

G. McNeilly
07.11.2023
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Birchwood Junior High School
Home & School
November 3, 2023

Suzie Dillon,
Chair of the Standing Committee
Health & Social Development

Good Morning Susie,

I am writing this letter on behalf of the Home & School from Birchwood Junior High School in Charlottetown. During the meeting held this week on Wednesday (November 1). There were many concerns raised about the safety of our children, school staff, the school property and the surrounding community. The custodial staff are required to do a sweep of the property each morning before school starts to identify drug paraphernalia, used needles, crack pipes and condoms. This week alone the custodial staff were required to call EMS for a person who had overdosed (OD) on the school's property.

Our teachers (through the encouragement of police services) have had to usher people off of the school property in the morning, remove tents, and move people off of the sports fields so we are able to have our teams practice, and to hold simple phys ed classes. The portable toilets at Orelabr are a dump for used needles which make the area for kids, coaches and parents very unsafe. The staff are now required to patrol the grounds at break, early morning, and at lunch time all the way down to Ken's Corner to ensure the safety of our students.

Our teachers, and administration are amazing. We value the support, guidance and education they provide our children each and every day. To ask our teachers, admin or custodial staff to perform these extra duties is not something we want, nor should the Department of Education or the Government of Prince Edward Island. Frankly it is not their responsibility, it is not safe to confront someone who could be extremely dangerous or possibly in a drug induced psychosis.

While we had City Police Officer Tim Keizer speak with the students at the start of the school year in an effort to educate and support the students, it created an environment of fear. These conversations must be shared beforehand with the parents so we are better prepared to have similar conversations at home.

Our students are scared, many not even leaving the school grounds to enjoy pizza, or go to one of the local convenience stores with classmates. The students were told where they could go, and where to stay away from. To tell our students to stay away from Ken's Corner is unacceptable. We are robbing our kids of the wonderful experiences of attending Birchwood Junior High. As a school our educational staff should not be taking on extra duties that simply do not fall under their contractual obligations. I sense and understand the collective frustrations of the school community. **This needs to change**, and we need a coherent action plan from the government of Prince Edward Island, and all stakeholders to find solutions immediately.

Dating back to the Community Outreach Center moving to the old curling club in 2021, no one from the school or surrounding community was consulted. We have seen an increase in drug usage, violence, and many incidents which will continue to impact our students well-being, and mental health. There are individuals who are not permitted by law to be within 500 meters of a school. Yet day after day there they are. Again the safety of all our students is paramount, and these situations put both the students and staff at a very high risk. It is also important to note that individuals who have those orders in place need to access services, and this puts those in greatest need in violation of probation orders.

Now the situation is deteriorating by the day. We just had an incident where one of our kids accidentally picked up discarded needles from a garbage bin he knocked over. Fortunately he was not pricked, however to say we are concerned would be an understatement.

We understand moving the Center will not solve all of our problems so we would like to see some actionable items addressed:

- 1-800 number established by Health PEI to pick up discarded needles (Not City workers, or custodial staff)

- Organizations that pass out safe supplies should also be required to collect dirty needles.

- Educational seminars for parents in the school to address issues related to discarded needles, emergency care options, safety and understanding of the drug culture we are now experiencing.

- A government meeting with Home & School, Police Services, Health PEI, Housing, Social Services, and service providers to open lines of communication to the future of the center, shelter and transitional housing options that are placed in the area of schools, and local communities..

With the cold weather, and situations of concern increasing we need to see a plan that satisfies the school, staff and community. Now is the time for a strategy to address the many issues raised at our meeting. Thank you, and we look forward to hearing a response to our many concerns from parents who want to be part of a solution to a growing community problem.

Best regards,

Michael Redmond
President
Home & School
Birchwood Junior High School

Cc: Leader of the Official Opposition Hal Perry
Natalie Jamieson Minister of Education
Premier Dennis King
Leader of the Third Party Karla Bernard
Mayor of Charlottetown Philip Brown
Councilor for the Ward- Mitchell Tweel

