

4. Questions to Ministers without notice - The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture

The Deputy Bailiff:

We now come to questions to Ministers without notice and the first question period is of the Minister for Education Sport and Culture.

4.1 Deputy J.M. Maçon of St. Saviour:

Given now that the department has published its response to the discussion paper, can the Minister please inform the Assembly what the conclusions are towards the structure of secondary education?

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan of St. John (The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture):

There are a number of references within the consultation responses about secondary education. The way for me to look at it from now onwards is to involve my Ministerial colleagues to carry out further in-depth studies of the secondary education system. This will take some time and I intend to start by reviewing all of the reports that have been in the public domain since the States last made a decision with regard to this in 1995. It is going to take some time. There will not be any imminent changes or anything proposed. We need to take this slowly and not create instability in the system because that has the potential for adversely affecting our children's education that are currently in the system and I am not prepared to do that.

4.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

In light of the public consultation on the future of sport on the Island, will the Minister assure Members that this is not an excuse for privatising facilities which the U.K. experience says has reduced standards and opening hours and produced rising costs?

The Deputy of St. John:

There is a wish from certain sectors of the public and also politically to look at this particular area. I think we need to wait for the publication of the sports strategy but I understand what the Deputy is talking about and it is not a particular area that the department is not familiar with and has already considered but we will have to wait until the end of the year when we publish the results. There will be a White Paper at that time so it will become clear at that point in time as far as the issues that the Deputy is concerned about.

4.2.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Minister commit himself to the continuing excellence of our resources and sports facilities on the Island?

The Deputy of St. John:

Yes, I think the answer to that is a definite yes.

4.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

Given the importance of links with China in terms of our economy and the relationship which has been forged by the Minister for Economic Development with his counterparts in China, will the Minister be taking any action to make sure that future school leavers in Jersey may have the corresponding language skills in order to be able to engage with Chinese businesses in the future?

The Deputy of St. John:

I have a statutory body called the Curriculum Council that advises me on all of the items to do with language development and teaching and the content of the curriculum. I think we have to be careful that we do not overload our students with too much statutory content in the

curriculum. It is already a difficult area for certain students to cope with. So although I am generally receptive, I am not at the point where I am going to start making decisions on the hoof about what should be taught in schools such as Chinese or what have you. We have already committed to increase the size of the number of teaching assistants for French. The Deputy is aware of that. That is an operational matter and it is carrying forward and it will continue. Really what I am saying is I am open to suggestions but it has to be demand-led and there has to be a very good case made for including it in curriculum, so I hope that answers the Deputy's question.

[11:45]

4.3.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

I am glad that the Minister is open to suggestions and demands and I may make suggestions and demands from him about the Chinese language inclusion. Would he consider perhaps appointing a Mandarin to advise on Chinese language tuition?

The Deputy of St. John:

The Deputy's pun is not lost on me and I thank him for his interest once more in language skills development but I think that perhaps it might be a useful thing for him to do to attend perhaps one of the sessions with the Curriculum Council to discuss it with them.

4.4 Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Can the Minister inform the Assembly with the redesign of the Music Service how much uptake has been taken within the non-fee-paying schools in the spread of music because I believe there is a disparity between the non-fee-paying schools and the fee-paying schools in the uptake of the Music Service?

The Deputy of St. John:

Yes, I thank Deputy Maçon for his interest in this one. We are about to lodge a proposition in line with the Medium-Term Financial Plan which States Members agreed and which included a saving in the Instrumental Music Service. It is coming to the Assembly because it is a new user pays charge. The budget has already been cut incidentally and it is a non-statutory and extracurricular service. I hope that Members will wait and have a look at that and then we can discuss it and debate it in more detail then. As regards to the statistics that the Deputy was asking about, fee-paying and non-fee-paying, I can tell the Assembly that 43 per cent of the Jersey Music Service time is with fee-paying students. This when you look at it broken down into primary and secondary sectors, which I think is important, in the primary sector fee-paying schools 23.2 per cent, non-fee-paying 76.8 per cent but that is slightly misleading because in the secondary sector, the fee-paying schools account for 56.5 per cent and that is only at Victoria College and Jersey College for Girls, and the non-fee-paying sector, 45.5 per cent. So obviously some of the non-fee-paying sector in primary becomes fee-paying in secondary as they move through into secondary school. I hope that has given the Deputy what he needs.

