

4.9 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of the Minister for Education regarding the assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of Jersey's education system: [1(573)]

Further to the publication in 2013 of the consultation document *Learning for Tomorrow's World - The Future of Education in Jersey*, in which the then Minister determined to assess further the strengths and weaknesses of Jersey's education system in order to identify whether any changes would be required in the future; what work, if any, has been undertaken, and what were the findings?

Deputy R.G. Bryans (The Minister for Education):

Thank you to the Deputy. The consultation that took place 5 years ago was inconclusive and did not offer a definite way forward for the structure of Jersey's education system. However, there was agreement that we needed to improve standards for all students and that is where the focus has been. The department, schools and teachers are constantly assessing their strengths and weaknesses so that we can make the current system the best it can possibly be, and it is working. Exam results have improved and our students out-performed England again this summer. Also, the consultation results were fed into the current business plan and distilled into the 4 key priorities you are all familiar with. The work on all of the action points is ongoing and more have been added.

4.9.1 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

The Minister has said in the past that our current education system that we do have is not how he would design it from scratch if he himself had the opportunity. Was this a sentiment that was echoed in the *Learning for Tomorrow's World - The Future of Education in Jersey* consultation and, if so, was this echoed by the public in that consultation?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

To some extent I think it was. But what we decided to do, I was fortunate that the current Chief Executive Officer had some time before he overtook his role and we were able to discuss the document in some detail. I have it here; there are 3 documents that relate to that particular *Learning for Tomorrow's World*. That is when we realised that what we had to do rather than deal with the structure of Jersey's education was to look at the education that was being provided to our children. So firmly what we did was look at the children first before we looked at anything else, and so that is where we paid our most attention and I think that is where we have been most successful.

4.9.2 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

In an answer, I think, to the first question the Minister said that the response to the previous consultation was inconclusive. Could he elaborate on why he thinks it was inconclusive? The reason that I ask this question is I have in mind Guernsey who are at the moment looking at reforming their education system and they do not seem to be making much progress. It looks like it is because of entrenched views that are not evidence-based that are forming a sort of political deadlock there, so could he elaborate on what he thinks the causes of that consultation being inconclusive were here?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

It is interesting the Deputy mentions Guernsey. We had a meeting with both Guernsey and the Isle of Man a couple of months ago. The Deputy is quite right, I think it is not just that the education system was being looked at, but I think the political system does not play to the strengths of what the Minister in particular wanted to do. So it was very difficult for ideologies and the pedagogy of teaching to sort of get through to the best credit it could do, particularly

from what I evidenced in Guernsey. The reason I think it was inconclusive was the public debate really provoked a bit of a storm and it was quite controversial, and from my perspective did not really benefit children all that much, so that was what we wanted to learn from. What we learnt in particular was you do not need to set the different sides in education against one another to address the problem. It can and has been done through working with schools, the unions and individual teachers and improving the training and support. I think the reason for the inconclusive feel for it all is that nobody really came up finally through that particular report with a focus on what could be achieved by dismantling the current system that we have. So that is again the reason that we have then said what we need to do is focus on the teaching that is being provided to our children and improve on that.

4.9.3 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

A supplementary? Can I gather from that answer then that any future potential reforms to Jersey's education structure would be hopeless then because would it not just be the case that if a similar consultation were taken, that those entrenched views would emerge again and the best interests of our education system and the children could not be met because of those politically-entrenched views? Does he see that as a problem?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

I cannot agree with the Deputy. I do not think if another consultation - and I do not propose to do one at this point in time - were undertaken that the entrenched views would surface in the same way. I think we have been very successful in the consultations that we have done with the current departments and the current team. I would probably point Members in the direction of what we did with Les Quennevais as an example of how we negotiated and consulted with the public and how successful we have been in doing that. So I do not think it is a model that is particularly broken, I think if there were another consultation, I think people will understand the direction of travel that we would be taking.

