

2015.10.20

3.8 Deputy M. Tadier of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture regarding the capacity required for the new Les Quennevais School:

What population projections have been used to determine the capacity required for the Les Quennevais School and what will be the expected student intake when it opens?

Deputy R.G. Bryans of St. Helier (The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture):

The Education, Sport and Culture Department has detailed the projections for the pupil population for the next 15 years. These are based on birth numbers, children we know who are already born, an analysis of current demographic trends including net migration. The forecasts are revised every year to take into account any changes. If the school opens on time, as hoped, in 2019 we are expecting approximately 700 pupils, gradually rising in the years after that as the current increase in primary numbers feeds through.

3.8.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

I asked for 2 figures there. One was the population projection; so I want to know what the overall population in Jersey will be when the school finally opens, let us say, in 2019 and he has given me a figure of 700 as the estimated student intake. How does that compare to the current population of the school?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

I answered the first part of the question. I could not give him the projected figures for the total population at that point in time. I do not have those figures but I am sure somebody could provide something along those lines. In terms of what we have at the moment, we have got about 650 students. The school is built to cater for a capacity of 750 but there is an architectural need to build extra capacity into the school so that it can accommodate up to 825 to 850 pupils.

3.8.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

This Minister will obviously appreciate this is an important issue for my constituents but, I think, more widely than that, and it seems to me that we still have not been given the figures which should be widely available. We know that population projections are out there. We have seen them in the numerous presentations we have had with the Council of Ministers for different departments. Without knowing what the population figures are going to be in 2019, in 2029 and perhaps in 2049 it is very difficult for us to try and hold the Ministers to account to find out whether or not the school being built is going to be big enough so that we do not have a school which could be too small 5 or 10 years after it is open. So will the Minister go back and get those figures for us so that we can sit around, have a look at those, analyse them and then speak to him subsequently?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

The models that we use for predictions are highly detailed, and because they are consistently and constantly revisited have a strong track record. The forecasts have been consistently accurate to within one or 2 per cent for several years. One exception was in 2010/2011 where there was an increase in the birth rate. In terms of the school itself we have built-in this extra capacity. It is meant to be a community school. We have focused on what we currently know. I do not have the projection figures. I think the debate has swung around population and turned into more of a

population debate than about the capacity for the school. So I can provide what I can provide but not what I cannot.

3.8.3 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Just following through on this and the Minister's answer to an earlier one. If the school is going to have a capacity of 650 at the moment and you are building in 750 but with architectural provision to go up to 850, those figures must have been derived from some population basis. You just do not build in 200 extra places on the assumption that we just need some extra space, it is extra expense and so on. You must have some population figure that you are basing that projected 200 places on. Will the Minister just elaborate how they arrived at 850?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

They are extrapolated from the answer I gave right at the beginning, on actual birth numbers; children who we know who are already born. These are net figures. We have got a current demographic trend, which we have already identified, and we revise it every year. So we have been fairly accurate in all of the figures that we have produced so far. I have more analysis that can be provided but it is not related to the population figures in that sort of context.

3.8.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Surely the source of these children are adults and the fact that there is no link between his numbers of children and the numbers of the population overall, he must be somewhat mistaken, surely? Surely there must be a link between the projected population figures in the overall population policy, which we have not yet finalised and will not be finalised for 18 months, and the figures that he is quoting for children in this particular school? Surely that is the case and what number is that based on?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

I go back to what I said originally. These are net figures. We have constantly trawled through these figures over the past and we have been fairly accurate in them. We are confident the school will be able to cope with the numbers for the foreseeable future and certainly over the next 15 years. Beyond that I do not have a crystal ball and we will get updated figures as we go along.

3.8.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

If I may remind the Minister, the population projections are based on, I believe, from memory, zero net growth, 350 net growth, 500 net growth and 750 net growth. Which of those figures does he expect to see in the finalised population policy on which a relationship can be built to his numbers for potential children in this school?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

Once again I will go back to what I said originally. We base it on the birth rates. We based it on the figures that we produced over the last 10 years or so which have been extremely accurate. The only aberration being, as I say, 2010 and 2011. We constantly look at the figures. We constantly look at the migration situation and we are building capacity into the school. I can say no more than that.

3.8.6 Deputy M. Tadier:

I am not particularly inspired by confidence when we ask some basic questions for figures and projections that are already out there only to get no satisfactory answer. My concern is, and I will put this to the Minister, that currently we are proposing to build a school which is far too small. He talks about the foreseeable future and 15 years in advance but when we have had a school there

which is the best part of 50 years old and has had no extra capacity during that time, and when we have also seen the population increasing and projected to increase in 3 or 4 years at 50 to up to 700 then being told that we have a school for 750 capacity is cold comfort. So will the Minister take this seriously on board and speak to perhaps some of the Deputies and the Constable of the area, among others, who have an interest in the school to make sure that we have a properly sized school that can cope with the projected population for the next 50 years, not simply for the next 5 or 10.

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

I understand the Deputy's frustration and what I can provide for him is a set of figures that we have produced which relate to what we see the school holding currently and what we project over the next 50 years to some extent. I have every confidence in the size of the school that we are building. We know that the current school is out of date, as he quite rightly says, and is holding too many children in a very small school. The school that we are projecting to build will hold 850. The figures that I have show that in 2029 the figure will only have risen to 743.