

**REPLY BY THE PRESIDENT OF
THE COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION, SPORT & CULTURE
TO QUESTIONS ASKED PURSUANT TO RULE 14 OF THE RULES OF
PROCEDURE BY DEPUTY LESTER QUERPEL**

Pre-amble:

A letter headed 'Our concerns should be known' was published in the Guernsey Press on Wednesday January 22nd of this year. The letter was written by 88 staff members of St Sampsons High School who were expressing their concerns about the new secondary school system here in the island. In the first paragraph of the letter, the third sentence read as follows 'Until now we as staff have not spoken out against the proposals due to the fact that we have been actively discouraged from expressing our views and speaking out'. However, the 88 staff members didn't actually say in their letter who exactly had actively discouraged them from speaking out. Therefore, I have the following questions for the President of the Education, Sport and Culture committee:

Question 1a

Is the President aware of anyone working on behalf of Education, Sport and Culture: or anyone within the employ of the States of Guernsey: or any members of his committee, actively discouraging members of staff working at St Sampsons High School from expressing their views and speaking out?

Answer

No - in fact quite the reverse. Since July 2017, our teaching community has received no fewer than four emails from various senior officers, including the Chief Executive of the States of Guernsey and the Chief Operating Officer, all of which confirmed that staff are free to share their views in public on proposals relating to the delivery of education, so long as they do so in a professional and courteous way. One such email, sent in August 2019 in anticipation of the September 2019 debate "Transforming Education Programme & Putting into effect the Policy Decisions made by the States in 2018", was also circulated to all States Members for information.

As recently as 30 January this year, in the context of the planned protest march in respect of delivery of the current one school - two colleges model, teachers were again advised via email that their employer respects their right to express opinion in a courteous way, including taking part in the planned march if they wanted to do so.

Question 1b

If the answer to question 1a) above is 'Yes', then can the President please tell me the name, or names, of the people who have actively discouraged members of staff working at St Sampsons High School from expressing their views and speaking out?

Answer

See answer to 1a.

Question 1c

If the answer to question 1a) above is 'No', then does the President have a view as to who may have been responsible for actively discouraging members of staff at St Sampsons High School from expressing their views and speaking out?

No. Neither I nor any other member of the Committee, nor the Executive Headteacher of Lisia School, are aware of anyone actively discouraging staff at St Sampson's High School from expressing their views publicly, so long as they do so professionally and in accordance with their relevant codes of conduct.

However, as is entirely reasonable, and in direct response to allegations that teachers at St Sampson's High School were displaying green protest ribbons within the School, and handing them out to students, teachers have been reminded about their professional conduct in accordance with their code of practice.

Pre-amble for Question 2:

Towards the end of the letter in the final section headed 'Summary', the 2nd, 3rd and 4th sentences of the first paragraph read as follows: 'Opportunities for staff to approach those behind the plans are irrelevant as staff feel unable to voice their concerns or are consistently dismissed. It is felt that there is very much a 'divide and conquer' atmosphere at present, and there is a lack of consistent, transparent communication, which is causing a culture of distrust. At the root of teachers career choices is a desire to provide excellent education for students-any concerns that we have reflect that and yet are being treated as though they are just an effort to be troublesome'.

I have three questions relating to the issues raised in those three sentences, which are as follows:

Question 2a

Is the President able to give me an assurance that when staff at St Sampsons High School voice their concerns, they aren't consistently dismissed by those behind the plans, as claimed in the 1st sentence?

Answer

Yes. On behalf of the Committee *for* Education, Sport & Culture, I am very happy to give that assurance. We do not dismiss out of hand the concerns of any members of our teaching or support staff communities, and we are actively engaging with the relevant unions, whose role it is to represent the views of their members. In response to concerns raised, we have sought to provide clarity where there has been misunderstanding and, where possible, to make changes in the light of feedback. We have also indicated our willingness to slow the pace of change in some areas, for example with regard to extra-curricular enrichment activity, so that there can be greater engagement over how and when enrichment activity is provided.

But not every call for change is either reasonable or possible, and being unable to agree all changes suggested by staff is not the same thing as dismissing them out of hand.

It will never be possible to find a model that will both deliver the necessary transformation of secondary education and be popular with every member of the teaching community, nor, for that matter, the wider community. Previous models, that were defeated well before they were as advanced in their implementation as the current model, have also drawn heavy criticism.

