

2025.07.08

4.16 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson of the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning regarding barriers to extending community access to school sporting facilities (OQ.166/2025):

Will the Minister advise what steps have been taken by his department since his appointment to identify potential barriers to extending community access to school sporting facilities, set out any barriers that have been identified, and state what actions are being taken to overcome them?

Deputy R.J. Ward (The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning):

I am working with the Minister for Infrastructure and his officers and my officers to assess the remaining availability for school sports facilities that could be used to further improve community use. I do share the ambition to maximise the use of these public facilities but it has to be achieved without impact on school use or safeguarding. I cannot equate safeguarding as a barrier; safeguarding is essential for our facilities in schools so it is not a barrier, it is just a reality of what we have to do in order to keep schools safe. I must also say, there is a huge use of the community in our school sports facilities. We recently had a joint meeting with the Minister and one of the heads ... a very, very positive meeting where the head was telling us that his facilities are so booked out he cannot find a space for a 5-a-side team. So they are used extensively across our estate, but of course it could always be better.

4.16.1 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Could the Minister - I think he has given one example there of a meeting that has taken place - give some examples of what is happening to make this happen, and are there any examples of successes or improvements?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

There are ongoing meetings between officers and ourselves. We have met I think 2 or 3 times, so some of things I have to receive from the schools, their timetable of when use is being needed by the school, to agree when those start times can happen. For example, finishing at 3.30 p.m. and starting something else at 3.30 p.m. is not practical because there is time after that, so we have to look very carefully at those times; they may be needed until 5.00 p.m. or 4.00 p.m., so that is happening. That has certainly happened across one of our schools; I have not got the details of which schools, I am afraid, but we can find out for the Deputy. Also, we are discussing the future. I have to say that if Gas Place School was finished by now, which it should have been, there is a 5G pitch on top of that, so there are new facilities that we are looking to plan with open community access for the communities as well. There is certainly work going on across a number of our facilities; I cannot remember the names of all of them but there is a lot of work going on with a group of Ministers.