

## **SECONDARY**

### **SCHOOL TEACHERS/OTHERS**

#### **ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**

#### **COVID-19 PANDEMIC - INDEPENDENT REVIEW PANEL REPORT - 11,000**

#### **DIGITAL TABLETS – PROCUREMENT (07.12.2021)**

(No. B/1341) **Dr. M. Gungapersad**(Second Member for Grand’Baie & Poudre d’Or) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the Report of the Independent Review Panel on the launch of the bid on 29 April 2019 for the procurement of 11,000 digital tablets by the Open University of

Mauritius, she will state if she has taken cognizance thereof and, if so, will she –

(a) table copy thereof, and

(b) for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to how the delay in the supply of the digital tablets has impacted the students and staff of the University, especially, amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

**The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun):** Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Open University of Mauritius that in April 2019, the institution did not launch a procurement exercise for the acquisition of 11,000 tablets.

However, I am informed that the Open University proceeded with the procurement exercise through open advertised bidding for the acquisition of 11,000, tablets on 28 May 2021, the closing date being 30 June 2021. Following this exercise, the lowest bidder was allocated the contract to the sum of Rs21,483,440. The third lowest bidder challenged the decision at the level of the IRP.

As regards part (a) of the question, my Ministry has taken cognizance of the Report of the IRP dated 12 November 2021 in the matter of JV Kalis Technologies Ltd and Keep Clean Ltd v/s Open University of Mauritius. After consideration of the challenge, the IRP recommended the enrolment of the decision. I am tabling a copy of the report.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that students can access to their learning materials remotely and at any time using their computers, laptops and even smartphones. Apart from providing the e-Learning platform, the Open University also organises face-to-face tutorials and provide notes to its students.

**Dr. Gungapersad:** Thank you, hon. Minister. Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether the evaluators were appointed by the Departmental Bid Committee of the Open University of Mauritius or by the Ministry of Education, Tertiary education, Science and Technology and if the evaluators appointed for the Bid Evaluation Committee were qualified and experienced in evaluation of IT equipment and are conversant with the bidding exercise because it is the third time that the procurement exercise has been cancelled?

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the Open University and their officers were involved in the Departmental Bid Committee.

**Dr. Gungapersad:** Hon. Minister, as you may be aware that one of the items which is advertised as a marketing strategy at the Open University is a free tablet for students which they are supposed to get upon successful registration and at the beginning of the semester. May we be informed when the last distribution of tablets took place and how many students are waiting to receive their tablets? Is the hon. Minister aware that when students are enquiring when they would get their tablets, they are being told that the process of purchase of tablets is still going on and circumstances are beyond their control?

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just informed the House that the IRP had required the Open University to start again the bidding exercise.

**Mr Speaker:** The Table has been advised that PQ B/1373 has been withdrawn.

Move to your next question!

## SECONDARY

### SCHOOL TEACHERS/OTHERS

#### ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

#### ONLINE CLASSES - ATTENDANCE (30.11.2021)

(No. B/1249) **Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien)** asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to online classes, she will state the percentage of attendance thereof since the start of the second semester.

**The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun):** Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that since the beginning of the second term which started on 13 September 2021, classes were held on a staggered basis and this until 09 November 2021.

Following the closure of schools on 10 November, we proceeded with online classes for students of Grades 10 to 13. The remaining Grades 7 to 9 have educational programmes on the four national television channels and the Student Support Portal.

About 40,000 upper secondary students in Grades 10 to 13 and about 8,500 educators in both public and private schools use online platforms like Microsoft Teams, WhatsApp, Zoom and Google to connect online with their students to ensure continuity in the teaching and learning.

Following a preliminary survey in respect of students of Grades 10 to 13, it has been found that the majority of students varying from 85% to 95% on an average are attending their online classes.

Online teaching is currently being monitored by the Rectors with the support of the heads of department, and educators who are fully engaged in the process of teaching and learning are in close contact with the students.

The Quality Assurance and Inspection Division is presently carrying out an in-depth survey to analyse the implementation of the remote learning over the period of 11 November to 30 November 2021.

I wish to reiterate that the current situation is being closely monitored.

**Mr Ramful:** I have been told by certain educators that in those low performing colleges from specific areas the rate of participation is quite low. Am I correct to say that?

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I have got analysis and we have noted that in some schools, it goes to around 55-65%, but in a few schools. In general, it is being done properly and we are trying to find out the reason for the low participation. In certain cases we have had replies where students are sick or the connection is not good, things of the sort.

