

STATES OF JERSEY



SCHOOL CLOSURES (P.163/2020): SECOND AMENDMENT

Lodged au Greffe on 10th December 2020
by Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour

STATES GREFFE

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1 PAGE 2 –

After the words “appropriate and practical” insert the words “, and Early Years pupils, as the Minister considers appropriate and practical”.

2 PAGE 2 –

After the words “appropriate and practical” insert the words “, and students in exam years, as the Minister considers appropriate and practical”.

3 PAGE 3

Designate the existing paragraph as paragraph (a) and insert the following paragraph –

“(b) to request the Minister for Social Security to extend eligibility for the Isolation Benefit to parents or carers whose children are affected by school closures and who are unable to make alternative care arrangements.”.

DEPUTY L.M.C. DOUBLET OF ST. SAVIOUR

Note: After this amendment, the proposition would read as follows –

THE STATES are asked to decide whether they are of opinion –

- (a) to request the Minister for Education to take the steps necessary to close Jersey’s state-run schools from Monday 14th December 2020 for the remainder of the current school term, with provision provided for vulnerable children and the children of key-workers, as the Minister considers appropriate and practical, and Early Years pupils, as the Minister considers appropriate and practical, and students in exam years, as the Minister considers appropriate and practical.
- (b) to request the Minister for Social Security to extend eligibility for the Isolation Benefit to parents or carers whose children are affected by school closures and who are unable to make alternative care arrangements.

REPORT

We have a shared commitment to “Put Children First”. By closing schools while shops and cafes remain open we would be sending a message that children’s education and wellbeing is not the first priority. Measures affecting the wider population could have been taken first – for example, a lockdown or other measures short of this – to safeguard the population from the spread of COVID-19 whilst allowing schools to remain open, as is the case in the UK.

However I do acknowledge that the situation is a very difficult one, and there are no easy answers as to the best course of action at this stage. I know that teacher and school staff stress levels are very high, and that we must consider their wellbeing along with the wellbeing, developmental and educational needs of children. I understand that from the meetings which the Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel have had with the Minister for Education and her team, and from the many discussions I have had with her in recent days, that she is deeply concerned about achieving an outcome that balances the wellbeing and development of children with the wellbeing of her highly valued staff.

In a letter from the Acting Group Medical Director to the Minister for Education dated 3rd December 2020 that is now in the public domain, the following medical advice was given:

- “There is limited effectiveness on the spread of the virus by closing schools. Whilst there has been some spread of the virus to children on the island the majority of this was from adults to children and most likely did not take place in the school environment but rather through the household contact or outside of the school environment.
- The vast majority of other jurisdictions, particularly in Europe, which have actually gone into a second lockdown have kept schools and educational establishments open throughout.
- The evidence continues to show that the health impact of the virus on children is very low.
- There is increasing evidence of harm by keeping children out of school for longer periods both to them and potentially their families. My understanding is that there is also emerging evidence that academic outcomes are directly related to the number of days that children spend in school and the more days missed correlates with poorer outcome. This will potentially affect individual children’s life chances and, as a consequence, their health in the longer term.”

The aim of this amendment is to try and slightly extend the measures that Deputy Ward is seeking to introduce and to ensure that specific groups of children have their needs met whilst taking into account reduced staffing levels in schools.

Three groups of children are accounted for in this amendment:

- Those who are unable to access education via online learning (Early Years);
 - Nuance is required when extending the proposed measures to Early Years aged children, [who are less susceptible to infection than adults](#), and [less likely to pass on the virus on to others](#) once infected. This group is also unable to engage with online learning, and requires much more

hands-on care from caregivers than older children, who can self-direct with regards to learning activities.

- Those who are studying for exams (mainly Year 11 and Year 13);
 - Children who are studying for exams will potentially be significantly disadvantaged by the removal of face-to-face teaching and should be able to continue their studies as normal wherever possible.
- I have also considered children whose parents are not critical or essential workers, but will not be able to work whilst caring for and supervising their children's learning at home. These families should be financially supported with a week of the equivalent of Isolation Benefit if they are forced out of work by a policy related to COVID-19.

Financial and Manpower Implications

There will be financial implications to extending the Isolation Benefit to working parent(s) or carer(s) who are affected by school closures and are unable to source an informal, alternative arrangement. In terms of manpower implications, additional staff cover should not be required and there should be saving to schools in terms of expenditure on additional staff as fewer pupils will need educational supervision.