

2020.02.04

17 Deputy R.J. Ward of the Minister for Education regarding the provision of sanitary products in the Island's schools and colleges: (OQ.38/2020)

Will the Minister ensure that sanitary products are available and free for all Jersey students in the Island's schools and colleges?

Deputy J.M. Maçon (Assistant Minister for Education - *rapporteur*):

While technically not the Minister, I wonder if the Deputy would accept a response from the Assistant Minister?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Absolutely, Sir.

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

May I begin by expressing my gratitude to the excellent work of the Red Box Project Jersey volunteers [**Approbation**] and all those who support them with donations. Thanks to their efforts, since February 2019, they have ensured that free period products are now available in 28 schools, who either request the box, or gratefully accept one when offered. May I just quote a comment from that group when they say: "Please can we ask that you do not use the word 'sanitary'? Instead say 'menstrual' or 'period products' when talking about products used, as 'sanitary' creates and reinforces the false connotations of periods being unclean and further adds to stigma."

4.17.1 Deputy R.J. Ward:

I absolutely take that on board and I compliment the services of that project, but can I ask the Assistant Minister if he would commit to ensuring that we are not reliant upon a charity, no matter how good their work is, that we can ensure that these period products are available for young women in our schools, in order that they do not miss school, for example and do not have to have the problem that is associated with that?

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

The Jersey Red Box Project also commented that: "Unlike the U.K. there is unfortunately no such data available in Jersey, due to lack of research" so it draws the exact same conclusions from the statistics used in the U.K. when analysing whether period poverty is an issue. At the moment we do not have that information, so, therefore, at this stage the Department is unable to commit to funding period products at this stage, without knowing the quantity. It has never been an issue that has been raised by head teachers, but we would want to further understand this as an issue, not only through teachers, but through the school councils. Also, to draw to the Deputy's attention, of course, there is a school funding review and which head teachers do have input into that if this is an issue for them. So, at the moment, I cannot give that undertaking, but there are avenues which can be pursued.

4.17.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

The Assistant Minister has been very helpful in quoting other people, including Red Box Project, but what is the Assistant Minister's political view and judgment on this issue as to whether our students, our female students in schools, should have access to period products?

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

My view is that they should be available and thanks to the good work of the Jersey Red Box Project, they are available free to students within the schools.

4.17.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is there not a principle that we should not be automatically reliant on charities; that, perhaps, this is an issue that should be made statutory?

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Again, as I have said, if you go with that premise again, you need the evidence in order to back it up. We do not have that, at this time, but the Department will be asking head teachers and students about whether this is an issue for them, in order to gain that evidence and make a decision about whether it would be appropriate to enhance the process, or not, or whether that could be done through, perhaps, the school funding review.

4.17.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is it not the case that we can probably rely on U.K. data, which has been extensive and/or we should be setting up our own investigation to make sure, if this is a requirement, that it is statutory?

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

I would not wish to compare apples with pears.

4.17.5 Deputy J.H. Perchard:

Given the fact that the average age at which girls begins to menstruate is about 14 and given that children spend so much of their time at school and therefore are quite likely to start their period for the first time at school and given that the population is made up of about 51 per cent female, is that not evidence enough to enable the Department to provide at least some level of product to schools? Because, my own experience tells me that schools do tend to buy, or have, some sanitary products available, but often teachers buy them with their own money and keep them in their classroom for that exact scenario, because they know how difficult it is for children and how scary it can be for girls when they first start to bleed.

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

I thank the personal experience that the Deputy has shared there. Again, we do have those products available in schools, thanks to the Jersey Red Products ... I am going to get this wrong. Red Box Jersey Project, thank you. So, they are there. If there is a matter to do ... because the point is this is a devolved matter for the schools. If there is an issue around funding, whether it should be provided through funding, there is a school funding review going on, which the head teachers can contribute if it is an issue for them.

4.17.6 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Is it not clear from this debate and from the data that is available that this is an equality issue and this is an issue of access to education for young girls? As such, it should be a statutory provision in our schools to provide these products.

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

No, I mean, this is an issue ... yes, it is about equality, but this issue has been addressed by a charity and we are grateful for that and for that support. That has been going on from 2019. That is not to say that previous to that schools did not provide other products to that. So, at this time, I do not

have the evidence that it should be a statutory matter, but it is something which we are going to raise with head teachers and students, in order to know what the best way forward is.