**Dr. Gungapersad:** Mr Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Minister enlighten us whether for SC and HSC, Grades 11 and 13, where attendance is a criteria whether they will pay or not, whether the attendance for online classes will equally be counted?

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the 90% attendance in fact was implemented taking into account the students who used to be absent from school, and we were trying to get them to be in school. Right now, we are following what is happening with the online teaching and online classes, and we are getting reports from the teachers. And whenever we feel that there is a need to take action, we are going to take action. But right now, the situation is such that teachers are saying that students are attending. Unless we get a report from a teacher stating that the student has consistently been absent, we might take action. But right now, no such case has been reported to us.

**Mr Ameer Meea:** Mr Speaker, Sir, since for Grades 5 and 6, there are no online classes, is the Ministry maintaining exams which are scheduled for Grade 6 modular assessment in January?

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the modular assessment has been postponed to end of January 2022.

**Mr Ramful:** May I know from the hon. Vice-Prime Minister in those areas which she said that the attendance is quite low, what concretely is she envisaging to do to increase participation?

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, we have been talking to heads of schools to find out what is the reason and whether there is a need for supplementary educational resources to be supplied to the students in terms of files and notes, etc. Already we are working on notes that are being distributed to some schools. Now, we want to extend it to any other school where we feel there is a need.

## SECONDARY

### SCHOOL TEACHERS/OTHERS

#### ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

#### NATIONAL EDUCATION COUNSELLING SERVICE – SERVICE OFFERED (23.11.2021)

(No. B/1165) **Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or)** asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the National Education Counselling Service, she will state the number of staff grade-wise attached to each Zone to offer the said service, indicating the –

- (a) studies, surveys or research work carried out since January 2015 to date;
- (b) psycho-pedagogical tools elaborated therefor;
- (c) number of home visits effected to assist Special Needs Children, and
- (d) sensitisation/awareness programmes carried out for children and parents prone to social exclusion.

**The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun):** Mr Speaker Sir, I wish to inform the House that the number of staff of the National Education Counselling Service attached to each Educational Zone stands as follows –

- Zone 1: 1 Senior Educational Psychologist, 12 Educational Psychologists, 1 Senior Educational Social Worker and 6 Educational Social Workers;
- Zone 2: 1 Ag. Senior Educational Psychologist, 7 Educational Psychologists, 1 Senior Educational Social Worker, and 6 Educational Social Workers;
- Zone 3: 1 Senior Educational Psychologist, 6 Educational Psychologists, 1 Senior Educational Social Worker, and 5 Educational Social Workers;

- Zone 4: 1 Senior Educational Psychologist, 5 Educational Psychologists, 1 Senior Educational Social Worker, and 5 Educational Social Workers.

I also wish to highlight that following the announcement made in the Budget Speech 2021-2022, the process for the recruitment of 34 additional Educational Psychologists has already been initiated with the Public Service Commission. This will double the number of psychologists in post.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that since 2015, numerous surveys and screenings have been carried out by the NECS with respect to –

(i) students with learning difficulties;

(ii) students showing anxiety and stress;

(iii) coping skills of students between 8 to 12 years of age;

(iv) drug prevention programmes;

(v) assessment of children with disabilities to determine their needs and appropriate placement within the educational institutions in collaboration with the paramedical team of my Ministry which includes Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists and Speech Therapists as well.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (b) of the question, I am informed that standardised and culture fair tests are being used by the Educational Psychologists to conduct the relevant screenings and surveys. The testing materials used are in line with the DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition).

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (c) of the question, home visit is an ongoing process across all education sectors from pre-primary to secondary level. 186 home visits have been carried out by the Educational Social Workers to assist children with special needs as well as to provide practical advice, guidance and care.

As regards part (d) of the question, I am informed that talks have been conducted by the NECS of my Ministry in community centres for parents. Since 2015 to date, numerous sensitisation and awareness programmes have been carried out for children and parents

in primary and secondary schools. A total of 21,803 students and 7,090 parents have participated in these programmes.

The NECS of my Ministry in collaboration with the Citizens Advice Bureau, *Brigade pour la Protection des Mineurs*, and the National Empowerment Foundation also participated in a community sensitisation programme for *Résidence Bethléem* with the collaboration of the NGO “*Atelier Sa Nou Vize*”.

Mr Speaker Sir, it is to be noted that the National Education Counselling Service also conducted interactive sessions with Heads of Primary and State Secondary Schools and the support teams on post-COVID-19 resumption. The aim of this exercise was to empower 1,549 officers working in the educational sector in identification and referral of school children who are in need of psychosocial support.

