

#### **4.6 Connétable J. Gallichan of St. Mary of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture regarding the development of a language immersion school in Jersey:**

As language immersion schools have become increasingly popular in North America and are now appearing in Britain, has any research been undertaken into the benefits of these schools and if so, does the Minister consider that Jersey should develop this concept to the advantage of our own students to increase the Island's skills base?

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

I thank the Connétable for her interest in language teaching, particularly French. We are going to visit a bilingual school in London in the early part of the autumn term and, at the same time, we will be investigating the question of total immersion schools as well. There is much research that we need to do. The research is at a very early stage and while there may be significant advantages to bilingual education generally, including immersion schools, it might not be suitable for all pupils, particularly those that have difficulty learning their first language and there are also other factors that will need to be carefully considered and a lot of consultation will have to take place.

#### **4.6.1 The Connétable of St. Mary:**

The thrust of my question is really to talk about language immersion and not about bilingual education because the research that I am reading is showing that the benefits to pupils, particularly those who are not linguistically able, the benefits across the curriculum in other subjects apart from languages are proving to make the worth of these schools ... make it stand alone and I would like to know whether the Minister will be looking specifically at benefits to non-linguists?

#### **The Deputy of St. John:**

I think we will be looking at the benefits to all children right across the piece and I do understand that full immersion can work very well in places in the world where the population is genuinely bilingual or, in fact, even biased not towards English, towards the second language, for example, as some areas of Canada and some areas of the United States where there are very, very high populations of Chinese people.

[10:15]

#### **4.6.2 Deputy M. Tadier:**

Will the Minister address why he seems to already have reservations about the notion of immersion schools when he has just said he is going to go over to London and can he reassure the Assembly that he is going into it with an open mind and that he will look for the benefits and even drawbacks for all students?

#### **The Deputy of St. John:**

I would not use the same words as the Deputy did. Cautious is my approach because this is a big subject and if we are going to do anything, we need to get it right but yes, I can reassure the Deputy that I have a completely open mind. In fact, I would go slightly further, in fact, that I have quite a positive view on the benefits of improving our language education in general.

#### **4.6.3 Deputy M. Tadier:**

On the back of that, will the Minister give an update to the Assembly of where he is with the modern languages strategy for schools which I think he has spoken about in the past, certainly with me?

#### **The Deputy of St. John:**

I am not sure if this is strictly to do with immersion schools but I am happy to or perhaps the Deputy would like to ask me again during ...

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

If it helps I can ask a question about immersion heaters.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

I think the Deputy is referring to French language assistance principally? No. Well, I mistook the question. We are looking at those things. We are keeping an open mind. I have a Curriculum Council that advises me. We have to be careful though with the curriculum because it is already quite crowded and we have to see where the demands lie.

**4.6.4 The Connétable of St. Mary:**

I am concerned from the Minister's answers that he is not understanding the thrust of my question. I am not talking about areas where there are indigenous populations who speak a second language. I am not talking about that. I am talking about developing language immersion as a way of education and adding it as a string to our bow. Does the Minister not consider that Jersey may be missing the boat yet again? We are in a uniquely placed environment to offer language immersion to attract inward students. We could become a centre of excellence. Would the Minister first of all confirm, does he understand the difference between immersion as an educational tool and immersion as a way to overcome a societal problem with immigration?

**The Deputy of St. John:**

I have read much of the same research already that the Constable is referring to. Yes, I absolutely understand the differences between a bilingual school and a full immersion school but there is as much research which prefers bilingual rather than full immersion as there is research that prefers full immersion as opposed to bilingual. We need to carry out all of the research. I have already said that I am very receptive to all of these kinds of suggestions and that we will carry out very careful and detailed research and consultation and it will include those Members of the Assembly obviously who are particularly interested as well.

**4.6.5 The Connétable of St. Mary:**

I thank the Minister for his invitation, I think that is what I just heard, but I would just like to close by asking the Minister will he arrange to contact or to visit perhaps, if that is possible, one of the State schools in the United Kingdom which is opening up its immersion programme to see what the benefits they have already encountered with their first programmes of French and Spanish to see how they are looking at Mandarin as a third option and to see how this could possibly be the niche educational market for the Island that we have been looking for?

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Our research will obviously include all of those areas that the Constable is suggesting, yes.