

Covid-19

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS COVID-19 – 2021 - EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS – TEMPORARY CLOSURE (03.08.2021)

(No. B/864) **Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East)** asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the educational institutions which have been/are temporarily closed down in 2021 amid the COVID-19 pandemic, she will state the measures taken/being taken to recover the missed courses.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, as you are aware, following resumption of schools as from the 05 July 2021, a few schools were closed temporarily due to the fact that they were located in Red Zones or had positive cases of COVID-19.

These schools were closed temporarily for disinfection and cleaning prior to the reopening on the next day. As already announced, in cases of temporary school closure, arrangements have been made for educational programs to be broadcast on TV for Grades 1 to 9 and for online teaching to be provided for Grades 10 to 13, so as not to interrupt the teaching and learning process.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to highlight that the Primary School Inspectorate Division and the Quality Assurance Division of my Ministry are carrying out an exercise to determine the curriculum coverage by e-school.

A Technical Committee has been set up to work on measures to be taken to make up for the loss of instructional time. This Committee will include all relevant stakeholders and will have to come forward with appropriate recommendations.

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have a few supplementary on this issue as this is a very important one. Can I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister what measures were taken by her Ministry for students that did not have access to the required technology to attend online classes for the recovery of lost school hours?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, following the close-down of schools last year, the Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity has come up with a policy of providing tablets to all students of Grades 10 to 13, who are on the Social Register of Mauritius, and also to provide internet connectivity to all these students.

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Speaker, Sir, according to my information, there is rather a high rate of percentage of students who did not attend online courses. Of course, it is my information but can I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister if she has the actual figures?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, this was indeed the case during the first confinement. But this time, all the students who are on the Social Register of Mauritius, whose parents are on that Register, have been provided with tablets.

Now, at the level of schools, the Heads of schools are monitoring the situation and all teachers are to submit the name of students who are not following the online classes to the rectors so that they may inform the parents of these students.

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Speaker, Sir, in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, I know it is not directly related to the question but if the hon. Vice-Prime Minister would be agreeable to reply to this one because it is an important information that the House and the nation would like to know. For students above 18 years old but who had not had the opportunity to get vaccinated, can I ask the hon. Minister what is the status of those students?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, all students who have not been vaccinated are being asked to go to the Special Medical Panel at the level of the Ministry of Health and Wellness and they are being provided with - You mean to say those who are exempted?

Mr Ameer Meea: No, those who are already at the age of 18 but had not had the opportunity to be vaccinated or could not be vaccinated for some medical reasons.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: As far as the schools are concerned, we have not had any cases of students not being admitted because of lack of vaccination card.

Now, at the level of the University, we have already provided the facilities for them for vaccination and those who cannot be vaccinated for a specific health condition, they are being provided with the exempt card from the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

Mr Ameer Meea: I have a last question, Mr Speaker, Sir. Currently, our schools are working two days for lower classes and three days for higher classes. Can I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister when does she expect for things to get back to normal, that is, a five-day working class?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, we are all awaiting for the time when all our students can go to school the way they used to go earlier. However, we will still have to wait for the advice of the Ministry of Health and Wellness before we go back to that state of affairs.

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ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS – COVID-19 POSITIVE TESTED PERSONS (27.07.2021)

(No. B/810) 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 educational institutions, she will state the –

- (a) number of COVID-19 positive tested persons thereat, indicating the number thereof having been quarantined following contact tracing exercises, and
- (b) list thereof having been closed down, indicating the duration thereof in each case.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that with respect to educational institutions, the number of COVID-19 positive cases as well as the number of people on quarantine or on isolation since 05 July 2021 till 26 July 2021 are as follows –

9 pupils and 3 staff members in pre-primary schools –

- The number quarantined: 38
- Number of people on isolation: 85 As for the primary schools -
- 14 pupils and 2 educators were found positive
- The number quarantined: 14
- Number on isolation: 56 For the secondary schools -
- 44 students and 4 educators were found positive
- The number quarantined: 20
- Number of people on isolation: 128 As for tertiary institutions -

- 3 students and 1 staff have been found positive
- 5 were on quarantine, and
- 2 on isolation

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to schools which have been closed down due to detection of COVID-19 positive cases, I am circulating a list of the educational institutions concerned. Most of them have resumed after two or three days. In one school, namely Cosmopolitan College, after the detection of 5 positive cases, the Ministry of Health and Wellness reviewed the situation on 22 June 2021 and advised that the students and educators of all Grade 10 classes be placed on self-isolation.

