

PRESS RELEASE

No: 27/2008

Date: 30 January 2008

Once again the Social Services Agency finds itself in the position of needing to correct the inaccurate and erroneous information contained in the latest press release from Fabian Picardo and the GSLP regarding the dispute at St Bernadette's.

The actual job description which applies to the staff at St Bernadette's very clearly states that their conditioned hours are 37 per week. It is the use of these 37 hours that Management uses to provide a range of specific and focused activities for the benefit of our service users.

Their job description also clearly states that they are responsible for attending to hygiene and toilet needs. The job description makes no reference to this activity being supervised. It is incorrect to state that this task has always been supervised by a nurse until a few years ago – it has never been supervised by a nurse either in schools or at St Bernadette's.

Mr Picardo states that the classroom aides did not complain at the time but they showed their goodwill and continued with the task unsupervised. Even if this were the case (which it isn't), the status quo is therefore that the work had been unsupervised for "a few years". This was confirmed by the TGWU District Officer in his fax of 14th January in which he stated that the aide's "goodwill" was being withdrawn. This therefore constituted industrial action on the part of the aides as they were refusing to undertake a normal and accepted part of their responsibilities.

Mr Picardo also claims that management are trying to "alter long established working practices". The long established and therefore normal working practices (ie those practices that have been in use for the last few years) at St Bernadette's include the following;

- Leaving to go home when their work is completed and at management's discretion.
- Looking after the hygiene and toileting needs of service users without supervision – there was even a period from March 2001 to September 2003 when there was no nurse working at the centre
- Assisting the service users undertake a range of activities without supervision from the Occupational Therapist, or the teacher before the OT was appointed

- Taking part in the Social Service Agency's standard process whereby all staff have regular meetings with their manager to discuss their own progress and development
- Completing Incident Forms as and when incidents occur

Management are therefore not actually seeking to change anything and this dispute commenced when the union "withdrew goodwill" and instructed its members not to do these things which are part of the job description and which they have been doing for a considerable period of time.

Mr Picardo's press release implies that these staff have been leaving at 4.00 pm for 22 years. Unfortunately Mr Picardo also gets the length of service statistics quoted in his press release wrong. The staff involved in this dispute have 18, 17, 15, 12, 3 and 3 years of service at St Bernadette's so none of the staff have been leaving at 4.00 pm for 22 years, in fact they only started to do this when recently instructed to do so by the union.

It is nonsense to suggest that these staff have been singled out because of their Union membership. The current situation was initiated by TGWU fax, when it was confirmed that these staff, and these staff only, were withdrawing their co-operation in key areas of their job description. It is this action that has singled them out, not the fact of their trade union membership. The GSLP's intervention in this dispute is not helpful to Social Service's service users, the majority of staff members and the parents.

We therefore call upon the GSLP to stop "fanning the flames" of this dispute for its own political ends with distorted and factually inaccurate forays into the media.