

**STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION
57/2008**

11 June 2008

The Government has accused Steven Linares of having said in his budget speech that “the level of truancy in Gibraltar schools is higher than in the UK and that the Government here does nothing about it.”

This is wholly untrue. It is wholly untrue because it is was not Mr Linares who said that, it is the Government who said it in their press release.

The comparison made between Gibraltar and England by Mr Linares was on the basis that non-attendance at school in Gibraltar was higher than the average for schools in England. This non-attendance can be for a variety of reasons, one element of it is truancy which is non attendance for no valid reason without permission. This is the one that the Government has a duty to address and correct.

It is not true that there is no consensus in England as to the definition of truancy because statistics on truancy levels in English schools are published and this would be impossible if each area had a different definition.

The Opposition would not normally consult the Oxford Dictionary on this matter. However, given that the Government needed to use it in 1996 to confirm that Gibraltar was a “nation” and the legitimacy of National Day, the only way to convince them that they are wrong and we are right might well be by reference to the Oxford Dictionary.

The Oxford Dictionary definition of “truant” is a pupil who stays away from school without permission or explanation. A UK Government website which specializes in giving advice to parents of truant children, among other matters, defines truancy as “missing school without good reason”.

The Opposition does not doubt that procedures and strategies exist to take preventive action whenever concern is raised regarding the attendance level of any pupil. The point made by Mr Linares is that such procedures have always existed, but they are proving too cumbersome and too lengthy. The Government needs to do more to provide whatever resources teachers need in order to deal with the problem.

Commenting on the matter, Shadow Minister for Education Steven Linares said:

“I have made no criticism of the staff at the Department of Education or of our schools. What I have done, as a politician is to expose the shortcomings of the policies of Clive Beltran and his Government. Research in the UK suggests a very clear link between truant children and anti-social behaviour, in that children who attend school regularly could be at less risk of getting involved in anti-social behaviour or crime.

In this respect, the fact that Mr Beltran is pretending that there is no problem with truant children in Gibraltar may go some way to partly explaining what is happening in our streets.”

ENDS