

Thank you Mr President and I thank the Honourable Court in allowing me leave to make this statement today.

Mr President, following concerns raised around the Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) Advisory Curriculum, the Department initiated an Independent External Investigation with clear terms of reference to gain an accurate understanding of the recently reported events alleged to have taken place at QEII. This investigation has been separated into 3 distinct parts:

Part 1

Delivery of the drop down day in question, held in September 2022 at QEII;

Part 2

The preparation and delivery of Relationships and Sex Education in QEII;

Part 3

The RSE Advisory Curriculum, Guidance and training provided by the Department.

To enable this, the Department appointed both Paul Morris and Richard Power as Independent External Investigators, to establish the facts of what occurred and whether any appropriate further action should then be undertaken based upon those facts.

The Investigators have now produced a report in respect of Part 1, as set out within the Terms of Reference, which outlines the facts that have been ascertained during this part of the Investigation, which I will now outline.

A drop down day, which is planned in conjunction with the Department is a one-off timetabled day, which replaces normal timetabled lessons to enable pupils to receive input from other organisations to support areas of emotional and physical wellbeing.

Part 1 of the investigation explored delivery of the drop down day in question, held in September 2022 at QEII, which was publically referred to as having a 'drag queen' as a guest speaker.

The focus of the drop down day was 'Wellbeing', and the pupils in attendance were from year 7, a mixed group of pupils aged between 11 and 12.

A number of guest speakers facilitated a variety of sessions from a range of both internal and external organisations. Topics being discussed included:

- Wellbeing
- Anti-social behaviour and consequences
- Drugs and Peer Pressure
- Relationships
- Your body and you
- Inclusion

Staff from QEII were in attendance at all of the sessions within the drop down day as outlined above and were responsible for monitoring pupils whilst guests delivered their sessions.

Public references to a drag queen delivering a presentation at the drop down day at QEII in September 2022, are inaccurate but it is

understood that the guest speaker referred to does occasionally perform as a drag artist.

The guest speaker presented on 'inclusion', as they have done previously, with the objective of the lesson being to provide guidance on the use of gender-neutral language with an understanding of the concept of gender in the LGBTQ+ environment alongside other inclusive intentions. The guest speaker made it clear from the outset of the presentation that the classroom was a 'safe space' and that no question was a silly question.

During the presentation the concept of gender identity was introduced by the guest speaker, this led to a question by a pupil who asked how many genders there were. The speaker responded that there could be as many as 72 different gender identities.

At one point a pupil was asked, by one of the teachers, to step outside the classroom, the other teacher remained in the classroom with the guest speaker. The teacher's intention was to remind the pupil of the school's expectations, that all pupils are entitled to their own opinions, and that they do not have to agree with the guest speaker but they

must show respect. The pupil then returned to the class for the remainder of the presentation. Both teachers in attendance agreed that the course of action was appropriate.

The teachers present during the presentation managed behaviour of the class as would be expected. At no point did any guest speaker remove a child from the classroom, nor did they request the removal of any child.

The guest speaker continued with the presentation, a presentation they have delivered previously.

Mr President, it is important to draw a clear distinction between the drop down day in September 2022 and the delivery of the RSE Advisory Curriculum in February 2023. The guest speaker, present at the drop down day in September 2022, did not discuss sex education. The speaker was not present during the delivery of the RSE Advisory Curriculum lesson in February 2023.

I'd like to summarise part 1 at this point by stating that there was

- **no** guest speaker dressed as a 'drag queen' in QEII in September 2022,
- the guest speaker in question did **not** ask the pupil to leave the classroom,
- **nor** was the guest speaker upset by the comments made by any pupil during the delivery of the presentation. In fact, the pupil returned to the classroom for the duration of the presentation.

Part 2 of the report is currently being developed. The RSE Advisory Curriculum was first made available to secondary schools in 2019, the views of any parents concerned will be invited at this stage. Comments, both voicing concern and expressing support exist and it will be important to hear all of these views in due course. Further evidence gathering is planned for the week commencing 27th March.