4.9.4 The Deputy of St. John:

I believe we have the potential in this Island to have an amazing education system. So I ask the Minister, in terms of long-term future of education for Jersey and the public, whether he considers that it is a role of this States Assembly to have that debate about what kind of education system we need for our future generations?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

I think we are currently always having a debate about what the education system needs on this Island and I think it is a very healthy attitude to have. It is our consideration most of the points raised in the 2013 report have been actioned and remain on our agenda. These changes are ongoing. The Jersey curriculum is kept under constant review and more G.C.S.E. (General Certificate of Secondary Education) subjects have been added to the numerical grading system next year, so we are always looking at the way both the system operates here on the Island and what underlies that, the pedagogy of that teaching. Just to carry on, after the *Tomorrow's World* consultation, there were further discussions about the structure of the system but there was no political desire to debilitate or dismantle education in Jersey. We were given the mandate with the drive from a new chief officer to move ahead with improvements. So some of the things we have done, just the main things: we have improved exam results for our students, we have launched the Jersey Premium to help disadvantaged students, we have expanded and improved our data team, we strengthened the way in which we review schools, we have introduced a new assessment system, brought a new skills strategy, we have got a new Les Quennevais Secondary School approved, we have opened new primary classes to meet rising numbers, we have rewritten the Jersey curriculum, we have introduced the new G.C.S.E.

exams across all schools and we have completely remodelled our special educational needs service. So I think we have done a great deal underneath it all and that is working along with the unions, along with the heads and along with the schools to produce that. So I think the debate could be happening, but it is always happening in my mind.

4.9.5 The Deputy of St. John:

A supplementary? Can I just ask the Minister then, all and well that everything that has been working and being done in education at the moment, but does he not believe that going forward that we should not just blindly follow what the U.K. are doing and that we should have that ultimate discussion and debate about what kind of education system that we can provide as an Island to our future generations, not just what the U.K. are doing?

[11:00]

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

Thank you to the Deputy. I think the construction of our new curriculum is an indication that we do not blindly follow. In fact, the new curriculum is very much Jerseyfied, if that is a word, and allows greater understanding of our political system, of the history of this Island, what the culture of this Island is. We have a group of individuals working on a cultural passport for children which would indicate that every child that comes into our system from the primary school right the way through to when they leave at secondary school will have experienced some elements of the culture of this Island, so we have got ongoing progress in all these particular areas. I do not believe that the system is broken in that sort of context and I think the debate is always open.

4.9.6 Deputy G.P. Southern:

One of the often-repeated criticisms of our education system is that it is not very inclusive. What action has the Minister, or will the Minister take to increase inclusivity in our system?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

I dispute that. I think that we have great inclusivity within our system. In fact, I was just at a Caritas meeting yesterday, we were talking about the eradication of poverty on this Island, and we were discussing elements of the inclusivity within the schools. There were about 14 people around the table and the various members were praising what was happening within the schools and the fact we do have a great deal of inclusivity. Just as I said at the end, we have completely remodelled our special educational needs service. I think it is a great credit to the teams that work within the schools, and the schools themselves and the pupils and the students that they see a society such as ours.

4.9.7 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Minister's denial that there is anything wrong with inclusivity runs in the face of 50 per cent of our students being in fee-paying education and on top of that a 14-plus system which excludes many candidates. Will the Minister treat this issue of inclusivity seriously and will he state what he is going to do to increase inclusivity in such a system?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

I think I must have misinterpreted what the speaker asked previously. I thought it was in relation to the special educational needs. I understand now what he is referring to. It is always on our agenda to talk to those schools in particular about the way they move forward. We have got a great relationship with all of the schools right across the Island now and we do address that, we do look at that problem constantly. So it is on my agenda, I do understand what it

means to people, but it is inherently unique to this Island and I think it is one of those factors that we can be very proud of.

4.9.8 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I want to thank the Minister for his answers. I acknowledge what he is saying about the responses being inconclusive, but does he agree that it was not down to the fact that people did not have views, there are very, very strong views that were split? Given that there are such strong views in our community, does the Minister agree that perhaps a further look at these types of questions is required? Would he agree to pass the raw data on to the Scrutiny Panel, anonymised with whatever conditions he wishes to attach, so that we can take a look at it, please?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

Just to answer the last part of the question first. I do not know whether the raw data exists now because this consultation was done some time ago. I think it started around 2011 but if the raw data exists, then of course I will pass it on to Scrutiny; I do not have a problem with that. Yes, the situation that we find ourselves in, we have been very careful about the way in which we have operated, talking to both teachers, heads and unions in moving forward. I think there has been a great amount of time and effort spent with teachers to make sure that - I know this is dear to the Deputy's heart - teachers were not overburdened with the amount of change that they have had to go through over the last couple of years. So we are now in a situation where we can begin to look at other areas that perhaps were not on our agenda to start with. Thank you.