

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFEFRAME LAKE

QUESTION 147-19(2): DAY CARE AT ECOLE J.H. SISSION

March 4, 2020

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. I spoke today about the need to provide more accessible and affordable childcare by investing in spaces in which childcare can be offered. Has the Minister considered providing childcare space in new or renovated schools as a way to provide suitable space for childcare in communities across the NWT? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Yellowknife Centre. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, part of our mandate is to better utilize GNWT infrastructure for early childhood programs, so that's a definite consideration. Right now, our capital standards don't say anything about childcare spaces in schools, so we're not mandated to build them, but that doesn't necessarily mean we're prohibited from building it, either, so it's a discussion that we're currently having. Thank you.

MS. GREEN: I'm jumping on this bandwagon. I'm particularly interested in the possibility of providing childcare space at J.H. Sissons school, which is in my riding, and which is going to be rebuilt, starting in the near future. Is it still possible to talk about providing childcare space in that school? Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: I hate to stop the fun, here, but the answer for that one is "no," unfortunately. The contract, or the engineering and design contract, was awarded in June 2019 and that work has already commenced. At this point, it's too late to include childcare space in that plan. However, in the future, if we have room available in the school, that could be used for childcare space, but dedicated space is not in the plan right now and it's too late to add that.

MS. GREEN: Okay, let me be the first to call the Minister a party pooper. What I'm interested in knowing is: in the event that it is possible to build childcare spaces in schools, what would that look like? Would it be on a partnership model with respect to service delivery? Would the partners need to bring money to the table? What are the Minister's initial thoughts on how this would work?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Right now, we're open to anything. This is very early in this Assembly, and this mandate item, I think, spring 2021 is when we look to have a plan

formed on what this would look like. Of course, we're open to partnerships. I mean, that's sort of been the mantra of this government. Every community is different, and so we have to look at the specific communities. Perhaps the GNWT is the only game in town and we could provide that service, but that is all yet to be determined. Right now, I won't say no to anything going forward in terms of what we're going to consider.

Mr. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Final supplementary, Member for Yellowknife Centre

MS. GREEN: Thank you. Can the Minister tell us what kind of research is being done on this topic, whether there is a jurisdictional scan, for example, to see how childcare is provided in other remote and high-cost locations? Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: As part of the mandate commitment, as well, we're working on the Early Learning and Childcare 2030 Strategy, and so there is some work that has been going into that. I don't have the specifics of that, but I can find out and share that with the Member. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.