As 23 educators are on self-isolation, Cosmopolitan College shifted from in-person schooling to remote online teaching and learning for the duration of the self-isolation period, as will be determined by the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

Please note that the remaining schools will be resuming during the course of this week with the exception of one pre-primary school, which has remained closed, as the Manager was tested positive as well as the educator and the helpers who are on self-isolation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to point out that in line with the protocol that has been developed, educational institutions are not subject to closure when a student or a staff member has been tested COVID-19 positive, I mean permanent closure. Instead, measures are adopted for cleaning and disinfection of the schools and isolation of persons in direct contact or referral to quarantine.

This process enables reopening of schools after a short period of closure whilst ensuring continuity in teaching and learning. In parallel, as part of the education resilience strategy, educational programmes are being aired for learners of Grades 1-9, who are unable to attend school due to the fact that they are either in quarantine or on self-isolation or in red zone, on four learning channels of the MBC TV.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, hon. Minister. Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister if she is considering to review the established official communication strategy with the stakeholders? Because we have had cases where schools were asked to operate and then were asked to close down. She has cited the example of Cosmopolitan College in Plaine des Papayes, where 30 out of 47 educators were requested to go on self-isolation and the other 17

were asked to come to work. If there is a proper protocol of communication, there would be no anxiety and stress on behalf of the stakeholders.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, the schools have been given all the information required and the measures taken were to ensure the safety of the students and also due to the fact that we could not have students in school when the teachers were on selfisolation. This is why, for Cosmopolitan College, we have shifted to the online teaching, awaiting the isolation period be over.

Dr. Gungapersad: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister to inform the House how far the guidelines set by the UNESCO and UNICEF in relation to psychological support to students, parents and staff are being effectively implemented?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, as rightly put by the hon. Member, UNESCO and UNICEF have advised that schools remain open. As far as psychological support is concerned, all requests made to the Ministry are attended to by the Counselling Unit of the Ministry.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Juman!

Mr Juman: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Given the increase in number of COVID19 cases in our educational institutions, will the hon. Minister consider going for online courses and closing down of our schools and colleges till things get better?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just mentioned that UNESCO and UNICEF have been advocating for the reopening of schools because keeping students away from school has a negative impact on their socialisation and also on their psychological and even physical state.

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WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS – COVID-19 POSITIVE TESTED (20.07.2021)

(No. B/760) 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 educational institutions, she will state the –

- (a) number of COVID-19 positive tested persons thereat, indicating the number thereof having been quarantined following contact tracing exercises, and
- (b) list thereof having been closed down, indicating the duration thereof in each case.

(Withdrawn)

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MATTERS RAISED FOREIGN UNIVERSITIES STUDENTS - VACCINES (13.07.2021)

Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Merci, M. le président. Ma requête est adressée à la vice-Première ministre et ministre de l'Éducation, le ministre des Affaires étrangères et le ministre de la Santé, et concerne une problématique urgente.

M. le président, je suis en présence des représentations d'étudiants ayant été inscrits dans des universités étrangères et ayant déjà payé leur année scolaire. Ils sont dans la confusion totale et s'inquiètent qu'aucune information n'est disponible quant à leurs éventuels départs par rapport à la pandémie et la problématique de la vaccination. Est-ce que les vaccins administrés à Maurice sont acceptables dans ces pays ? Je fais donc un appel pour la mise sur pied d'un comité regroupant l'éducation, les affaires étrangères et la santé, et de communiquer les informations nécessaires aux étudiants dans les meilleurs délais pour dissiper toutes inquiétudes et confusions.

Je vous remercie.

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal): Mr Speaker, Sir, in the PQ addressed to me by hon. Osman Mahomed, I have already given all the information pertaining to anybody who wish to travel to any other countries; what are the rules and the regulations imposed. Now, at the same time, students who know that they have to travel to some other countries, have to contact the Embassy to know what is the criteria that has been already established or if there is no criteria, to go to their universities.

