the office or to the school teacher; so we do not see mobile phones in our primary schools. In secondary schools, Haute Vallée, La Passerelle Secondary, Le Rocquier School and Les Quennevais have a rule where the phone must be in the bag or locker all day and if it is seen it is confiscated. On the first confiscation it goes to the office and returned, second confiscation, parents have to come in to get the phone. Grainville only allow use at scheduled break times in a permitted area. I believe that is also under review. Victoria College, year 11 cannot use at any time; it must be switched off and out of sight. Years 11 and 12, who are 16, 17 and 18 year-olds, are allowed to use their phones in the sixth form area for educational purposes. Jersey College for Girls are allowed phones at scheduled break times and lunch times but for year 7, parents must request permission by completing a form to ensure that all apps are age-appropriate and users must adhere to the acceptable use policies across schools.

#### **The Bailiff:**

I am going to have to ask you to finish your answer.

#### **Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Okay. I just wanted to give an overview of what is happening in schools and how we are extending that in terms of mobile phones.

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

I thank the Minister for his answer and it is clear that there is a lot going on in schools. One of the statistics was that 6 in 10 of the year 6 children believe the school took bullying seriously but that decreased as the children went into secondary school. Would the Minister commit to, once he has done the reflection on this data that he mentions is coming soon, considering what additional resources or programmes or training might be needed to go into schools similar to what the U.K. Government invested a few years ago in anti-bullying campaigns and whether we need this in Jersey given the voices of young people in this survey have shown that it is a significant problem to them?

#### **Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Yes, I think ongoing training in schools is vital in terms of bullying and it is an issue that is taken very seriously, and it is an issue that is very serious. There is a slight decrease but I am not even going to mention that because we do not want to be complacent in any way, so I do agree with the Deputy. I think there was also some work to be done around social media, and I know the question mentioned social media. I think we need a bespoke policy for Jersey in terms of social media. I would point people to Common Sense Media which is a really good resource online. It suggests to parents some of the recommended ages for, for example, Snapchat should be above 16 years of age, Instagram should be above 15 and TikTok above 15. This is good, sound advice for people who are looking at internet use, so I just mention that in regard to bullying, but I do agree, yes, schools will work really hard to do that. Again, I extend an invitation to any States Member who wants to come into school with me and talk to teachers and children about their experience in school, please, please contact me because I think that is the best way for us all to understand modern schools and the challenges they face.

### **3.8.2 Deputy J. Renouf:**

I thank the Minister for those answers. I have been contacted by parents who are exceptionally concerned about the use of phones in schools and in particular the way that they essentially lose control of their children because other students can show them mobile phones even if they have been banned. Will the Minister, therefore, commit to taking very seriously the issue of access in schools to mobile phones where it is often the case that the rules - although the rules he read out exist - are ignored?

### **Deputy R.J. Ward:**

I have been through a list of what is happening in schools and I would again extend the invitation to the Deputy to come into schools and talk to students and staff. We have a lot of rules in society that may not be obeyed and then they have to be dealt with. Schools are on the front line of mobile phone use. To some extent, they have been asked to put the genie back into the bottle, and they have taken a very measured but controlled approach to doing this with the rules that they have. I cannot see a single school on our Island that allows unfettered access to mobile phones during the day. I would suggest that the advice is that parents know the rules of the school. Please support the school in those rules, and that is the way forward. Other than that, I do not want to see children scanned and searched every day on the way into school. I do not think that is a feasible approach. I think the increasing awareness will help us to control this more and more as we go forward.

### **3.8.3 Deputy J. Renouf:**

I have children at 2 schools and both of them report to me that those rules on mobile phone use are completely ignored. I do think that it would help if there was leadership from the centre and that is why I repeat the question really, which is: will the Minister commit to showing leadership in this area and taking very seriously the concerns that are raised by parents?

### **Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Absolutely. In terms of leadership from the front, we absolutely support schools in the policies that they have to put forward every day. I think I am being asked to ... I know the rules are there in every single school, phones, if they are confiscated, they are taken in. If the Deputy is suggesting that it is illegal for a child to bring a phone to school, fine, that has to be policed. We will be here in 6 months' time with people saying: "That is not being adhered to." I get that but the schools are working incredibly hard, with support from myself essentially, and I absolutely support the policies that they are putting forward to not have mobile phones in the classrooms and to stop their uses around school. I do not know what more schools can do apart from ... essentially, I can say: "Yes, I would advise parents not to send their child to school with a mobile phone" that would be what I would say to parents, but if they want to send their child because they are walking home and they feel that they are not safe walking home, there is a difficulty there. But schools at the moment, as I have listed, do not allow mobile phones to be used and they are confiscated when seen. If there is an issue with any particular school, I would strongly suggest the head is contacted at that school, go into the school and talk about it, and they can re-establish their rules, if that is what is happening.

