

2021.10.05

15 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of the Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture regarding the ability of children in the Island to access swimming pools and swimming lessons (OQ.212/2021):

What is being done to ensure that all children have convenient and affordable access to a swimming pool and equal access to funded swimming lessons, as per the pre-Covid policy?

Senator L.J. Farnham (The Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture:

Thank you, Deputy Raymond as the Assistant Minister with responsibility for this area will take the questions.

Deputy H.C. Raymond of Trinity (Assistant Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture - *rapporteur*):

May I thank the Deputy for the question. If I may take the opportunity of prefacing the direct question with it is great that we have the ability. We seem to be coming out of COVID, as we have heard this morning, and it is essential that we make sure that our youngsters move forward with regards to whatever activity they are doing. It is great to see that they are out doing other things like running. We have to encourage our children back into the sports and the bodies that they were doing prior to COVID. That leads me into the most important activity, which I feel is swimming. I am totally behind the Deputy and having done a lot of research over the last couple of weeks with the team I am hoping that everything is in place. I can confirm that all States of Jersey primary schools are now offered free use of the sports division pools to undertake swimming lessons as part of their curriculum learning. The States of Jersey non-fee-paying secondary schools are also offered free access to the sports division pools where their timetable allows. Fee-paying schools are offered access to the sports division pools charged at a 50 per cent normal hire rate. Schools are timetabled prior to the end of each academic year and each school can request access for whatever they require. For argument's sake, that is P.E. (physical education) lessons, learn to swim, G.C.S.E. moderation, scuba, galas and water polo. The major thing here is to make sure that as an Island one of most important activities that all our children should be doing, and dare I say it across the board, the earlier you catch the children swimming the better it is for their mentality and living on an Island. I totally agree that we have to make sure that we provide these facilities and hopefully that is what we are doing at the present time.

4.15.1 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

The Minister will be aware of 2 specific issues, because I have raised these over email. One of issues is the AquaSplash due to staff shortages is closing - not the adult pool but the family pool - apart from 2 or 3 days a week. I would like to know what is being done to support the AquaSplash in providing access, which of course will be particularly convenient for families who live in town, possibly lower income families who do not have a car or the ability to utilise public transport to get to Les Quennevais. I would like to know what the Government are doing to address that.

[12:30]

Also another issue that has been raised is the reception to funded swimming lessons which pre-COVID every child had a course of 10 swimming lessons on their reception year and I have been informed that not all children are currently able to access those. Could the Minister address those 2 specific issues, please?

The Deputy of Trinity:

I will take the second question first. As far as I am aware, I thought everything was in place. It has just slightly concerned me with what the Deputy has just said. I will certainly look into that but I am given to believe, after having our discussions with Education, that that was in place. If I may, I will come back to the Assembly and let the Deputy know. With regards to the first question, yes, we are having difficulties. It would be silly for me to not say so. The biggest issue is they are coming back with regards to the ability to get staffing and, as you know, with swimming we have to make sure that we have the right people in the pool at the right time and it is essential they are there. Purely for risk reasons as well. Again, I am very keen to push this very much forward, bearing in mind the amount of money that, dare I say it, we put into the swimming pool via Serco so it is important that we look after it. As the Deputy rightly says, if we take the 35,000-odd population that are in and around the pool it is essential that we try and make sure that that limited availability of the small pool becomes much greater for people in St. Helier to use, especially because it is very much in walking distance to a lot of people that do need that requirement. Again, it is not a definitive answer but I can assure both the Assembly and the Deputy that we are moving forward on those discussions, and I am very much involved with them.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Sorry, the Minister did not answer the first part of my question about the reception for swimming.

The Bailiff:

Are you able to provide a more elaborate answer than that?

The Deputy of Trinity:

As far as I am concerned I thought that it was 10 free lessons for reception children. I believe that is still in place and I was given to believe ... but I will check that with Education. If the Deputy could give me a particular school where that has happened, I am more than happy to look into it.