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MATTERS RAISED
LA ROSA, NEW GROVE - D. BASANT RAI GOVERNMENT
SCHOOL – STUDENT – COVID POSITIVE
(13.07.2021)

Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I have an issue which concerns the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education as well as the Minister of Health. It concerns the case of the D. Basant Rai Government School at La Rosa, New Grove where one Grade One student has been found to be positive. In fact, there is contrary to what the hon. Deputy Prime Minister just said, there is a lack of communication from the authorities with regards to contact tracing, with regards to screening, with regards to closure of the school. I have been informed that two days back, the authorities have conducted contact tracing in New Grove but the parents of the school have not been informed. There was no communiqué whatsoever from the Ministry.

So, may I call upon the relevant authorities to kindly look into the matter and if there could be effective communication to the parents and staff of the school.

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal): Mr Speaker, Sir, whenever a positive case is detected, there is a scientific way of conducting contact tracing and quarantine those who have been in contact. It goes in the same way for the schools also. Once a pupil or a student is being tested positive, that will follow the same course. At the same time, the contact tracing team if ever they will come to know that there is more contamination, then it is question of giving direction to the school to be closed. Otherwise, it is only the class that is involved. So, the class will be closed for a period of two weeks. The school will be disinfected and then in due course, other information will be given to this school and the parents.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Osman Mahomed!

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MATTERS RAISED SCHOOLS & COLLEGES – COVID CASES (13.07.2021)

Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East):

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. My request is addressed to the Vice Prime Minister, Minister of Education but unfortunately she is not here, I request the hon. Deputy Prime Minister to pass on the message, if possible. Since I have been solicited by many worried parents regarding COVID cases, registered during the last days in various schools and colleges, resulting in higher rate of absenteeism. It would much be appreciated if the hon. Minister can come forward to clarify the situation, reassure the parents, students, teachers and I urge the hon. Minister to please communicate. In such situations, communication is very important, it is a keyword.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal): Mr Speaker, Sir, concerning COVID cases that we have detected in the different localities or in the COVID Testing Centres, the contact tracing team first will contact the person who has been tested positive and we will do contact tracing and at the same time inform the school if in case there is suspected contamination in the school, whether this child has attended the school or not, so all these is based upon what are the information that has been conveyed to the contact tracing team.

So far, the Ministry of Health is liaising with the Ministry of Education to send all the information that is required, especially in positive cases.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ameer Meea!

The Deputy Prime Minister: If I may add, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: I am sorry.

The Deputy Prime Minister: If I may just add for the sake of clarity. There are specific agreed protocols that are immediately applied by the health authorities and the educational authorities whenever and wherever there is a reported case of contamination or at least a positive case in schools. Disinfection automatically ensures, isolation of classmates

automatically ensures and the Minister of Health only yesterday explained this very forcefully and clearly in public.

Of course, we need to communicate. The battle of communication is a constant one and we owe it to the public and to our population to constantly be communicating more and better, more effectively if I may say so and we shall continue doing so. But do rest assured that there are objective criteria as per well-established protocol helping the sanitary authorities and the educational authorities to address each and every case as it arises.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ameer Meea!

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ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS SCHOOL CALENDAR – REVERT TO ORIGINAL CALENDER (18.05.2021)

(No. B/416) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand’Baie and Poudre d’Or) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the school calendar, she will state if consideration is being given to revert to the original one as against the one adopted in June 2020 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, with your permission, I will reply to both PQs B/416 and B/450 together as they relate to the same subject.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic all schools were closed last year for a period of nearly three months from mid-March to the end of June 2020. While we did successfully switch to an alternative remote mode of learning, it was inevitable that the suspension of the face-to-face instruction in schools during that period would have consequences on the teaching and learning process. It also led to an uneven coverage of the curriculum in our various schools.

Furthermore, it could not be assumed that students would immediately begin to recover missed learning. We, therefore, needed to make sure that at the time of the reopening of the schools in July 2020, all students be given time to reconnect with their studies. We also needed to ensure that the whole syllabus was covered for all students in all grades, particularly for those sitting for the international examinations. In the light of all these considerations, the school calendar was revised and extended by three months to make up for the learning loss.

