

2.13 Senator J.L. Perchard of the Chief Minister regarding the proposal to reduce the subsidy for secondary education in private/fee-paying schools:

In reply to a written question 5704 on 19th October 2010, the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture invoked that the initial proposal supported by the Council of Ministers was to reduce the subsidy over a period of 2011 until 2013, starting at the end of 2011. When did the Chief Minister personally, and the Council of Ministers formally, first become aware of the proposal to reduce subsidies for secondary education in private fee-paying schools?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur (The Chief Minister):

I first became aware that officers of the Education, Sport and Culture Department were suggesting reducing the grant to fee-paying schools as an option to meet the C.S.R. setting the targets on 17th May 2010 in a meeting with the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture. The issue was first raised informally with the Council of Ministers at a C.S.R. workshop on 19th May, held to discuss options for savings, but no proposals were put forward at that stage. As a member of the political board which peer reviewed the C.S.R. proposals of Education, Sport and Culture, I first saw the steering group report, which included the formal proposal, on 21st September 2010. At the Council of Ministers workshop held on 5th October 2010 all Ministers received the department's savings proposals, which included the Education, Sport and Culture steering group report and templates.

2.13.1 Senator J.L. Perchard:

Is it the case that the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture then made the decision to propose funding cuts to fee-paying schools at least 2 weeks before the Business Plan debate, but chose to remain silent on this matter during the debate? Will the Chief Minister indicate which it is, was it that the Minister is negligent in his duty or did the Minister knowingly act contrary to Standing Order 155 paragraph 3, Code of Conduct for Elective Members the article headed: "Openness", where it is stated that the holders of public office should be as open as possible and restrict information only if confidentiality clearly demands?

The Deputy Bailiff:

I am not sure that is a question the Chief Minister can answer, but Chief Minister, answer it if you think you can.

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I would struggle I think with that one. Certainly, we had to distinguish between options for consideration and formal proposals. The formal proposals were put forward at the dates I mentioned.

2.13.2 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Could I ask the Chief Minister, so the members of the public and Members in this Assembly can be quite clear, how many Ministers on the Council of Ministers support the removal or the reduction of fees to private schools that have been proposed by the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture? How many? When was the decision taken? Where is the vote recorded?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

Ministers tend to make decisions by consensus. Not all Ministers will always agree with everything. But I will say that in this case, Ministers do support the general principle of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture to review and consider options for the reduction in grants for private schools. Those negotiations and discussions, as the Minister says, are ongoing. It is the principle of negotiating those discussions and discussing which the Ministers wholeheartedly support as part of the proposals of the Minister to contribute an appropriate share towards the reductions, which all Members wish to see in our overall States spending.

2.13.3 Senator J.L. Perchard:

In a final supplementary. This has been done to death, but it is important that Members understand that the Minister is backtracking. I have a letter here to States Members - 8th October - where the Minister says clearly that it has been difficult to arrive at this decision. The decision was to cut 50 per cent of the subsidies to States secondary schools. Will the Chief Minister join me in asking his Minister for Education, Sport and Culture to withdraw this proposal completely and consult and consider a proper future for the educational system of Jersey rather than this *ad hoc* approach which is being adopted?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I hope the Senator was not suggesting I was backtracking. I think the Minister is quite capable of listening to advice and he will make up his mind in due course. Certainly, he is making a statement later this morning, which may help clarify the matter to the satisfaction of Members. Maybe I should have added at the start a declaration of interest, which I think is not relevant to this particular question, but for the avoidance of doubt, I just remind Members that I am a trustee of one of the fee-paying schools, not a member of the board of governors or an active director.