We recognise that any change is unsettling, and this is particularly so when changes are large-scale and ambitious, as is necessary with the current education reforms if we are to secure the very best educational outcomes for our young people. It is pleasing to note the signatories of the letter to which your questions refer also confirm their “...*desire to provide excellent education for students*”. We will continue to increase our engagement with the teaching profession, and those who represent them, throughout the transition period with that aim in the forefront of all of our minds.

Question 2b

Can the President give me his views please on what is claimed in the 2nd sentence, which reads ‘It is felt that there is very much a divide and conquer atmosphere at present and there is a lack of consistent transparent communication which is causing a culture of distrust’?

Answer

Naturally, the Committee was disappointed to read that the teachers of St Sampson's High School feel this way. We feel unable to comment on what might have given rise to these concerns. It is clear that there is much uncertainty within the profession, but the best way to provide certainty for staff is by allowing the Committee to implement the reforms without further delay.

We recognise that, in recent months, we have taken significant steps towards the implementation of the reforms and, with big changes on the horizon, large sections of the teaching community have become increasingly concerned. This was not – and never would be – our intention, and we very much regret that some of our teachers and support staff feel this way.

Although it is not possible to spend time with each teacher individually, the Transformation Team already has in place the following forums, with the expressed aim of ensuring there are good channels for consistent two-way communication with those teaching and working in our high schools:

Supporting Education Transformation for Staff group - meets fortnightly to bring together colleagues from each of the four high schools, along with national and local union representatives, and to support staff engagement, communication and consultation with reference to development of the 11-18 One School, Two Colleges model. This includes providing further explanation of information disseminated from the Executive Leadership Team (see below), and the raising of issues and concerns from staff in the various workplaces. This Group helps to shape the changes being developed and provides constructive feedback to assist in their finalisation and communication.

People Advisory Group – meets monthly and is a joint employer/union consultative group established to identify and initiate the actions necessary to: identify the numbers, types and responsibilities of staff required to deliver the educational outcomes of the new 11-18 school; and ensure a smooth transition of staff transferring from their existing roles and responsibilities into those required for the new 11-18 school.

It should be noted that the Committee has given a repeated commitment that there will be a teaching role, both during and after the transition, for every teacher currently employed in our high schools who wants to be part of the future model.

Executive Leadership Team – meets weekly to develop and implement plans for transformation and transition to the new school.

Negotiating Committee for Teachers & Lecturers in Guernsey – meets monthly as part of business as usual functions and comprises national and local union representatives. Some overlap of membership with the Supporting Education Transformation for Staff group.

Joint Advisory Council – meets quarterly as part of business as usual functions. Some overlap of membership with the Supporting Education Transformation for Staff group.

However, we recognise that there is still much work to be done to improve the levels of trust between the teaching community and the Committee. We have ensured additional resources are deployed to assist with this, and we sincerely hope that teachers and support staff at St Sampson's High School, and across the island, as well as parents and other key stakeholders, will benefit from – and be reassured by – closer engagement going forwards. In particular, we were very pleased to hear feedback from staff at St Sampson's High School, via the Supporting Education Transformation for Staff group, that they have already benefitted from the arrival of the person appointed to the Change Lead role, who is regularly spending time in each of our High Schools.

Question 2c

d) Is the President able to give me an assurance that concerns expressed by staff working at St Sampsons High School aren't treated as an effort to be troublesome, as claimed in the 3rd sentence?

Answer

Yes. I hope that the answers to the above questions evidence that this is not the case. We remain open to hearing the concerns of any person - or body of people - and to make changes where the concerns are well founded and evidence-based, and where there is scope to accommodate solutions within the cost envelope approved by the States.

However, there must come a time when those who comprise our school communities; be they leaders, teachers, support staff, students, parents or extended families, should come together and embrace the agreed changes. It is only by working together that we will bring about the successful transformation of our secondary education system, and the transition to the new school model, that will lead to the high-quality educational provision that our young people so deserve. We should not lose sight of the fact that we surely all share the same aspiration: to improve educational outcomes for all of our young people.

Date of receipt of the Question: 7th February 2020
Date of Reply: 21st February 2020