**The Bailiff:**

Again, Minister, I must ask you to stop your answer. Thank you very much. I have seen the lights of Deputy Jeune, Ozouf, Tadier and Wilson and then a final supplementary Deputy Doublet. I will not take any more questions.

**3.8.4 Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

I strongly suggest to all States Members to watch Netflix “Adolescence” that highlights the devastating effect of cyberbullying on young people’s mental health.

**The Bailiff:**

This really does have to be a question, Deputy, we are running out of time. If you could just ask a question.

**Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

What support services are there to help teachers spot the effects of online harassment in schools if they spend most of their time with children in the daytime, and how can they support children with online harassment and cyberbullying?

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Training is undergone repeatedly with staff in terms of safeguarding and part of safeguarding is to identify online harassment. I will say that I have watched that series, just to mention it, because it is about mobile phones.

[10:45]

I will say that the school that is in the second episode, there is not a school on the Island that would give unfettered access to mobile phones as that school is portrayed. If that is happening in schools, then there is an issue because they are not following their own rules. That is something that has to be acted on and I would support that but, yes, there is online safeguarding training. Schools also identify more than just online harassment, they identify all sorts of issues with regards to safeguarding and the well-being of children every single day.

**3.8.5 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:**

The Minister says that there are bans, and if I did not hear everything in the answer, there are effectively policies for all schools. Is he unaware of one school that is an outlier in their mobile phone use?

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Could the Deputy name ...

**The Bailiff:**

I am afraid, even I did not understand that question, Deputy.

**Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:**

Sorry, the Minister said he is aware that there are bans in all schools. I am particularly asking about the Jersey College for Girls, which I have received a number of representations from parents, which is the outlier. If he is unaware of it, does he not think he needs to be aware of it because there is a very significant amount of - I should declare an interest, I have a goddaughter there but it is not my own child - but I hear from a lot of schools. I know the issue is very difficult for the Minister; however, is he unaware of the outlying situation and the real concern of parents of Jersey College for Girls about their children’s and their girls’ safety?

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Jersey College for Girls do allow at break times and lunch times. Year 7 now have to request permission by completing a form to ensure all apps are age-appropriate and the users must adhere to the acceptable use policy, so they do have a policy. If there is concern with parents, then I would invite the Deputy to come in and speak to the head with me, or I will go in and speak to them, that would be a very good thing to do. In terms of an outlier, yes, it is compared to the 11 to 16 schools and much of the others. There is a particular approach from the headteacher there and the staff who want to believe that the girls need to learn to use

mobile phones effectively at times. It is a States-assisted school, so it receives a grant; it has more autonomy, I suppose, than some schools. I think it would be a good idea for the Deputy to come in and speak to the headteacher, and if there are other Deputies who seem to be supporting that approach, to come with us and let us have a meeting with the headteacher so that we know exactly what is going on. I have had contact with parents. Again, I would say to parents, do not send your child with a mobile phone. If there is an issue, contact the school, talk directly to the school. Schools identify this every day, it is their role to do that. Schools have a job to do of course, so do parents, and working together is the best way to solve those problems. Yes, I am sure the headteacher would be happy to speak to the Deputy.

### **3.8.6 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:**

Does the Minister not understand that it is not the issue of the parents themselves, responsible parents, allowing a non-Smartphone phone - you can have a phone which is Smart-enabled for all the safety reasons - is he not aware that it is the other students in the classroom that are showing the girls, in this case, horrendous pornography, beheadings, and other things like this, that that is the concern? It is not the parents that are being seemingly responsible, it is the ones that have decided that they should be allowing their girls in order to develop learning with Smartphones, and it is damaging them. I am most concerned about it, is he not?

### **Deputy R.J. Ward:**

I take the notion I would not be concerned about that as really quite offensive. I have spent my life in education, I have spent my life protecting children and safeguarding, and to score a political point, let us move forward, shall we? Second, if that is happening in a classroom, that is directly against the rules of that school. Speak to the headteacher; that should be dealt with. I would also add, if that material is being shown, I would report it to the police because it is illegal. **[Approbation]** There is a law behind that. We could set a law and that is firmly in that ground of a law. I would suggest, yes, if that is the case, please contact the school, please contact the headteacher, and that has to be dealt with. What I am being presented here with are scenarios which, if they are happening, yes, absolutely need to not be happening. Absolutely. Yes, I completely agree with the Deputy but, again, I really strongly suggest we meet with the headteacher to talk about what is happening in that school and the reasons for that. There is a parent/governor body as well, that is a vehicle for that information. If the Deputy does not think they are good enough, then he does need to speak to the headteacher about that. I am a bit concerned that we are isolating one school in this Assembly but there we go.