In parallel, National Assessments and International Examinations were also rescheduled. Accordingly, the resumption of studies was scheduled in June 2021. Briefing sessions were held with all stakeholders at that point in time, namely in June 2020.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to reiterate that the change in school calendar was brought about in an exceptional, unforeseeable and unprecedented, circumstance of

prolonged school closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The hon. Member will recognise that any change in school calendar is always a difficult undertaking. And reverting to the previous one would be fraught with a number of implications, ranging from prolonged grade retention, subsequent delayed entry in the higher studies and rescheduling of international examinations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with this in mind and specially in the best interests of learners, it is not envisaged at this stage to revert to the original school calendar as it will entail accumulative stretch of school time by almost one year considering that the academic year was already stretched earlier.

Dr. Gungapersad: Will the hon. Minister receive stakeholders who are willing to help you, your Ministry to revert back to the initial school calendar because they have proposals which are very insightful and can be helpful for the future change of the school calendar?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: *Mr Speaker, Sir,* je dois vous dire que ce n'est pas de gaieté de cœur qu'on a changé le calendrier scolaire. Ça a été fait dans l'intérêt primaire des jeunes. Il faut se rendre compte que les enfants ont été à l'école pendant une durée de 18 mois et que repousser les examens pour novembre/décembre de l'année prochaine, ce sera vraiment pénible pour eux, et demander aux élèves qui sont en *Lower VI* cette année-ci de prendre les examens à la fin de cette année en novembre serait aussi pénible. Alors, pour nous, c'est clair que la décision qui a été prise a été dans l'intérêt primaire des enfants. Nous allons, bien sûr, nous assurer que les enfants ne soient pas pénalisés en aucune façon. Bien sûr, que les *stakeholders* sont toujours libres à venir vers nous avec des propositions. Mais les décisions que nous avons prises ont été dans l'intérêt des élèves parce que vous réalisez aujourd'hui, M. le président, que les élèves ont été dans le même grade, dans la même classe pendant 18 mois. Et si nous voulons les aider, c'est de s'assurer qu'ils puissent faire l'évaluation, prendre les examens le plus tôt possible. Repousser vers novembre de l'année prochaine voudrait dire ajouter six mois de plus sur leur année scolaire. De toutes les façons, demander à ces élèves de prendre les examens aussi à la fin de cette année-ci voudrait dire leur demander d'aller prendre les examens sans avoir complété le curriculum, le syllabus.

M. le président, les *stakeholders* sont toujours *welcome* à venir vers nous avec des idées, mais nous avons pris les décisions en gardant au centre de notre action l'intérêt primaire des étudiants.

Merci, M. le président.

Dr. Gungapersad: The solutions proposed by stakeholders are not for this year; they are short-term solutions. They may take a few years; that is what they have been suggesting.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is what I said earlier; that, at this stage, we do not plan any reverting, but we are going to ensure that all students are properly treated and that no one is adversely affected by decisions taken by the Ministry. So, we are going to help and, in due time, we are going to see whether it is possible or not to revert back.

Mr Speaker: Time over!

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ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS COVID-19 PANDEMIC 2020 - PRIMARY & SECONDARY SCHOOL PREMISES – SANITIZATION CONTRACTS (20.04.2021)

(No. B/241) 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 sanitary protocols established amid the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, she will state who is responsible for the sanitization of the primary and secondary school premises, indicating if contracts were awarded therefor and, if so, table the list of the contractors, indicating in each case, the –

- (a) terms and conditions ;
- (b) contract value;
- (c) date of award of contract, and
- (d) eligibility criteria of the contractor.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall make a combined reply to PQs B/241 and B/282 as both relate to the same subject matter.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic in Mauritius in March 2020, schools were closed as from 19 March and reopened on 01 July 2020. The Ministry worked out a general preparedness plan in consultation with the Ministry of Health and Wellness for the reopening of all schools and for cleaning of the departments of the Ministry. I wish to point out that a series of actions were taken by the Ministry to ensure a safe and secure environment. For example, full sensitisation of all sanitary precautions to be adopted by student community and the school personnel, flyers on precautionary measures against COVID-19 were distributed in all educational institutions, as well as posters. Health and sanitary guidelines were formulated with the collaboration of the Ministry of Health and Wellness to ensure adequate health and sanitary measures are taken throughout the academic year. Guidelines included temperature checks upon arrival at schools, the mandatory use of face masks by students and personnel, frequent cleaning and disinfection of the classrooms and high-touch places amongst others to

