

2021.10.05

12 Deputy R.J. Ward of the Minister for Children and Education regarding class sizes in Jersey's schools (OQ.203/2021):

Is any increase in the class size currently being experienced, both in respect of primary and secondary schools; and what future increases, if any, are being planned for?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden of St. Helier (The Minister for Children and Education):

I thank the Deputy for his question. Overall across primary and secondary schools we are experiencing a slight increase in class sizes for this academic year. Primary school average class sizes have increased from 25.1 to 25.7 pupils since September 2020. In the same period secondary school class sizes in years 7 to 9 have increased from 24.0 to 24.6. The average class sizes in years 10 to 11, while lower than years 7 to 9 due to the number of pupils gaining entry to Hautlieu, has also slightly increased from 23.4 to 23.5 pupils per class. My officers constantly monitor demographic trends and plan ahead to ensure we flex our capacity with more classrooms brought online to avoid excessive class sizes and growth. For example, when we were aware of high birth rates in 2014 plans were implemented to open 14 additional classrooms in 2016 to cope with that increase. Also in September 2020 we opened 3 additional primary classrooms to cope with unexpected demand in government-provided school places. These are examples of the planning and flexibility capacity we have in place to ensure class sizes remain in accordance with our policies. Due to the lower than average birth rate in recent years, I am not currently planning for future increases in class sizes.

4.12.1 Deputy R.J. Ward:

I would like to know, first of all, whether those figures were across the entire school population, including States-assisted schools, or whether they were entirely public schools; but we do not have a mechanism for doing that. Then to add to that, I would like to ask whether specific circumstances, for example, in secondary schools where teachers may have to be allocated, for example, to provide support for J.T.T. (Jersey Talking Therapies) students and, therefore, their class is allocated elsewhere, which puts temporary increases in class sizes, whether the Minister is aware of those and whether he has a mechanism for highlighting such circumstance so that classes do not go way beyond the average; in secondary you mentioned 23.5.

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

I am not aware of what the Deputy has said about J.T.T. We do have policies around class sizes to make sure that we are not having large increase in class sizes which will reduce educational outcomes for children. We are under those policies in most instances. There are some occasions with special educational needs schools or certain catchment areas where we go slightly above but we never exceed our policy.

4.12.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

Is the Minister able to provide us with a comparison between average class sizes in non-fee-paying schools and in the fee-paying schools?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

No, I am not.

4.12.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

Could the Minister go back and let us know what that comparison is and circulate it? Would he be able to do that, please?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

I can go back for 2 things. I can go and find out what the policy is in the fee paying and non-fee-paying schools and then come back with some figures on that, which I think will be helpful because their policies could be different to our policies within public schools.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Can I just get clarification? I was asking for the figures, I do not want the policy. I just want to know what the figures are in those schools for average class sizes. Certainly the ones that are state schools but fee paying.

The Bailiff:

Is that information that can be provided, Minister?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

Of course it can; I was trying to be extra helpful, Sir.

4.12.4 Deputy I. Gardiner:

Would the Minister have figures, if there is a difference, between town schools and country schools?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

Yes, I could put a breakdown together for classroom sizes in town and non-town schools and get them to Members.

4.12.5 Deputy I. Gardiner:

Would the Minister give an update on the review into public education, which was ongoing? Sorry, the Minister mentioned demographics and the capacity and there was an ongoing review into the primary schools specifically in urban areas as to what the needs of the catchment area demographics were? Where is the review now?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

I believe the Deputy is talking about the review into schools within the town area that we are doing and, although I think it falls outside the question, I will organise for an update to be given to Members.

4.12.6 Senator T.A. Vallois:

Can the Minister advise what his policy is on classroom sizes and whether that is based on actual numbers or average?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

I thank the Senator for her question. The policy has not changed since the Senator's time as Minister for Education. The non-fee-paying primary schools, we aim for a class size that averages not to exceed 26 pupils. In secondary schools the forms are set at 25 pupils. Both sectors do have policies on when and how class sizes can go above the respective figure; for example, in primary school classes can go up to 28 places for pupils who live in the catchment area and 29 or 30 pupils via a formal appeal. In secondary schools 26 places can be offered for a pupil living in the catchment area.

[12:00]

4.12.7 Senator T.A. Vallois:

Could the Minister advise whether he has the number of class sizes in actual numbers that are above 26 and, if he does not have that to hand at the present time, whether he would share that with us as States Members?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

In secondary school classes that are above 25, the majority of them are at Les Quennevais School, which has seen an increase in demand due to its new school status. The primary schools that have class sizes over 28: there is one class in D'Auvergne, 2 in St. Lawrence, one in Springfield, 2 in St. Martin, one in Plat Douet, one in Samarès, 2 in La Moye and 3 in Mont Nicolle.

4.12.8 Senator S.Y. Mézec:

It follows on from Senator Vallois's question. I wonder if the Minister could tell us what he is aware is the maximum class size in a school in Jersey?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

The maximum class size is 30.

4.12.9 Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Could the Minister indicate where that is and is that just one example in the Island or are there multiple that are at 30?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

I do not have that information in front of me right now but I can disseminate it when I disseminate the rest of the information to Members.

4.12.10 Deputy R.J. Ward:

How significant does the Minister believe the class size is in the delivery of education? Could he given an example of what he sees should be the maximum number in a class, for example in a year 2 class and in a G.C.S.E. (General Certificate of Secondary Education) science class in year 10?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

I am led by my department on advice on what a class size is. I believe that it gets reviewed constantly so I believe we have the class sizes right. To go above and have too many children reduces, as I said earlier, the educational outcomes for all children within that classroom, which is why it is important to make sure that class sizes are appropriate so all children get a fair and equal education and get equal time with the teacher for the level of education that they require.