### **3.8.7 Deputy M. Tadier:**

I would perhaps ask for a different angle. I sympathise with the Minister because, first of all, children spend a minority of their time, but an important amount of time at school. I am sure he wants to get a balance between making sure that students are safe - that is the overriding message - but also not making schools like a prison which it can sound like they might be becoming. What regard does the Minister have to human rights of children, specifically U.N.C.R.C. (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) when it comes to Article 12 so that when adults are making decisions about children that they should take into account children's views? Does he think that in this area that children's views have been sufficiently taken into account about the use of mobile devices at school? Would he perhaps add whether he thinks that on the way to school and also school buses is an area, because it seems ludicrous that children might be able to hand their phones into school but they are allowed to take them to school on the way. They are allowed to see whatever they want on the school bus on the way home - presuming they get the bus - I am sure not all students get the bus. Would the Minister give a more rounded answer about where the balance lies between authoritarianism and safety?

### **Deputy R.J. Ward:**

I think the Deputy has just summed-up the dichotomy we have in our society with mobile phones. Schools can address what they can directly control during the day on school premises, when they arrive and when they are on school premises. As I have detailed to people, there are policies and rules in place. Whatever

rule this Assembly makes, if it wanted to ban everything, it would have to be policed. Schools are doing that. They are doing it to the very best of their ability and they are doing it every single day, plus teaching subjects and dealing with all the other issues that come forward for schools. In terms of school buses, I do not think we can ask the bus driver to supervise 25 children as to whether they have their phones on the bus. I simply do not think it is within their remit. I have to say, the safest way to do this was for parents not to buy their child a mobile phone, to have parental controls on that mobile phone, and to work with the school in what is the best way to do that. Schools cannot control what happens outside of school and at home at weekends and other times. They can work with parents to advise. I can advise parents that we are very aware that unfettered access to the World Wide Web is a dangerous place if it is not controlled, and I would urge all parents really to take parent controls seriously. If you are not sure, go and talk to the school and they will help. That is the best way forward; I think I have answered the Deputy.

**3.8.8 Deputy M. Tadier:**

Given that this is not an issue about schools necessarily, this is an issue about safety of children and perhaps accessing online harm, does he believe that this responsibility needs to be shared and perhaps even led by the Minister for Children and Families, given the fact that, as I have said, children spend most of their time outside of school? Therefore, would he perhaps assist with that dialogue with the many interested parents in our community to speak with both Ministers and develop a meaningful policy but including the voice of the child in that?

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Yes, I would say what was said earlier, we are all in this Assembly corporate parents, and so we all have a responsibility for the well-being of the children in our constituencies when they are not in school. I wonder how many constituency drop-ins will have leaflets about online safety. Perhaps that is something that could be circulated, there is a vehicle there to get those out. I will mention that the Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel are currently conducting a Scrutiny review on online safety and any information on that would be useful because that is a good vehicle. We do listen to the Scrutiny Panel a great deal, we have briefed them, and we have I think a positive relationship there, so that is a good thing to do and we will be listening to that. This is a real challenge for us as a society. What I will say today is I can stand here and say that schools are really trying to stop the use of mobile phones in school lessons. We have asked the schools to take this on and they have done so with aplomb and they have moved forward with this, to turn the tide back. The next step, whatever that will be, has to be thought through very, very carefully. I think it is as much about education on online safety and what that means which links to so many other areas of our education system and our society as well. Otherwise, I think we cannot let 16 year-olds get to a stage...

**The Bailiff:**

I must ask you to close your answer, Minister.

**3.8.9 Deputy K.M. Wilson of St. Clement:**

Just as we have seen legislation to control smoke-free in areas of school, would the Minister consider of a way forward maybe to mandate schools and youth services as Smartphone-free zones? Would he allocate, or consider allocating, some specific time to deal with this issue, given the weight of concern, both locally and internationally, on this issue, particularly for the children in his care?

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Yes, I think that is perhaps inevitably where we are moving to. Schools have enabled that anyway. The vast majority of schools have enabled that anyway, so it will not be a huge step after that. In terms of legislation, I am not too sure, it might be bumped by the Senators' legislation, so I cannot guarantee that any legislation will happen; we have to decide on that. How that legislation will work and how that will police, I do not know, and there is a balance between human rights. Are we going to get to a situation where a child is arrested in their school for having their mobile phone? That is not a flippant comment, it is a realistic comment. I think we need to get to a stage where we have controlled use and much more information over this topic for parents so that we can all move forward together. If there is a co-operation between the school,

parents and young people, we know where we are going, that would be much more successful. When my teenagers were teenagers, telling them to do something was really challenging. Getting them to do that because it was the right thing to do, and convincing them of that and working with them meant it stayed there, it was sustainable, and it worked way into the distance. I would like to see that balance between the 2 but, yes, it is a very good question, I think inevitably we will be in that place.