The paramedical team of my Ministry will also be carrying out teletherapy for children with special education needs. Additionally, the screening protocol developed by the paramedical professionals for SEN learners would be validated by teams of allied Health Professionals through a virtual validation workshop in December 2021. A mass sensitisation campaign on inclusive education has also been scheduled for December 2021.

**Dr. Gungapersad:** Thank you, hon. Minister. Mr Speaker, Sir, since the Minister has announced online teaching as from 11 November 2021, is she aware, whether the Head of the National Education Counselling Service (NECS) has given instructions to 34 Educational Psychologists and 22 Educational Social Workers of all the four Zones to stay in office? And if they stay in office, how will appropriate service be given to our children?

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, even during the time of confinement, these officers have been in contact with the students, obviously through telephone calls and other online means. But then, Mr Speaker, Sir, with the present situation, it is quite normal that some restrictions be imposed and that these officers do not necessarily have to move to the houses of people unless there is the necessity for them to move.

**Dr. Gungapersad:** Thank you, hon. Minister. Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister, how many Educational Psychologists are involved currently in

providing emotional support, especially to those children who have experienced tragedies in the wake of the pandemic or other emotional, economic or social problems?

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, all the Educational Psychologists working normally give support to all students or even the parents of students who make requests at the level of the Ministry. Otherwise, as I have just mentioned, teachers normally are trained to try to identify students requiring such support. But, since we are in a time when schools are closed, we have to wait for them to come towards us, because teachers are not in contact with students, unless they do identify students having these problems while dealing with them online.



## **SECONDARY**

### **SCHOOL TEACHERS/OTHERS**

#### **ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**

#### **ONLINE EDUCATION – IMPLEMENTATION (23.11.2021)**

**(No. B/1162) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand’Baie & Poudre d’Or)** asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to online education, she will state the reasons for the implementation thereof since 11 November 2021, indicating if –

(a) consultations were held with the stakeholders prior thereto and, if so, with whom and when, and

(b) if a full fledge survey of same implemented during the two lockdowns to assess the extent of which teaching and learning were successfully achieved was carried out and, if so, table copy of the report thereof and, if not, why not.

**The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun):** Mr Speaker, Sir, after an assessment of the situation with regard to the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic and taking into consideration the safety of our youngsters in schools and the need to ensure a continuity in teaching as well as learning, decision was taken for schools to be closed and for classes to be held online as it was the case in June 2021.

As I have already explained during my replies to Parliamentary Questions B/630, B/648 and B/885, my Ministry has already in place a National Education Resilience Strategy since last year for ensuring continuity in learning and teaching whenever schools are closed.

Our strategy provides for the broadcast of educational programs for students of Grades 1 to 9 on MBC channels and MBC TV website. Lower secondary students, Grades 7 to 9, have been provided with logins to have access to educational resources available on the Student Support Portal. Moreover, all students in Grades 10 to 13 and the Educators have been provided with logins and have access to Microsoft Teams for them to connect

online to ensure continuity in learning. Educators also use other platforms such as WhatsApp, Zoom and Google Classroom.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as for part (a) of the question, with regard to consultations, I wish to point out to the House that as far back as in 2020, all stakeholders have been informed that whenever schools are closed due to *force majeure*, we have to ensure continuity through online teaching and distance education. This has become deeply embedded in the system.

In fact, many of our stakeholders have supported the idea of having recourse to online teaching and learning, especially in the context of the COVID-induced situation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, the reason inbuilt structure, monitoring mechanism at the level of the Ministry involving the Primary Inspectorate and the Quality Assurance and Inspection Division had followed up on the online teaching exercise as well as on the coverage of the curriculum.

It is to be noted that this monitoring exercise is meant for internal analysis and action at the level of the Ministry. I wish, at this stage, Mr Speaker, Sir, to express my deep appreciation to Heads of schools and educators for their dedication and support in the implementation of our National Education Resilience Strategy. I believe the students have benefited from this mode of learning. It has also enhanced the capacity for autonomous learning and this, Mr Speaker, Sir, perhaps maybe one of the major gains of the COVID-induced situation.

I also wish to add that the results obtained at the level of the Primary School Achievement Certificate, the National Certificate of Education as well as the School Certificate and Higher School Certificate showed that students have in effect benefited from the remote learning.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am confident that with the support of Heads of schools, Educators and parents, students will continue to benefit from remote learning may it be online or through the TV or even the Student Support Portal. My Ministry will continue to monitor the situation closely.