ensure protection. Rapid PCR testing was carried out for all teachers and non-teaching staff to ensure health and safety of all students upon resumption. A series of sensitisation workshops were also held with the collaboration of the World Health Organisation and the Ministry of Health and Wellness, with members of school health clubs on infection prevention and control of Covid-19.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a procurement exercise was also launched for the cleaning of all Government and aided primary schools and State Secondary Schools on a one-off basis by the Ministry. Bids were invited from registered contractors for cleaning and disinfection. Contracts were awarded to the following two service providers, namely: Rolington Company Ltd for 105 schools in Zone 1, for the total sum of Rs1,349,000.00; 92 schools in Zone 2, for a total sum of Rs1,248,000.00, and the second contractor was ELM Services Ltd; 73 schools in Zone 3, for a total sum of Rs1,860,434.00; 56 schools in Zone 4, for the total sum of Rs1,680,847.80. The contract included transport, disinfection of all furniture, doors and windows of classrooms, offices, staircases, corridors, toilets, amongst others, in all the schools. The contract also included the warehouse of the Ministry.

In addition, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has also an ongoing contract with MauriFacilities Management Co. Ltd, a Government-owned company, under the aegis of Landscape, engaged in daily cleaning of all our primary and secondary schools. Cleaning and disinfection are also carried out by the general workers and office auxiliaries.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for the second wave of COVID-19 this year, schools were closed as from 10 March 2021. The cleaning and disinfection of schools during the period of examinations have been done as per the recent guidelines from the Ministry of Health and Wellness by Mauri-Facilities Management Co. Ltd and the personnel of the Ministry. No other contract was awarded for one-off sanitisation and disinfection by my Ministry.

Dr. Gungapersad: Given that we have to learn to adapt to new sanitary realities in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic, is the hon. Minister considering equipping our schools with sanitisation tunnels for the safety and security of our children and staff in the days to come?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, all the measures taken were guided by the Ministry of Health and Wellness and the use of sanitizers, actually is being done, but then no sanitising tunnel has been planned for the near future.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Mr Armance: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Minister replied my PQ together with the PQ of hon. Dr. Gungapersad, and you did not even give me a chance to put one supplementary question.

Mr Speaker: Did you express ...

Mr Armance: Of course, I did.

Mr Speaker: I am sorry for that, I did not... **Mr**

Armance: If I may?

Mr Speaker: Please, go ahead!

Mr Armance: Can I know from the hon. Minister, for the procurement exercise, whether there has been due diligence on the contractor to avoid any recurring problem that occurs last time during the confinement, and whether the contractors are well qualified to perform sanitisation of the buildings and schools?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, we did not have any problem at the level of my Ministry during the confinement period and the contractors who had sent their bids were all registered contractors at the level of the Ministry.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

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LOCKDOWN - EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS (30.03.2021)

(No. B/92) **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 educational psychologists, she will state the-

(a) number thereof employed by her Ministry and working on a full time/part time basis in each of the 4 Zones and in Rodrigues, indicating the number and

nature of the cases they addressed and the follow-up done during the 2020 Covid-19 lockdown, and

(b) number of students they are supporting during the current Covid-19 lockdown.

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 there are, as at date, three senior educational psychologists, 31 educational psychologists working on full time basis in the four educational zones as follows –

- Zone 1: 12 educational psychologists and 1 senior educational psychologist;
- Zone 2: 8 psychologists, the senior most one acting as senior psychologists;
- Zone 3: 1 senior psychologist and 6 educational psychologists;
- Zone 4: 1 senior educational psychologist and 5 educational psychologists.

With regard to Rodrigues, I am informed that there are two educational psychologists working on full time basis. I wish to inform the House that they are supported by 26 educational social workers.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Health and Wellness Directorate of my Ministry along with the National Education Counselling Service took measures for sound empathy for the psychosocial comfort of our children during the lockdown. The educational psychologists of my Ministry addressed a total of 223 cases during the lockdown period in 2020. I am advised

that these were behavioural cases categorised as cases related due to oppositional behaviour, family conflicts, aggressive behaviour, emotional distress, suicide ideation and planning, bereavement, persistent low mood and domestic violence. Cases of children displaying signs of non-school related anxiety, trauma, emotional dysregulation, withdrawal, hyperactivity and school related stress were also tackled.

