

Liberals renew questions on fire safety, air quality in schools

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THE TELEGRAM

The Liberals renewed calls for better fire-safety, air-quality and asbestos inspections for schools in the House of Assembly Tuesday.

The issues have come up repeatedly over the last year.

On Tuesday morning, before the start of the school day, a fire was discovered at Holy Heart of Mary High School in St. John's. An employee reported the fire, but no fire alarm was set off.

That prompted Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones to ask why.

Education Minister Darin King said an investigation is underway to answer that question.

But he said all fire and safety codes were up to standard at the school, which has been inspected a number of times in the last year.

Jones then asked if a review of fire safety, promised last year by the former director of education at the Eastern School District, Darrin Pike, has been done.

Pike was recently named deputy minister of education.

King said \$10 million has been spent on life-safety issues in schools over the last few years.

Jones also said the Liberals wrote the province's fire commissioner last June, asking that he inspect 20 schools around the province which were flagged by parents, students or teachers for fire-safety concerns. King said he was not aware of any list of schools.

Education critic Roland Butler also asked about mould and asbestos in schools.

On Monday, it was reported that St. Joseph's Academy in Lamaline would be temporarily closed due to the discovery of mould.

"Another week, another school affected by poor air quality," Butler said. "The only way this issue can be resolved is with a comprehensive air-quality study."

He asked the province to conduct the study when schools close for summer holidays this year.

But King said enhanced inspections are working and the province will act on individual mould problems "as the need arises."

Butler also noted the 2009 auditor general's report, which said only 28 per cent of schools in the province have had air-quality tests for asbestos, as of April 2007.

King said all but 10 schools have now been tested for asbestos and the rest will be done this spring.



Darin King



Roland Butler