

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

JUNIOR KINDERGARTEN IMPLEMENTATION

February 7, 2017

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the saga of what funding is available to implement junior kindergarten continues because communication by the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment and his department is so ineffective. But it is not too late to turn things around. What we need are some straight answers.

In early December, parents and trustees appeared at the standing committee on social development to deliver a simple message about the introduction of junior kindergarten. Another grade of school requires another grade of funding. At that point, the Minister said he planned to fund the new grade with a combination of new investments and cuts.

Last week, the Minister of Finance said the government would provide an additional investment that would fully fund junior kindergarten in the life of this Assembly, although he did say that not all schools were ready for JK. Then later in the week, an assistant deputy minister at the Department of Education, Culture and Employment announced through the media that the government would provide the whole \$5.1 million needed this fall. He said school boards would not be asked to reallocate any of their funding to cover the extra grade; but wait, there is more.

Yesterday, the Minister told this House that the whole amount of money allocated to JK won't be needed this year. He said, and I quote: "We will work with boards to make the money they need to implement junior kindergarten available to them when it is needed. Once we know the actual enrolment figures, the government will bring a request for supplemental funding to the Legislative Assembly in the fall of 2017 to fully fund implementation."

Mr. Speaker, this is not how school boards or district education authorities' budgeting works. Once we pass the budget, school authorities create a budget for the 2017-18 school year and it is submitted to ECE for approval. That has to take place before the end of the fiscal year in March. If they are going to hire new teachers or they are going to lay them off, they must plan in advance and not do that two weeks before school starts.

Mr. Speaker, school boards in Yellowknife are behind the idea of JK. They are holding parent information nights this month. They expect enrolment of about 250 four-year-olds in September. They remain concerned that inclusive schooling doesn't include the new grade and about the cost of busing these little people, yet they are ready to go. But is the government ready?