Mr Speaker, Sir, despite the lockdown, these children and their parents were provided with help, support, guidance and counselling by the Health and Wellness and the NECS of my Ministry. Interventions made included counselling by phone with students and responsible parties, motivational counselling, guidance to establish effective study plans, referral to other institutions as well.

Follow-up of the cases was done through the phone conversations with the students and their family members. Online working sessions were also conducted whereby parents were explained how to design activities to help manage the behaviour of children at home and how to help their children with their studies during the lockdown period amongst others.

With regard to Rodrigues, I am informed by the Chief Commissioner's Office that no cases were attended individually during the 2020 Covid-19 lockdown. However, the educational psychologists did radio interventions for students on the following topics: how to spend time during the lockdown and to endure lockdown positively, sensitisation on mental health and enhancing family bond. Pupils were also provided with emergency numbers which they could contact for psychological support.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that the educational psychologists in Rodrigues also did e-counselling with around 15 pupils and parents. Upon resumption of school, counselling had resumed to support pupils and parents. It is to be highlighted that the monitoring of cases referred to educational psychologists was continued during the lockdown period and cases referred during the same period were also monitored after school resumption in July 2020. Furthermore, audio recordings and videos were also prepared by the NECS to support students and their parents during the lockdown period.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, since the start of the current lockdown till date, the educational psychologists have supported a total of 142 students. A brochure to guide students and how to tackle their exams with a more serene and calm state of mind and how to cope with exams stress during the lockdown has also been prepared by the department. The brochure includes coping strategies like breathing mindfully, practicing

gratitude and letting go of negative emotions. A support service for students sitting for examinations during the lockdown period is being provided by the educational psychologists along with sensitisation programmes on the MBC.

Though Rodrigues is not under lockdown, I am informed that formative and supportive sessions are currently being done by the educational psychologists for Grade 6 pupils.

Dr. Gungapersad: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to know, the number of cases that you have mentioned, 223 during the last lockdown, 142 cases during the present lockdown, how do we come to these cases because we have students who do follow- up during normal time? Has there been an increase in the number because of the lockdown and how did these educational psychologists find out additional or new cases during the lockdown? What was the methodology and mechanism?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, during normal time, students at school are identified and referred to the psychologists through the system. However, during the lockdown period students contacted, probably the NEC, and from there on, the support was provided.

Dr. Gungapersad: This is a very sensitive issue that we are talking. We know that children who are in need of assistance generally come from very vulnerable backgrounds, from backgrounds where there are, maybe domestic violence, abusive parents, parents addicted to illicit substances.

Mr Speaker: Put your question!

Dr. Gungapersad: So, how did these educational psychologists reach out these students?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have just stated, these students may have contacted the NEC through the educational social workers as well. But I must say that we cannot generalise saying that this type of support is provided solely to people coming from vulnerable groups. Children from all walks of life do require support and the support is provided to one and all on request either through the system, through the teachers who identify them or by the parents or the students themselves contacting the NEC.

Ms J. Bérenger: Merci. L'honorable ministre peut-elle nous dire si elle est au courant que selon le *School Safety Task Force* de 2018, les ratios recommandés selon les Etats Unis

est d'un professionnel en psychologie pour 500 élèves ou un *School Counsellor* pour 250 élèves pour un accompagnement efficace. Hors, actuellement les ratios selon ses propres chiffres, est d'un accompagnement, un *educational social worker* pour 3,663 enfants. Donc, peut- elle nous dire qu'est-ce qui est prévu par son ministère pour améliorer ses ratios?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: M. le président, nous sommes d'accord que les chiffres sont différents, si on peut arriver à augmenter le nombre de soutiens qu'on offre aux élèves, c'est toujours *welcome*. Mais bien sûr, compte tenu du budget, compte tenu de ce que nous avons là comme ressource, nous devons y dépendre. Seulement, c'est vrai que nous avons toujours et chaque année demandé une augmentation et nous recevons chaque année quelques *additional officers*. Bien sûr, nous allons essayer d'avoir en plus mais là, valeur du jour, nous dépendons de ces professionnels et nous travaillons avec eux, avec le soutien des *educational social workers as well*.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Dr. Gungapersad: I would like to know whether all these educational psychologists, even the seniors, receive a Work Access Permit during this lockdown or the previous one?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: No, Mr Speaker, Sir, because as I have just mentioned, they have been working through phones and e-counselling.