4.5 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

One of the problems we have been having at Highlands is that children are moving on to Highlands and then having to be taught remedial reading, writing and arithmetic. How is progress going in ensuring that all children can read when leaving primary school?

The Deputy of St. John:

Yes, focus on the core skills, reading, literacy, mathematics, the sciences, is extremely important and I want Members and the public to know that that is one of my key priorities. In order to ensure that we are doing all of the right things, we are currently in the process of carrying out a maths review. This will be concluded by the end of this year. We will follow immediately with a literacy review where we will be looking at all of the teaching methods and the outcomes for

children and then we will follow that with a sciences review. We cannot do them all at once because that puts too much pressure on schools. In addition to that, we are currently looking at the way that we fund, and we are in the middle of a review of special educational needs which will include English as an additional language as part of that. We are halfway through that. I am expecting that that report will come back to me soon and also it will, as I say, have reviewed the way that we fund primary schools to take care of those particular highly important areas.

4.5.1 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

It is quite a simple question. Are all children being able to read when they are leaving primary school? Surely the department does have a measure of this.

The Deputy of St. John:

Yes indeed we do. We have done a lot of work on measurement of one way or another and that kind of information is available on schools' websites and to the public and to parents in detail. That is all I can say really.

4.6 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Further to his answer that he gave a few minutes ago about sports facilities on the Island, could the Minister tell the Assembly how soon we can look forward to a 4G artificial pitch so that we can play sport all year round?

The Deputy of St. John:

That is in the sports strategy paper and we are looking for information from the public as to how they feel about this and how soon. I think we are going to have to see what comes out of it and see if we can find the funding. There is no funding specifically set aside for that but we may need to look to sports associations and clubs to see if we can do some kind of partnership in the future to make that kind of facility available but it certainly is something that we are looking at. All we need is the money to do it.

4.7 The Connétable of St. John:

What percentage of non-English speaking children have another language as their first language and what monetary burden does this have on your education budget?

The Deputy of St. John:

The percentage of children varies greatly across different schools. For example, in the town primary schools, the percentage of children that do not have English as their first language will be much higher than in some of the country Parishes. I do not have the 2 numbers specifically to hand that the Connétable is asking for. I will get it for him later and any other Members that are interested in those numbers as well.

4.7.1 The Connétable of St. John:

Could the Minister give us a ballpark figure, whether it is 15 per cent across the whole Island, 20 per cent, 30 per cent, *et cetera*, please?

The Deputy of St. John:

I know that in, for example, Rouge Bouillon School, I can cite an example there where in the foundation stage, that is right in the early years, it is something like 60 per cent but it would be wrong to say that children who do not have English as their first language always suffer with worse outcomes. There are a considerable number of children in this category who do extremely well at school and one should point to the fact that there is very often a very high level of parental involvement with those children, whether they are Portuguese, Polish or Eastern European. Also we provide a very good service of assisting them in the very earliest years and

also that those 2 communities also provide some additional help by way of extracurricular language help with those young children.

4.7.2 The Connétable of St. John:

Can I come back in on that? Given that such a high figure might be at one school, and it varies across the Island, how much does that affect your budget in the course of 12 months?

The Deputy of St. John:

I have already explained to the Connétable I do not have that number exactly to hand. I will get it for him later and any other Member that wishes to know.

4.8 The Deputy of St. Martin:

The Minister has told us this morning that the curriculum is demand-led. Could we assume, therefore, that if there is no demand for a particular subject, it might be withdrawn from the curriculum?

The Deputy of St. John:

No, there are other items in the decision-making on curricula besides them being demand-led. That is only one part of it and we have to inevitably be driven in the curricula to children achieving results in qualifications and therefore we are inevitably led by the English curriculum in that way. We cannot get away from that hard fact. In the end, children might want to go to university in the United Kingdom so the curriculum has to reflect that. They have to get exams in order to have access to higher education and the same goes for G.C.S.E.s (General Certificate of Secondary Education).

4.9 Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Given that Thursday this week is World Book Day, can the Minister advise whether he supports initiatives within our local schools and advise the Assembly what book he would want to promote on this day?

The Deputy of St. John:

Children's book choice is wide and varied and my choice might not be a popular one. I am very interested in sport; I am interested in politics. I am not so sure how many younger children would be interested in politics. I have just received some hardback books that my late father has given me. One of them is called *A Thousand Days* and it is about the thousand days that President John F. Kennedy was in power. So that is my choice but I am not so sure it would be much good ...