**3.8.10 Deputy K.M. Wilson:**

I welcome the Minister's comments on that. I think what he would also appreciate is that there is the will of Members of the Assembly to work with him on this issue. Would he give some consideration to providing some initial policy direction as soon as possible?

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Yes, the online safety policy is being reviewed anyway. That policy already exists but it was from 2021. In the world of online, 2021 was another epoch, let alone another year, so of course we do have to undertake that. I am pleased that the Assembly is behind that. I would urge Members, do come into schools and have a conversation, particularly with young people, because I think that is really important that we have those discussions. When we spoke to year 9s, for example, in one school, in Le Rocquier School, they were very, very good, and when we mentioned online safety and said: "Have you had any training?" I was told that they have training in online safety in every single year since year 5, and so it is happening. If that dialogue helps us understand what is happening there and it becomes less of a conflict between 2 supposedly opposing ideas - which it is not, I do not believe - I think we are all going in the same direction. Schools are trying to get there but this has been challenging for schools. They have had to do things that many parents would really find challenging, to say no to their children, and they have had to say no to a whole cohort in one go, and schools have been successful in doing so. Let us give them a bit of credit, let us move forward together. I absolutely understand that and share those things and let us have less of the: do we take safeguarding seriously? Yes, of course we do and I hope everybody in this Assembly does the same. Thank you.

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

I thank the Minister for all of the answers. He has shown that he understands the harms associated with social media and indeed screen time generally. There are stats within the report that show that the more screen time a child has, the more likely they are to experience bullying. Does the Minister agree that this is a public health issue in terms of the harm being caused to children's health and well-being? Would he agree that what schools and parents and us in the Assembly need is some expert guidance and some teamwork around establishing some expert guidance on what is a safe usage, generally for screens, but also for social media in terms of time on screens, what types of apps are suitable for different ages, et cetera, and boundaries? Does the Minister agree that that is important and would he agree to work with other Ministers and any departments necessary to help establish those?

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

I thank the Deputy. I will say to the Deputy, the notion that that does not exist already is not the case, there is an awful lot that is going on but, yes, of course, anything that we do for it as we move forward because it is an ever-changing world, there is greater recognition.

[11:00]

In terms of it being a public health issue, that is a very good question. I look back to COVID, and as we entered COVID, one of the big criticisms of education was that children did not have access to online learning and screens, et cetera, so there was a big push there. We are now at the aftermath of that and think: "Yes, okay, so where do we need to be?" I do agree - and I am quite pleased and I thank the Assembly for the questions today and the approach - because I think there is a shared concern. There is a shared reality of the challenge that we have got ahead and there is a shared recognition that, yes, we do have to act, the schools are acting, but anything else we can do in conjunction with parents, schools, children and essentially with C.Y.P.E.S. (Children, Young People, Education and Skills) I think will be very beneficial for our young people into the future, and that is what we want to do. We want them to be safe online, healthy online, and

use every education opportunity possible where we can because then we get the best outcomes in the modern world.

**The Bailiff:**

I think I should inform Members it perhaps has been the case that I have been a little bit too lax on this occasion but at the rate we are going at the moment, we will not finish all the questions that have been lodged. Could I remind Members if the Presiding Officer is talking, then nobody else does, Deputy? Could I remind Members that Standing Orders require that questions are succinct and not the opportunity for making political statements other than absolutely necessary to contextualise the question and, similarly, answers should be disciplined. The fact that there has been a practice to allow answers to extend to a minute-and-a-half does not mean that they always should.

**Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:**

A point of order?

**The Bailiff:**

Yes.

**Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:**

Would you consider making an order to put the timers on the thing so that we can see the amount of time that Ministers are answering in order to guide us? I think that might be helpful. Would you make an order for that?

**The Bailiff:**

Well I would consider that that might be helpful but I do not propose to do it on this occasion. It is something I will certainly give consideration to.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

May I just say as well, sometimes some of the questions we are getting are quite large questions, and this is not the first time that it has been mentioned that the time that I was answering questions went over. I am happy to answer questions but I am only answering what I am given.

**The Bailiff:**

Well, we will leave that for a discussion, arguably, on a different occasion, Minister, but the fact is that I will have to be more disciplined going forward. I will allow, because of this exchange, an extra minute or 2 of injury time.