

**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**

Preamble

As you are aware Deputy Dudley Owen, I've expressed concerns in the media and during States debates, about possible discrimination in relation to the Covid measures that have been introduced here in the Bailiwick, ever since the measures were first introduced in 2020. Now that the focus has been put on our schoolchildren to be tested for the virus, I am concerned that discrimination will rear its ugly head in our schools, causing a divide between children who have been tested and children who haven't. So in relation to that, my questions are these:

Question

1. How are ESC going to deal with discrimination in our schools resulting from the recently introduced 'testing' programme for children should it arise? Will a policy of some kind be put in place to mitigate against it, or will ESC just leave it to the children, their parents and their teachers to deal with?

Answer

ESC has a number of policies that education settings follow to respond to any incidences of discriminatory or undesirable behaviour. These include Anti-bullying procedures; Promoting Good Behaviour in Schools; and a new Complaints Policy which is publicly available.

It is important to note that there are two different types of COVID-19 testing approaches in education. The first is surveillance testing which is ongoing in a number of sectors across the Bailiwick and, within education settings, invites all older students to undertake regular lateral flow tests. The second is the current Public Health and Education lateral flow testing programme to reduce unnecessary absence from education settings which could negatively impact both the learning and emotional health and well-being of the Bailiwick's children and young people, where those children might have been in contact with a positive COVID-19 case in their setting. This is a non-statutory policy position which extends to *all* children (identified as education contacts of a positive case whilst in school/College) who are asked to engage with the testing programme for ten days following contact. Since this programme extends to all, we do not believe it to be discriminatory.

Public Health has directed the most appropriate and proportionate testing and surveillance programme in support of a smooth reopening of education settings for the 2021/22 academic year and ESC's officers have assisted by putting the programme into action for the well-being of all students and staff. Where necessary, ESC's officers have always indicated areas of concern to Public Health's officers to help to inform their decisions.

Question

2. a) Have ESC actually received any reports of the sort of discrimination I have referred to above?

Answer

We have not received any complaints about discrimination relating to this issue.

ESC uses clear internal operational guidance and there is additional public guidance available to outline the approach to managing positive COVID-19 cases in education settings. Via our educationqueries@gov.gg inbox we received emails expressing concern about the impact of Public Health's guidance to limit extra-curricular/after-school/evening/weekend activity (e.g. sports/dancing/music etc.) for those identified as social/household or education contacts of a positive COVID-19 case.

Question

b) If the answer is 'yes' then can you tell me how it was dealt with please?

Answer

The answer to question 2a was not 'yes', but we think that it is helpful to elaborate here for Deputy Queripel rather than leave a void in response.

ESC's officers liaise closely with Public Health's officers and have indicated where any challenges from members of the public related to education have been presented. Public Health was clear that it was taking a cautious approach as education settings reopened after the summer holidays but that the approach would be subject to frequent evidence-based reviews. Following such a review, [new guidance was issued by Public Health on 20th September](#), and at the time of writing that is the guidance being followed by education settings and those providing extra-curricular activities.

Question

3. a) Do ESC foresee a time when it will be made compulsory for all of our children to be tested?

Answer

We are not able to respond to this as it is beyond the scope of our mandate and subject-specific expertise. It is a question best directed to the Committee for Health & Social Care.

Question

b) If it were made compulsory, would ESC challenge the decision or support it?

Answer

Following on from the response given to the last question, it would be inappropriate to comment without expert advice or knowledge of the wider context at the time when any such decision was taken.

Question

4. Can you please tell me if parents were consulted, prior to the Lateral Flow tests being issued, to establish whether or not they were going to actually use them?

Answer

No, parents were not consulted. As they have done throughout the pandemic, ECS's officers worked in partnership with Public Health's officers to implement the requirements directed by Public Health.

Date of receipt of the Question: 13th September 2021

Date of Reply: 28th September 2021