

2019.06.04

11 Deputy C.S. Alves of the Minister for Education regarding the delivery of political education in the Island's schools: (OQ.145/2019)

Will the Minister inform the Assembly to what extent political education is delivered in schools; and whether such education is covered as a standalone subject or, if not, through which areas of the curriculum it is delivered?

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

Political education is a statutory requirement of the Jersey curriculum in our secondary schools at both key stage 3 and key stage 4, as the curriculum is required by the Education (Jersey) Law 1999 and is available for all schools. Although not a standalone subject, it is delivered through the Personal Social and Health Education curriculum, as part of the programmes of study for living in the wider world and citizenship. There is also a wider emphasis on politics, specifically relating to Britain, 1745 to 1901, in the key stage 3 history curriculum. Currently, our 9 and 10 year-olds across the Island, in both maintained and private schools, are given the opportunity to visit the States Chamber. The sessions are supported by local experts in the States Greffe and this has been in place for several years. During periods leading up to an election, the staff from the States Greffe also visit secondary schools to discuss the right to vote and to encourage young people to have a voice, which, of course, the Education Department are truly grateful for.

4.11.1 Deputy C.S. Alves:

Given that the Minister there has mentioned that it is covered in P.S.H.E. (Personal Social and Health Education) and aspects of history, can the Minister advise how often it is being taught on average throughout the academic year?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

I do not have those exact statistics to hand, but I can get somebody to get that information together for you and disseminate it across the Assembly.

4.11.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

The Minister will be aware that we are celebrating 100 years of what should be called 'votes for some women in Jersey' and that inequality, especially when it comes to the equality of the vote for women, living in urban areas, is not equal, even 100 years on from some of them achieving the vote. So, will she ensure that when it comes to political education in schools that students are taught from a young age about political philosophy and analytics and not simply about learning the facts of our current feudal and gerrymandered system?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

In terms of political education, or citizenship, as it was known, one of the issues that we have with regard to political education, not just in Jersey, but most of the western world, is that the appropriate resource of objective understanding, provided to the political sphere, is not understood and fully reflective in terms of education. The conversation that I had with Deputy Alves - I was aware that she was going to put this question to me - is that in terms of being able to ensure that better understanding is made of political education, especially in Jersey, is that there may be a need for us, as politicians, to work together, possibly as a standing committee of P.P.C. (Privileges and Procedures Committee) with relevant Members who are interested in this and I am happy to take

part in that group, to put together resource packs, to support teachers in schools to provide that political education.

4.11.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

May I have a supplementary? Does the Minister also agree that politics is most interesting, including to children, when it involves some disagreement and when there are different voices having a debate, hopefully with some decorum, in front of them in schools; and that, up until now, there has been a distinct lack of debate and differing political voices being allowed to enter schools to contest ideologies, for example?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

I do not think it is just politics; it is good to have disagreement in life, full stop. Everyone is different and they all have different views. Also, in terms of ... I know that there is more debate in schools, my own son and my own stepchildren are in secondary schools and they take part in this, not necessarily on a particular political platform, but debating, understanding written arguments, that is not just in P.S.H.E. but it is also in R.E. (religious education), it is also in English, understanding how to provide evidence-based arguments, as well. It is an extremely important part of growing up and becoming a well-rounded individual. But in terms of politics, I am willing to take on board all the information, but understanding, of course, how we can ensure - that is why I was talking about a resource pack before - to support the teachers, because it could be taught in various different subjects across the line, because we have to recognise the curriculum in the school education system at the moment is jam-packed.

4.11.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

As an immediate extension to the words of support that you gave to political education in schools, would the Minister not encourage her head teachers, who have control over the curriculum, to invite the current electoral reform scheme promoters into schools, as well as touring the parishes?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

I am happy to have that conversation and speak with the Group Director of Education and the heads and ask whether they would be willing to invite the group in and have that discussion about electoral reform.

4.11.5 Deputy K.F. Morel:

With regard to political education in schools, would the Minister agree, or would she want to ensure, that the importance of clear communication within a Government is very important, including, for instance, such times as when a Minister for Education is not told that they are being committed to savings by the Chief Minister, whether such communication is so important?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

I believe all communication is extremely important. I am not going to comment on the fact that the Minister for Education should be consulted with regard to her budget and her ability to provide the services that she needs to as Minister for Education. I would agree: communication has been a fault of, not just the Government, the States Assembly, the public service, for many years, and there is a lot of improvement to be made.

[11:00]

4.11.6 Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade:

Would the Minister, in agreeing that there is a necessity for political education, agree that children ought to be warned of the dangers of alignment with political radicals and extremists?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

This is quite a hot topic in the U.K. at the moment about radicalism, extremism; we have to, of course, obviously understand that there are potentially far right, far left, whatever it might be. Education is about providing the objective education base, to allow an individual to determine for themselves, but also to support those individuals, who may be vulnerable and ensure that they carry on through the right path and are not taken in a particular grouping that could harm the whole of society.

4.11.7 Deputy C.S. Alves:

I welcome the idea of resource packs and things like that; that will be absolutely fantastic. So, would the Minister, given that individuals can now vote at 16, consider making it a more consistent programme, especially in key stage 3 and 4?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

The first step we need to take with regard to this would be I would be happy to have a conversation with the Chairman of P.P.C., to set up a standing committee with interested Members from this Assembly to sit on; I would be happy to take part in that as Minister for Education. I am also happy to take the discussion and the questions that we have had today to the Curriculum Council when it next meets, to have a discussion about the consistency and how we ensure that this is provided in the schools. But, hopefully, that standing committee can continue, no matter which States Assembly, or Government, are in place for the long run because, of course, politics in Jersey continues to change, whether it is miniscule or huge steps, but there are changes, so people need to be kept up-to-date and understand how that does, or does not work.