Dr. Gungapersad: What about ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Next question! You have four questions!

Covid-19

YEAR 2021

**ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS
MELBEES NURSERY SCHOOL - COVID-19 CASES - CONTACT
TRACING
(23.03.2021)**

(No. B/32) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Melbees Nursery School, he will state the number of registered pupils thereat at the time of detection of the first two positive recent cases of Covid-19 thereat, indicating the number of –

- (a) registered pupils;
- (b) teaching and non-teaching staff members and;
- (c) parents thereof who were quarantined, and
- (d) quarantine centres where they underwent same and duration thereof.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the first two cases of COVID-19 at Melbees Nursery School were detected on 07 March 2021. Following a contact tracing exercise, 316 persons consisting of –

- (a) 95 registered pupils at Melbees Nursery School;
- (b) 16 teaching and non-teaching staff members, and
- (c) 205 parents and siblings were quarantined.

As for part (d) of the question, the following quarantine centres were used –

- (a) Lagoon attitude;
- (b) Long Beach Hotel;
- (c) Le Mauricia;

- (d) Maradiva;
- (e) Constance Prince Maurice;
- (f) Beachcomber Trou aux Biches, and (g) Constance Belle Mare Plage.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the last day of school at Melbees Nursery School was on 26 February 2021. As informed, the first two cases of COVID-19 at the school were detected on 07 March 2021. Consequently, the quarantine period for the children and parents other than the two positive cases was up to the 14th day from the last contact.

However, some parents who were quarantined at Lagoon Attitude Hotel breached the conditions of the quarantine. Hence, their quarantine period had to be extended.

Moreover, a group of 14 persons, who were quarantined at Le Mauricia Hotel also had to extend their stay as the last day of contact with the positive cases could not be ascertained.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I also wish to inform that as some rooms could not accommodate families of more than 2 persons and some children had difficulties to cope with the confined space, 31 persons were transferred from Lagoon Attitude to Constance Belle Mare Plage which had more spacious rooms.

Mr Speaker: Hon Juman!

Mr Juman: Merci, M. le président. M. le ministre, pourquoi une famille spécifique a-t-elle pu se rendre au centre de quarantaine par ses propres moyens alors que les autres ont été transportés par le ministère de la Santé et sous escorte policière, et pourquoi cette même famille, je vous parle de Monsieur le CEO du *Mauritius Telecom*, le VVIP, qui n'a passé que 4 jours en quarantaine contrairement aux autres, 14 jours?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, for this family I do not have the information, but once I will have the information I can reply.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Quiet!

Dr. Jagutpal: Now, why they have spent four days, I think the duration of the quarantine period was determined based on the last date of contact with the positive cases and was decided based on the advice of the technical expert of my Ministry. This is in line with the interim guidance of the WHO on contact tracing in the context of COVID-19, issued on 01

February 2021, which recommends supported quarantine for a duration of 14 days from the last contact with a confirmed case to minimise risk of onward transmission.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bérenger!

An hon. Member: M. le ministre, pour confirmer qu'il y a... **Mr**

Speaker: Wait! Hon. Ms Bérenger!

Ms J. Bérenger: Merci. Des recherches comme celles de Sprang and Silman en 2013 ont montré que les enfants isolés ou mis en quarantaine sont plus susceptibles de développer des états de stress aigu. Pourrait-on savoir si la quarantaine était la seule solution dans ce cas ? Si oui, quelle prise en charge axée sur l'intérêt de l'enfant ou quel soutien psychologique a été apporté à ces enfants en quarantaine ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think I totally agree with the hon. Member because it is very difficult for children to stay in quarantine. But these children, they have been staying with their parents. At that time, Mauritius was having only a few cases and hardly a few days later, the number of cases rose to more than 60. My Ministry is trying to do everything that is possible to accommodate these children in better places, that is why they have been transferred in other hotels for their own good.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary hon. Juman!

