

2018.06.26

**The Connétable of St. Helier of the Minister for Education regarding the closure of school libraries: [OQ.76/2018]**

Will the Minister state whether any school libraries have closed in the last 5 years and, if so, why?

**Senator T.A. Vallois (The Minister for Education):**

I can confirm that all schools continue to operate either a library or a learning zone in which library books and resources are available to pupils. With the changing nature of the curriculum, some schools have decided to utilise space in a different way. For example, at Grainville School, the old library was turned into a computer suite in 2017, providing an excellent space for pupils to develop their computing skills. As an alternative to the library, the school is now developing learning zones for key stage 1 and key stage 2, which will have age-appropriate texts and learning aids, which relate to topic areas, which are being studied by each year group. Library books are also available in book corners in the class.

**10.4.1 The Connétable of St. Helier:**

I am struggling with this a little bit because we have heard about Grainville and their learning zone, but I am particularly keen to know whether any secondary schools have lost their libraries.

**Senator T.A. Vallois:**

The only secondary school to have, in the Constable's words "lost their library" was an example of Haute Vallée School. It is another example of a school that is focused on improving and developing the literacy and reading ages of students in a different way. The school is in process of changing its library function to a year 10 and year 11 student learning zone and the learning zone will enable students to access the resources they require to excel in their learning.

**10.4.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

The Minister made much of the use of the word "learning" and learning specifics; is there not a case for libraries, which promote the enjoyment of books rather than the mere learning of facts?

**Senator T.A. Vallois:**

Yes.

**10.4.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

If the Minister agrees, will she examine and review the policy of closing down library spaces in order that she might have a more enlightened and liberal view on the act of reading?

**Senator T.A. Vallois:**

As I am sure the Deputy is aware, I am just 2 weeks in the post but I am happy to look and discuss this with all the schools and identify the most appropriate way for reading in the context of the right thing for the child and ensuring that we are providing the appropriate literacy programmes for all children right across the board.

[11:45]

**10.4.4 Deputy K.F. Morel:**

Going back to the example of Haute Vallée, could I ask what library provision there is for those pupils outside year 10 and 11 who are not able to access that learning zone?

**Senator T.A. Vallois:**

I understand that the school has undertaken a book audit. In terms of their alternative provision, now I do not have absolute certainty of this, but I will check and come back to you, in terms of the mobile library that goes around and I will find out whether that accesses the Haute Vallée provision. But I am aware that, following a review of the Haute Vallée budget, the school no longer employs a librarian at the moment, but however, funds permitting, the school is keen, through its literacy development plan, to employ a full-time librarian in the future.

**10.4.5 Deputy K.F. Morel:**

I would just like to ask the Minister if she appreciates the importance of exploration as a part of reading and libraries. What I am hearing come from the Minister is it feels a sense of control that is being exerted on the pupils' ability to decide their own direction when it comes to reading.

**Senator T.A. Vallois:**

My understanding so far is that there is a slow process in change in terms of the way literacy is being provided but I understand that there is more of a link with the Central Library. There is also, for example, in primary schools and early years, a new programme called R.E.A.L. (Raising Early Achievement in Literacy), which offers different ways of providing literacy in a more active learning environment. So in terms of the Central Library, there is a new partnership between Grainville and the town library that is being created with all students in year 7, 8 and 9, where they will be members, and pupils will be set regular and frequent reading challenges supported by the English departments.

**10.4.6 Deputy M.R. Higgins:**

Following on from the Minister's answer about Haute Vallée doing away with the librarian post, is she aware of any other school, both primary, or secondary, that have done away with librarians?

**Senator T.A. Vallois:**

In terms of librarians across the schools, that is the only one that I am aware of at the moment that a paid librarian is no longer available. Libraries at Hautlieu, Jersey College for Girls, Le Rocquier, Les Quennevais and Victoria College are run by paid librarians. The remaining schools maintain their libraries with support from a teacher, teaching assistant or volunteer who are responsible for the upkeep.

**10.4.7 Deputy R. Ward:**

Can I ask the Minister to reassure the Assembly that the changes to library provision that we have heard about are based upon improvements in learning as opposed to simply because of pressures of funding for those particular schools?

**Senator T.A. Vallois:**

I am sure the Deputy will be glad to hear that this is a bigger issue I think in terms of school funding that I particularly want to look at with my Assistant Ministers in terms of how it is allocated and how it works; not just libraries, it is across the whole of the curriculum in the way that we provide it and it is a huge piece of work. So it is definitely something on my agenda but I have only been there 2 weeks, so give me a little bit of time and I am sure I can give you a bit further feedback where we are.

**10.4.8 The Connétable of St. Helier:**

I appreciate the Minister has not been in office long but clearly a policy decision was taken by her predecessor that schools do not need libraries. Will the Minister undertake to work with the

Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel, of which I am a member, to review this policy and, if necessary, to take advice from some of the schools that have kept their libraries, and indeed a school like J.C.G. (Jersey College for Girls) which has taken an old library from a worn-out building and placed it in a new building, that schools do need libraries, even in a digital age, for all their students? Will she undertake to work with Scrutiny so that we can really open up this issue and make some decisions about it?

**Senator T.A. Vallois:**

Yes, absolutely, more than happy to work with Scrutiny. When I speak with the department with regards to this particular provision, I will ask about the specific policy and ensure that it is sent on to the Scrutiny Panel for them to view. I would be happy to work with them in terms of a more optimal way forward for all our young children in the Island.