

Shocking stats

Liberals ask about 'disturbing report' on Nain school

By DAVE BARTLETT

THE TELEGRAM

A shocking report written by staff at the school at Nain, Labrador in 2006 was the subject of debate on the floor of the House of Assembly Thursday.

Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones got a copy of it through an access to information request.

The report details high rates of dropouts and absenteeism, the affect a high suicide rate in the community is having on students and the high number of students needing special attention, mainly due to fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

Jones called it a "disturbing report" on education and social issues facing Jens Haven Memorial School.

"This report which was completed in 2006 was never released to the public, and I ask the minister today why that report was kept hidden," said Jones to Aboriginal Affairs Minister Patty Pottle.

But it was Education Minister Darin King who took the questions, and he didn't get off to a good start.

"She continues to come with lies and innuendo and half information," King said, who was immediately

called for unparliamentary language.

King withdrew the comment before finishing his answer.

He said the report wasn't secret and was not prepared by government, but by the school's administration.

"It was used as part of an advocacy effort to try to lobby for more resources for the school," he said.

King said since receiving the report, more teachers have been hired for the school, the curriculum is being reviewed and meetings have been held with the community.

But Jones asked why no provincial investigation was undertaken.

She said 72 per cent of the approximately 330 students were directly affected by the suicide of a close family member; two thirds of the students required moderate or intense education support; only 46 per cent stayed in school until Grade 12 and no students between Grades 4 and 7 were performing at an advanced level.

In fact, 95 per cent of the students in Grade 7 were performing below basic levels.

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Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones

Jones 'disturbed' and 'devastated'

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Outside the House, Jones told reporters she was "disturbed" that King suggested the report was a means to get more money from the province.

"Once I obtained (the report), I was absolutely devastated to learn (the situation) had escalated to the level that it had," she said.

Jones also said there's no indication government followed up on the report, nor if any of the statistics had improved.

"I am told right now that there are still some very critical problems that exist in that school that still need to be addressed," Jones said.

King and Pottle also took questions from reporters.

He disputed when his department received the report saying it was only received last year.

In that time, King said the province has cleared a backlog of assessing special needs students.

"We've eliminated that backlog through extra resources in the school."

He said there have also been talks with the community and local school board and the Nunatsiavut government.

Pottle said she's recently seen reports from all the schools in her district.

"From the reports that were getting back from the principals ... it's showing positive signs from all schools," she said.

Pottle was also quizzed on underlying social problems in the town.

One staggering statistic in the report was that the only bar in Nain — which has a population of 1,261 — is the third most profitable in the province. On top of that, almost half the population is under the legal drinking age.

Pottle said the province and Nunatsiavut government are working together on some of the social issues.

"Positive work is being done, but it's going to take some time," she said.

King agreed.

"In education, you don't bring in new initiatives and new resources one day and expect six months down the road, necessarily, that you're going to see a systemic change," he said.