

22.02.08

9 Deputy R.J. Ward of the Minister for Children and Education regarding the school meals pilot (OQ.20/2022):

Will the Minister advise what criteria were used to select the most recent schools to be included in the school meal pilot project?

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

The most recent schools to be added to the school meals pilot are St. Martin and St. Peter. The pilot objectives are to understand the cost and feasibility associated with delivering nutritionally-balanced meals in Government-funded primary schools in Jersey, with a focus on achieving public health outcomes, such as increasing the consumption of fruit and vegetables among children, to understand the methods for implementation, commissioning and barriers to delivery and to review user feedback and lessons learned in order to make recommendations for a sustainable and cost-effective model provision. The original plan was to pilot the scheme in 3 schools and we are now extending it up to 5. Within the criteria for extending the pilot we have taken into consideration how easy or challenging it is to fit out the schools with an appropriate servery area. In the extended pilot we have selected schools where this is straightforward. Within the criteria we are also keen to stress-test the pilot by bringing in out-of-town schools to understand the methods for implementation, uptake among students and barriers to delivery in accordance with the pilot objectives.

3.9.1 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Would the Minister agree that the greatest need is within the town schools where Pupil Premium level, Jersey Premium levels are 53 per cent, 50 per cent and 44 per cent of students and, therefore, the impact would have been greatest? Does he not feel that that criteria of the greatest impact should have perhaps been weighted when making this decision, therefore, if you like, the biggest bang for your buck?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

Within this pilot we have to take into consideration that there are 25 primary schools in the Island, most of them, if not all of them, were never built with a fit-for-purpose modern health and safety servery area so we can deliver food to children safely within those buildings. Each building has to be assessed to be able to see whether there is current capacity and room for a servery that will meet modern health and safety standards, along with if we need to build an extension to put them in through lack of space. When we are looking at a pilot and we need to see how the feasibility of how the whole scheme worked across the whole Island in 25 schools, we need to look across the board at schools in town and out of town so that we can properly assess for a tender process to take place. What the actual scheme will look like, the challenges of making 3,000 hot meals a day and delivering them across the Island to 25 schools and serving them within their school; that is why the criteria was what it was. I do agree with the Deputy that there is greater need in the Pupil Premium if it is uptaken to its fullest but that is why we did what we did.

3.9.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is it not the case that it would have provided far better detail of what you can and cannot do if the Minister had chosen schools with high pupil premiums?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

No.

3.9.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Minister chose to go for easy targets; is that the case?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

No.

[11:00]

3.9.4 Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Is it not the case that the school meal programme has already shown its value and is it not the case that it is clear at this point that a rollout across all schools in the Island is surely an inevitability, based on what the pilot has shown us already? Would he agree to set that as the direction of travel now?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

The direction of travel is to get it into all school meals and the pilot will continue to extend to more schools throughout the year. That is already set in place. We are extending the pilot so that we can get the best possible information. We have been working with the amazing charity, Caring Cooks, who have been providing us with the information and who have agreed with the work we have done and the information we have got, they are extending the pilot to better achieve the right outcomes for a full programme.

3.9.5 Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Therefore, will the Minister undertake now to commit to ensuring that the next steps of expanding this pilot will be focused at those schools where there is the demonstrable greatest need for those children to access this programme and, in particular, that should include the town schools where a recent answer to a written question from Deputy Ward showed that they are where the greatest need is and that ought to be pursued as a matter of priority? Does he not agree?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

I will take it into consideration and, if it is not me, whoever succeeds me will take into consideration the evidence about the best way to go forward. I will not make a commitment or pre-empt that evidence-based work for headlining.

3.9.6 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

The Minister mentioned that he has chosen out-of-town schools, which I understand, and did he consider any St. Saviour schools, given the high level of need in some of our schools in St. Saviour?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

All schools were considered and it was about where we would get the best data to be able to create the best service after the pilot about delivering a full service to all schools. That is why we considered what it was. We had to look at whether we would have to do a planning application to build a servery within certain schools and a lot of the schools do not have the space to be able to put a servery in without building, planning applications and extensions. We tried to deliver what we could to get better information in the best possible way to be able to create a really good service when it comes to the actual delivery after the pilot.