Mr Juman: M. le ministre, vous avez parlé de '*breach of quarantine*' par certains à l'hôtel Lagoon Attitude. Puis-je savoir, ce '*breach of quarantine*' concerne quoi?

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are using as quarantine, hotels accommodating more than 200 at times, and sometimes 300 quarantined persons are serviced by one doctor, is one quarantine officer, one nursing officer. Can you imagine how difficult it is for those few staff working in quarantine centres to look after each and every quarantined person? In that case, for every person, we should have a quarantine officer and a Police Officer, and a Police Officer to supervise the other Police Officers.

Mr Speaker: Time is over, but I allow you one last question, short!

Mr Juman: M. le ministre, ce que vous venez de dire à l'Assemblée, c'est très grave. On est en centre de quarantaine sous la responsabilité du ministère. Voilà cette photo qui a été prise le 12 mars avec des enfants qui jouaient dans la cour. À qui la responsabilité ? C'est aux parents ou au ministère ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think the hon. Member should understand the context children were admitted and it is the responsibility of the parents to look after their children.

Mr Speaker: Are you giving the answer?

Dr. Jagutpal: You want to...

Mr Speaker: Time over! I have to advise that PQs B/41, B/42, B/45 have been withdrawn.

Covid-19

YEAR 2020

MAURITIAN UNIVERSITIES & SPECIALISED INSTITUTIONS - FOREIGN STUDENTS - ESTABLISHED PROTOCOL (24.11.2020)

(No. B/944) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the foreign students studying in Mauritian universities and other specialized institutions, she will state the established protocol in relation to the – (a) first year students registered for the first time in Mauritian institutions, and

(b) students already studying in Mauritius who went on vacation in their native countries and who are unable to return to Mauritius due to COVID-19 restrictions?

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic has compelled authorities in Mauritius to review the established protocol regarding the entry of foreigners to Mauritius, including foreign students who generally take studies in any local, high educational or training institutions. As a rule, all foreigners wishing to enter Mauritius have to conform to the COVID-19 protocols in force in the country for the safety of our people.

With regard to part (a) of the question, with the closure of the Mauritian borders, following the outbreak and spread of COVID-19, I am informed that applications for entry to Mauritius from first the students registered for the first time in any Mauritian high educational or training institution, were not entertained by the relevant authorities, and with the phased reopening of the borders as from 01 October 2020, I am informed that applications from recognised high educational or training institutions in respect of new registered foreign students are now being accepted by the Passport and Immigration Office as per the existing guidelines for application and issue of permits in respect of foreign students.

With regard to part (b) of the question, the admission to Mauritius of those foreign students during the pandemic and prior to the phased reopening of our borders depended on the availability of flights. However, every possible assistance was extended by my Ministry and the Higher Education Commission to the local higher educational institutions with a view to facilitating the travel arrangements of those foreign students to return to Mauritius to resume their studies.

The House may wish to know that my Ministry has put in place a coordinating mechanism, whereby any Mauritian educational or training institution having registered foreign students still stranded abroad, may forward the list of same to the Higher Education Commission for onward submission through my Ministry to the competent authorities, including the Passport and Immigration Office for the facilitation of the issue of students' visas and residence permits as well as for the travel arrangements.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that the travelling protocol applicable for any students is that they will have to produce a certificate of negative COVID-19 PCR test administered between 5 and 7 days prior to the date of boarding on flights of the last point of embarkation. Upon arrival in Mauritius, the foreign students, whether new or existing ones, have to mandatorily abide by all sanitary protocols put in place by the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

Mr Nagalingum: I am informed that, at least, one particular private institution has received visas for the foreign students, and for me, this is clearly *une politique de deux poids deux mesures*. Will the hon. Vice-Prime Minister confirm this information and explain why this *politique de deux poids deux mesures*?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, as far as the phased reopening of the borders is concerned, as soon as the Ministry received requests from the institutions, the requests were forwarded to the authorities, and as soon as we came to know about this problem, we advised the Higher Education Commission to come into contact with all educational institutions and ask them whether they had students who are still awaiting to come back to the island, and we have offered the same facilities to all.