

22.03.29

1 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade of the Minister for Children and Education regarding language assistants (OQ.53/2022)

Further to the answer given to Written Question 45/2022 and, in particular, part (b) which said that the decision on whether to reinstate the £40,000 per annum to fund language assistants in primary schools would be made this year, will the Minister provide the Assembly with an update?

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

There is currently no funding allocated to continue the previous relationship with the Alliance Francaise that specifically funded their language assistants in primary schools. This evolved as we developed the French Experience model, which followed a successful pilot that the Deputy will recall was rolled out to local primary schools. This required additional investment, including the reallocation of some of the resources previously allocated to the Alliance. Secondly, schools continue to access language assistants to support their examination years for students entering modern language qualifications. It is important to note that funding for all streams of education follows a commissioning model with any funding justified in terms of agreed measurable outcomes. I will leave it there for a supplementary.

3.1.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

I cannot quite figure out whether that was a yes or a no but perhaps one should not be so naïve as to expect such a binary answer. In the written answer that was circulated to my previous question it is suggested that one of the reasons the money was cut was because of COVID. Is the Minister saying now that is not the reason that it was cut and it was done as some kind of restructuring?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

In the written answer that I gave, it talks about the furloughing during COVID, during lockdown, and that a decision was going to be made about whether to continue on with what is going on. What actually happened was that we evolved the French lessons and we rolled out the French Experience model.

[9:45]

We have recruitment for 1½ qualified teachers and we have extended French lessons to years 3 and 4, as well as 5 and 6.

3.1.2 Deputy K.F. Morel of St. Lawrence:

I was just wondering if the Minister would advise the Assembly: the reduction in funding for this service, does it indicate a reduction in the value placed on language learning within education?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

No, absolutely not. The funding, rather than a reduction, it is being spent in a different way. That is with the French Experience, that is booster sessions for French within primary schools, it is to pay for the 1½ qualified teachers, that extended out to years 3 and 4 in French lessons, showing that we have extended and we do more French now than we did before. It was about trying to provide French longer and earlier in schools because we see it as such an important language.

3.1.3 Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier:

How long has the French Experience and the language assistant provision been running side by side in schools?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

I am afraid I cannot answer that question directly on how long it has been going but I will find out for the Deputy and get that information out.

3.1.4 Deputy R.J. Ward:

I just want to ask the Minister, is it a choice of one or the other if both have been accompanying each other? It is difficult we do not know how long. Is it really a choice of one or the other or do they not complement each other?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

I do not know if they will complement each other. All funding proposals, if Alliance Francaise comes forward with a new funding proposal or new proposal to us, that will be looked at. We do have a new C.Y.P.E.S. (Children, Young People, Education and Skills) adviser in language who is taking up post in April this year and with the implementation of the new languages strategy. But until a costed formal proposal is received we cannot go further than that, but we are looking forward to the starting of a new language adviser in April that will start bringing other ideas forward.

3.1.5 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier:

What we have done is replaced some lessons with a strategy; how practised we are at that. But is it not the case that the new language adviser will be taking up her place with a reduced budget? Has the budget for languages in schools been reduced?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

I do not know if the Deputy was ... I said that we have employed 1½ qualified teachers and with expanded French lessons down to years 3 and 4 that was not previously done. So we have not replaced teaching with a strategy but we are employing an adviser for languages who will start looking at what languages will look like going in the future, and we will set that up. I am sure that will be part of a strategy but one that will be costed that could go forward.

3.1.6 Deputy G.P. Southern:

I repeat: is it the case that the funding of languages in schools has been reduced and will the new officer be setting up from scratch with a reduced budget? Is that the fact?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

No, because we are spending the same amount, we have just allocated it differently.

3.1.7 Deputy C.S. Alves of St. Helier:

Given that the language strategy is due to be launched in early May, would this not be a good time for the Minister to show his commitment to languages and reinstate that funding of £40,000 to allow for the good work of the language assistants to continue?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

I dispute that again because I feel that by actually extending French further within schools and providing teachers shows that there is a commitment to French, and about expanding it and making sure that children are learning French earlier than they were previously that shows a commitment to the language.

3.1.8 Deputy M. Tadier:

I would ask the Minister if he agrees with me that he is giving with one hand and taking with the other. Would he go back to his department, speak to them about languages there, find out how long the French Experience that he has been lauding has been running for because it is a very good project but it has been running side by side with the language assistants, which are provided in primary school? Does he agree that it is absolutely imperative that children in our primary schools not only have teachers but they are able to hear a native speaker speak in the correct accent in their own language or a correct accent in their own language because if you wait until secondary school for that kind of exposure it is unfortunately too late.

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

I can continue to talk to my department. We have qualified teachers that teach in primary school French lessons, and they have been expanded. But I will go back with what the Deputy has said and speak to my department.