

2.19 Senator J.L. Perchard of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture regarding the number of students which the non fee-paying sector could accommodate before it would need to build more classrooms and employ more teachers:

How many students could the non fee-paying sector accommodate before it would need to build more classrooms and employ more teachers?

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

Before I answer this question I would like to answer an earlier question posed by Senator Perchard, which I do not believe I answered fully. I would like to say this: if, following the period of consultation with the fee-paying schools and an acceptable solution cannot be found, I will consult with the Council ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Please answer the question you have been asked.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I will state that in my statement, perhaps, thank you. Overall if the primary non fee-paying sector was at full capacity a further 419 pupils could be accommodated without the need to employ extra teachers. In the non fee-paying secondary sector 137 pupils could be accommodated without the need for extra teachers and, in addition a further 181 pupils could be accommodated without the need for extra accommodation.

2.19.1 Senator J.L. Perchard:

Staggering figures, and I am taken aback. Is it not the truth then that the Minister, who currently has in excess of 500 students surplus capacity in his schools, is it not the case that he is proposing to take up the slack by forcing students away from the fee-paying sector into his own service?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

No, I am not proposing to take up any slack. I am just simply answering the question posed to me by the Senator, and I would just like to add that this capacity is spread over all schools and all year groups. It is true also to say that certain youngsters who choose to access fee-paying primary schools spend the first 2 years in our primary schools and then disappear, leaving the classrooms partly empty.

2.19.2 Senator J.L. Perchard:

Does the Minister not realise that most people consider that the Minister is aiming his dart at the wrong dartboard and that the real problem is the overcapacity in the public sector provision which he should be dealing with?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

If the Senator chose to come and inform himself properly, as I have requested him to do, he would understand the effort that the department has already made to deal with the issues of capacity and efficiency savings within the States school system. This is the first time for a long while that the department has challenged the fee-paying schools to demonstrate that they are able to provide an effective and efficient education for our children, and that is all we are doing. Thank you.

2.19.3 Senator J.L. Perchard:

The Minister really must take up the invitation put to him by Senator Le Gresley earlier this morning and bring back the details of this proposal to the States for approval. It really cannot be allowed for the Minister to, just by Ministerial decision, make such radical changes to our education. Will he guarantee before implementing changes above the 2 per cent C.S.R. proposal to the school fees, bring back a proposition to the States to get the full support of this Assembly and the people of Jersey?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

If, following the period of consultation with the fee-paying schools, an acceptable solution cannot be found for all parties and all stakeholders, I will consult with the Council of Ministers and give proper and full consideration to the suggestion to bring a proposition to this House. I am not aiming to avoid my responsibilities, not only to the children in my care but equally to this States Assembly.