3.9.7 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

What will the Deputy hope to learn about the schools that do not have serveries yet if the pilot scheme does not include those schools without serveries?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

We need to have a kitchen that can cook 2,500 to 3,000 meals a day and they need to be delivered across the whole of the Island to schools inside and outside of town. It was really important to be able to work out things like travel routes, delivery and staffing for areas around the Island within the pilot.

3.9.8 Deputy I. Gardiner:

I would like the Minister to address 2 things that he gave in his answers. From one side the pilot should present a way forward and how to address challenges to deliver hot food meals at schools. From the other side the schools in town, for example, as the Minister indicated, they do not meet more than the health and safety standard and the reason that these school meals cannot be introduced. How can we understand what is the way forward to introduce meals in much needed town schools with a high Jersey Premium if they are not creating a trial to do this?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

We are creating a trial, we are currently in the trial. All schools have been assessed by the C.Y.P.E.S. Department to identify which schools would require an extension and a planning application, which we could not do during COVID while we had schools in one-way systems and classroom bubbles. It would have been completely unacceptable and I wish we were further along but COVID really has put us in a situation in some places. There are children in all schools that this service will help and the ones that we picked in St. Martin and St. Peter cannot be forgotten either. But we can get there quick and easily to help those children that should not be left while collecting good data. At the same time over this period we have been identifying within schools areas of how we can deliver a service with a modern health and safety-met standards of a servery within those schools to find out if there is space currently or if there is not, and in most instances there is not. None of the schools were even built with a nursery and we had to build nurseries on those schools to even get them into our schools.

3.9.9 Deputy I. Gardiner:

If I understood correct, the town schools that do not meet health and safety requirements require extension and require planning application. It means that the town schools will not receive meals for the next 3, 4 or 5 years.

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

I do not believe I said any of such and that is an assumption that lies with the Deputy.

The Bailiff:

I think it is a statement of what the Deputy understands to be the implication of what you said and it could well be the subject of a legitimate question, so if you would like to answer it, Minister.

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

I do believe that Standing Orders says that questions should not be statements but I will answer. It is being reviewed, we are looking at it now. It is not going to be 2 to 3 years for all of this. We need to make sure we do this right and that anyone that takes over this service when it is a full service

knows the full implications of what is being done, otherwise we are only going to deliver something that does not provide a service for the children that is required.

The Bailiff:

Thank you very much. Before we come to the final supplementary, you made an observation there, Deputy, that you thought Standing Orders had a particular effect. I am sure you will accept Standing Orders is a matter for the Chair. Questions can be posed in a number of different rhetorical forms, including a statement with an upward inflection at the end. They can be questions just as much and they are not simple statements, they are obviously posed as questions and that is a matter within the judgment and discretion of the Presiding Officer.

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

Can I just state the Standing Order that I believed that it was not in order with, please, Sir?

The Bailiff:

No, the Standing Order provides that a question should not be a statement of fact or anything of that nature; that is what the Standing Order provides, it should not. But if someone says I understand what you are saying is this that is a question if it is done in a question form with an upward inflection at the end, which I heard that to be; that is my ruling on the matter. We are not going to have a discussion on Standing Orders but if you wish to raise the matter with me outside the Assembly, please do not hesitate to do so.

3.9.10 Deputy R.J. Ward:

From my understanding of the answers so far, would the Minister agree that given the limited resources available for the project in terms of being able to cook meals, would it not be best to focus those on where the most need is? If you have a limited resource focus where it is most needed because would the Minister not agree that these young children in our town schools only get one go at school and as time passes they miss out on something that could be beneficial. We have missed a real opportunity to impact on children's lives much more fully with what is a project that I believe will be fully supported across this Assembly.

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

Just because we have opened up the pilot to 2 schools where we can deliver to the children as soon as possible this required need of hot meals does not stop or slow down the work that is already underway to make sure that the schools that do need longer and stronger applications that would require building to take place. That work is still going on and we will be taking part throughout the year as part of the delivery of the programme. But that does not mean that we should not deliver the service to other children outside of town where there is also a need, which is just as great for those children as there is for the children in town.