

## **PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOLS – HEALTH SERVICE (29/03/11)**

**(No. B/86) Mr S. Boolell (Second Member for Curepipe & Midlands)** asked the Minister of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare whether, in regard to child abuse and neglect in the kindergartens and other pre-primary set-ups, he will state if Government will consider introducing -

- (a) pre-primary schools health service which would provide regular medical screening and physical abuse detection in the sector, and
- (b) basic compulsory nursing training programmes for child carers and baby minders.

**Mrs Bappoo:** Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, according to the Institutions for the Welfare and Protection of Children, Regulations 2000 of the Child Protection Act 1994, my Ministry is mandated to cater for the registration and monitoring of Child Day Care Centres providing services to children in the age group of three months to three years. On the other hand, policies pertaining to pre-primary schools fall under the purview of the Early Childhood Care and Education Authority (ECCEA) which falls under the aegis of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources.

With your permission, Mr Speaker Sir, I shall therefore reply only to part (b) of the question.

I wish to inform the House that according to the provisions of the Regulations 2000, it is mandatory for all Day Care Centres offering day care services to children in the age group of three months to three years to recruit caregivers having qualifications or experience in the field of early childhood.

Such courses are provided by institutions registered with the Mauritius Qualifications Authority, such as the Mauritius Institute of Education, Bethlehem, Charles Telfair Institute, the True ECD Academy, among others.

It is to be noted that these courses include modules related to the detection and referral of child abuse and neglect as well as provision of first hand care and support to victims.

Members of the House may note that, unlike the pre-primary set up where most of the institutions which are operating are run by the Government, all child Day Care Centres are private owned, with the exception of the Centre at Baie du Tombeau where all the caregivers are qualified and trained in the field of early childhood care. This Centre is the only one which is being run and managed by the National Children's Council.

In the light of the above, my Ministry, being a regulating body, ensures that the day care centres comply with the provisions of the Regulations. However, as I just mentioned earlier in PQ No. B/83, my Ministry does step in from time to time to provide training

courses for caregivers, with the assistance of the MIE, the last one having been conducted from September to December 2009.

It is to be noted that, in practice, child day care centres and pre-primary units are operating side by side at times on the same premises. In accordance with the current legislation, they should have separate managers. In line with the concept of working together, I am proposing to set up a Coordinating Committee with the Ministry of Education, through the ECCEA, to monitor the situation regarding early childhood.

**Dr. S. Boolell:** My question, I believe, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has not been answered. I wish to ask the hon. Minister whether Government intends introducing a pre-primary schools health service to be able to detect medically all these cases which, week after week, day after day, we are reading about in the press.

**Mrs Bappoo:** As I said, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I cannot answer for the pre-primary sector. The question should be put to my colleague, the Minister of Education.

**Mr Obeegadoo:** The majority of pre-schools are not publicly owned but privately owned, and the Minister might enquire and confirm that. My question relates to part (b) of the question. The Minister has been talking about the courses. Can she tell us what are the qualifications prescribed for child carers under the Regulation, and whether these qualifications include basic nursing training?

**Mrs Bappoo:** I have just answered. In my answer, I have given the list of institutions responsible in putting up the training courses for day care centres. The carers can go for their training and they are being supervised by their own management of their centres and, from time to time, the Ministry also comes in. I said that there are two different modules in the training programme that take care about what is being questioned in paragraph (b). I have given the answer.

**Mr Obeegadoo:** With all due respect to the Minister, my question was not about what courses were being offered nor what institutions are offering these courses. The Regulations mention that no person shall be registered as a child caregiver, unless he/she produces evidence that he/she has basic qualifications or experience as appropriate. So, my question is: have these qualifications been prescribed? Which are the qualifications that have been prescribed by way of regulation, and do they include, as my colleague just asked, basic nursing training?

**Mrs Bappoo:** Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as I have just said, there is a list of responsible institutions giving these trainings. When the managers submit their request for registration of a child day care centre, they have to produce one by one the certificate of that particular caregiver, where he/she followed the course, and the certificate needs to be produced. The course...

*(Interruptions)*

**The Deputy Speaker:** Please address the Chair!

**Mrs Labelle:** Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether the qualification required is a certificate course, a diploma course, a degree course, a master course?

What is the qualification required? What are we expecting? Are we going to ask the institutions to tell us what we are going to prescribe or are we setting our requirements for this job? I do not know whether I am clear, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

**Mrs Bappoo:** In a child day care centre, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the staffing starts from the manager, who needs to have the higher qualification, be it the diploma or the degree. But it is not said degree, as far as I do understand, through the Regulation that has been prescribed. It is a diploma.

The second category of staff is the caregivers. They need a certificate; they might have been studying up to Form V, and they are qualified to follow it. This is what is being done by the Ministry of Social Integration actually with the MIE...

*(Interruptions)*

This is the certificate, and I am in consultation with the Ministry of Social Integration to further carry training programme for caregivers. If you leave the second category, you come to the third one, which is the helpers. The helpers do not need a diploma;...

*(Interruptions)*

they need a lower certificate. It is so simple! Intelligent Members do not put this sort of question! It is so simple!

*(Interruptions)*

**The Deputy Speaker:** Thank you very much.

*(Interruptions)*

We move to the next question! Hon. Quirin!