

2.2 Deputy P.J. Rondel of St. John of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture regarding the removal of grants to fee-paying/private schools:

Following the recent report, would the Minister clarify whether his department has plans to remove in full the grants to fee-paying private schools at any time in the future, or whether further cuts beyond those already announced will not be pursued if a mutually satisfactory agreement can be reached in the current discussions?

Deputy J.G. Reed of St. Ouen (The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture):

There are no plans to further reduce the grants to fee-paying schools outside of the proposals currently being explored with all fee-paying schools, and the governing bodies have already been made aware of this. My department is working closely with all schools to achieve a mutually satisfactory agreement and, once the discussions are completed, I will be bringing a proposition to the States so Members are able to consider this matter with all the facts in front of them.

2.2.1 The Deputy of St. John:

Will the Minister please meet with Mr. Le Blancq from Parents for Choice, and will he reconsider being at the presentation for States Members later this week and if not, why not?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I have already been asked that question in a different oral question. Am I required to answer that now?

The Deputy Bailiff:

It is a supplementary question.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Fine, Sir. On 2 separate occasions, I have invited Mr. Le Blancq, the spokesman for Parents for Choice, to attend my department to discuss his proposal with my officers and myself. It is quite appropriate and right that any particular strategic option should be considered and I plan in the New Year to include and develop the educational strategies within a Green Paper. Regarding the attendance of a meeting, I do not believe that it is useful or helpful at this time for me to attend such a meeting until I am aware and fully understand the proposals put in front of me.

2.2.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Minister consider extending the period of the changes to the funding of fee-paying schools from his current schedule to something more like 5 years?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Absolutely. I am very mindful of the fact that initial discussions with the schools involved have indicated that the timescale is extremely tight and, as such, I am proposing to have further discussions with all the school governors tomorrow evening.

2.2.3 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire of St. Helier:

May I ask the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture, who has been taking most of this on the chin, whether or not he has been supported in his moves that he has been proposing by the Council of Ministers and what effect, if any, has the Council of Ministers had upon these proposals?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Both the Council of Ministers and, indeed, the States have had an effect on these proposals and others that I am being required to bring forward, because Members will recognise that both the Council of Ministers and the States are requiring myself and other departments to reduce government expenditure to ensure that we maintain any tax increases to a minimum.

2.2.4 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

May I please ask a supplementary to that or get a better answer if possible. I would like to ask the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture to reflect on the fact that I am particularly referring to these proposals rather than the overall.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Yes, these proposals have been discussed with the Council of Ministers. They are proposals. They need to be explored further and I have had the full support of the Council of Ministers, as I have been engaging with the schools. I am keeping in touch obviously regularly with the Council of Ministers and discussions continue on this matter.

2.2.5 Senator J.L. Perchard:

The recommendations in the report from the U.K. consultants about school fees were to reduce subsidies in the short term to fee-paying schools by 50 per cent, but also to consider 100 per cent removal and the longer term of subsidies. Is it not the case that the Minister's real agenda is to move the Island's education system to a U.K.-type model of state schools funded by the taxpayer with completely unsupported private schools, which would almost certainly bring about the closure of at least one, maybe 2, of our fee-paying schools?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Not at all; I value the contribution made by the fee-paying schools and respect the right for parents to choose the form of education they wish to provide for their children. Furthermore, it is important that we recognise that the appropriate amount of support is provided to the fee-paying schools to provide the broad education that is on offer on the Island and, as such, there is no intention, and I repeat no intention, to remove all support from fee-paying schools.

2.2.6 The Deputy of St. John:

Since the Minister is entrenched in his views, does he believe he can get out of the hole that he has put himself in and keep his seat or will he keep on digging?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I do not believe that I am digging a hole. I believe that I am undertaking a particular process in considering a number of proposals to reduce the expenditure of my department. As such, I need to continue and follow the process and, as I said before, I will report back to this Assembly once that process has been completed and I can provide the information that both States Members and parents require.