Whilst the volume of evidence is unknown, it is difficult to commit to a completion date at this point but the Department are committed to completing the investigation as quickly as possible acknowledging that a comprehensive RSE curriculum is an important part of education.

I ask this, not to stifle debate or dissuade comment, I ask this because continued misinformation serves only to undermine professional, well informed and balanced discussion in the future.

The Department is committed to establishing the facts, which is why the independent investigation was initiated. As such, it was particularly concerning to see this investigation already being discredited online, before it concludes or reports. It is vital that all stakeholders are focussed upon obtaining the facts, if we are ever going to be able to learn and move forward.

Whilst there is still work to be done on the other parts of this investigation, I am sure there will be points of learning, development and improvement that can be made, and I can assure Honourable Members that my Department will take that learning, implement appropriately and in this way continue to improve.

It is evident Mr President, sufficient detail has been clarified within part one and it would appear that a number of pieces of information have been conflated and mis-represented.

Honourable Members will be aware of a related video, which continues to circulate on social media, which presents a document, and specific language pertaining to specific sexual acts. This was portrayed as if the document and some associated language forms part of the curriculum on the Island. I wish to make clear that this is not the case, nor has it ever been the case. The document 'Inclusive Relationships and Sex Education in Schools' is from the organisation Transgender trend and forms **no** part of the RSE advisory curriculum, which has been delivered within our primary or secondary schools here on the Island.

Whilst we cannot change the presence of social media in our lives and a case could be made for its positive influence, we should recognise its power to mislead and as such, negatively impact our community. We should also recognise the way in which it supports language and abuse that would not be tolerated in the physical world and should not be tolerated in the online world either.

In this instance, social media has turned elements of a community against a school that has served that community loyally for many years. It has also caused elements of our wider community to turn against each other.

One thing we may take from the first part of this investigation, is that some of the behaviours we have witnessed online perfectly exemplify the importance of education. It is through education that we ensure our community is inclusive, supportive and a place where we are all able to live, safe from the forms of abuse we have witnessed recently.

The safeguarding and wellbeing of our children, young people and staff is the Department's main priority. The Department has serious concerns at how the misrepresentation of the facts has impacted not only the school, the staff and pupils, but the reputation of the Isle of Man on a global stage.

On this note Mr President, I would like to take the opportunity to explain why we have asked members of the public to refrain from speculating and would request no further speculation. There have been malicious accusations and comments which continue to be received by our staff, and myself directly through email, letters, telephone calls and shared across social media platforms, are continuing to have a detrimental impact upon many individuals. As the Department has already stated, comments such as these are wholly unacceptable.

Mr President, I would question if they should be tolerated by anyone within our Island community. As such, any such comments will continue to be reported, where appropriate, to the Isle of Man Constabulary.

I would like to thank all staff at QEII for the level of professionalism displayed under intense personal pressure, most specifically the Headteacher who has not only suffered a tirade of abuse but featured in national press articles. Despite a level of personal threat, staff have remained professional and continued to deliver their usual high quality of Education to our pupils.

Mr President it should be noted that our staff have felt unsafe following threats from individuals. These range from threats to turn up at the school, demands for staff to be dismissed to demands for people to be arrested and executed.

As a Department, we strive to prepare our children and young people to live in a rapidly changing and complex world, prepared for a future that is increasingly hard to predict, although one thing we can be sure of, it

will be different to the world we all grew up in.

The drop down days delivered within our schools provide an opportunity to bring in those from other professions and walks of life to offer a different perspective, to challenge our thinking and to stimulate positive debate. This is a principle I have always supported and will continue to do so, and I hope all honourable members of this court will do likewise.

Readily available access to devices, technology and vast amounts of knowledge, brings an unprecedented challenge and enabling our children and young people to consume and make sense of this wealth of knowledge, is one of the most important areas we engage in. It is only in this way that we can enable unbiased, inclusive and well informed discussion, through which our children and young people can make well informed choices. It is the choices we make and the consequences of those choices, that shape us and define our futures.

Thank you Mr President.