**Dr. Gungapersad:** Thank you, hon. Minister. Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether her Ministry is doing or has done something to close the gap of the digital device that exists in our country and it is felt by many families, especially the

under-privileged families? What measures will her Ministry take in order to ensure that all our kids irrespective of their economic background get proper education during this period?

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, as I informed the House earlier, through Parliamentary Questions, I have, with the Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity, already distributed tablets to all the students from Grades 10 to 13 and students coming from families who are registered on the Social Register Mauritius. Furthermore, Mauritius Telecom has connected more than 7,000 families to broadband internet.

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Ameer Meea!

**Mr Ameer Meea:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. As the House is aware, in private schools all Grades, be it in primary or secondary schools, they have been following online courses whereas in public school only Grades 10 to 13 have been following online classes. So, my question to the hon. Minister - I am not taking primary but secondary, from Grades 7 to 9 - why are the students not following online courses, bearing in mind that the audio-visual thing that you have on MBC is only for a small amount of time, not more than one hour per day, and it is not catering for the needs for the syllabus of those students and also the teachers as they already have their existing timetable? So, why do we not give online courses for Grades 7 and 9?

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the planning for the classes being broadcast on the MBC channels have been made by the MIE and the Ministry's officials. What we are planning to do, we have the whole syllabus prepared and lessons prepared already for them to be broadcast on TV or on the Student Support Portal. Now, the Student Support Portal is also being upgraded so that we have even more lessons in there.

For private secondary schools, teachers have gone on WhatsApp and other means to connect with students. This does not mean that students from the State Secondary Schools do not get this *accompagnement, this encadrement* from their educators. This is also being done, but we already have a format with classes being run on TV and on the Student Support Portal. This can be sort of complemented by the teachers connecting with students through WhatsApp, Google Meet and other means.

**Mr Ramful:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the Minister tell us if at the level of her Ministry is there a monitoring with regard to the percentage of participation of students on online courses since the second semester has started and is she satisfied with the percentage of participation?

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, all the Quality Assurance Departments of my Ministry are following up on this particular issue and they deal with the heads of schools. The heads of schools are to monitor the situation in the schools and to see to it that teachers do engage with the students and that the classes are on as planned by the Ministry.

**Mr Speaker:** Last supplementary!

**Dr. Gungapersad:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Is the hon. Minister aware that in State Secondary Schools for Grades 7 to 9, there are schools which are providing online education for all subjects; some schools are providing online education for a few subjects and some schools are not providing these. There is a disparity, hon. Minister. So, if there is a proper protocol of online learning, it would be better for the kids and let me just add what about our kids from the Extended Stream who have to take the NCE exams? Thank you.

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have just said a few minutes earlier, one does not exclude the other. There are schools, even the State Schools, where teachers do connect with the students over and above the classes that are being run on TV or on the Student Support Portal. This, as I said, it all depends on the way it is being done. The Ministry has planned to have classes for Grades 7-9 on TV and on the Student Support Portal. But, as I have said earlier, teachers can still connect with the students. Students do ask their teachers for additional support and this is being provided.

**Mr Speaker:** The Table has been advised that...

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, as far as the Extended Stream is concerned, there is a follow-up being done at the level of the schools.

**Mr Speaker:** The Table has been advised that the following PQs have been withdrawn: B/1225, B/1226, B/1227, B/1223, B/1179 and B/1232.

Next question!

## SECONDARY

### SCHOOL TEACHERS/OTHERS

#### MATTERS RAISED

#### ONLINE CLASSES – GRADES 7, 8 & 9 (19.11.2021)

**Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East):** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The issue I am raising tonight is addressed to the Minister of Education. Although she is not there, I am sure her colleague will take my request on board.

As the House is aware, presently online courses are being conducted for students from Grades 10, 11 onwards and I do not know for what reasons there are no online courses for Grades 7, 8 and 9. And the more so, for Grade 9 there will be a national exam, which is called the NCE. Though audiovisual programmes are being broadcasted on MBC, this is not catering for the needs of students for Grades 7, 8 and 9. And, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, comparatively in private schools, students of all Grades have been following online classes. So, I would urge the Minister to do needful so that the students from Grades 7 to 9 could follow online classes so that they can catch up with the syllabus. Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Thank you. Hon. DPM!

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** The request will be conveyed to the Minister.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Thank you very much. Have a safe trip. *Bon week-end à vous!*

*At 10.14 p.m., the Assembly, was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 23 November 2021 at 11.30 a.m.*