HM GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR
Ministry of Education, Telecommunications and Justice
Suite 771
Europort
Gibraltar

PRESS RELEASE

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Opposition Criticism of New Classrooms at St Joseph's is Absurd

The Government regrets the Opposition's irresponsible attempt to scaremonger and cause unnecessary alarm and distress amongst parents of children attending St Joseph's First and Middle Schools. It is a matter of deep concern that the Opposition has sought to attack the Government without any attempt whatsoever to discover the true facts and without caring about the truth.

The latest statement by the Opposition in relation to the new classrooms at St Joseph's shows once again that the GSD will clutch at straws and at every rumour that they can attach themselves to in their efforts to denigrate the Government's drive to improve not just the financial and human resources in our schools, but also the buildings and facilities for the education of our children.

The Minister for Education, Gilbert Licudi, QC, said:

"This is a clear attempt by the GSD to discredit the investment and planning that has gone into improving the educational infrastructure available to our children. It is, quite simply, an exercise in misinformation and contradiction.

Numerous statements in the Opposition's press release are so far removed from the truth that they amount to pure invention. The press release cannot be, therefore, a bona fide attempt by the Opposition to criticise the Government or hold it to account.

It is not true, for example, that the toilet facilities are designed for adults or that the sinks are too high for children to use. It is also not true that noise from the lunch hall on the first floor interferes with learning in the classrooms. The lunch hall is only used at lunchtimes (i.e. when the classrooms are not in use) so there cannot be any interference with learning even if noise filtered through which it does not.

Telephone No: (350) 200 52557 (Centrex: 3223)

The Opposition's statements that the facilities are not fit for purpose, that they have been built in a rush and that corners have been cut are completely absurd. As with any new build, there are snagging issues which are being dealt with.

Further, the suggestion by the Opposition that the classrooms will be cold in winter shows that the GSD is prepared to speculate about the future without any concern whatsoever about the true position.

In fact, all windows are double glazed precisely to keep the classrooms warm in winter. Insulation has been fitted between the floors and an innovative system installed to cool the classrooms during the summer months by extracting air during the night and bringing in cooler air from outside.

In addition, all health and safety requirements were met and the facilities were certified as fit by the relevant Government authorities.

The reality is that the GSD embarked, when in Government, in a building programme in the South District without giving any consideration at all to the educational needs of the families that would be moving in to the area. It was, therefore, left to the GSLP/Liberals to consider those needs and to plan and deliver extra classrooms for both St Joseph's Middle and First Schools.

The new classrooms have been built to very high standards with the needs of children at the core of the design brief. This was prepared in full consultation with the respective Headteachers of the First and Middle schools as well as the technical experts available to HM Government. The standards are the same as those for the Notre Dame extension. This was completed in September 2012 and has been in use for over a year without any concerns expressed by anyone.

The false statements by the Opposition will not shake the Government from its resolve to improve not just the quality of education but also the facilities in our educational establishments. In less than two years, the Government has already completed extensions to Notre Dame, St Joseph's First and Middle Schools and St Martin's. The Government's record in the quality of these additional facilities is there for all to see and speaks for itself.

Given that - in addition to these extensions - two entirely new schools are scheduled to be delivered by September 2015, the fact is that in one Parliamentary term the GSLP/Liberals will have delivered more for the fabric of education than the GSD delivered in four terms. That may be the stinging reality that has prompted Mrs Ellul Hammond to make such reckless errors in the untrue criticisms levelled against the Government. Such carelessness says so much about the GSD's approach to politics that the public would do well to bear in mind in future this particular example of political "foot-in-mouth".

Tel: (350) 70071 Centrex: 3261; Fax: (350) 59271 Centrex: 3262; e-mail: moj@gibraltar.gov.gi