

22.11.22

8 Deputy R.J. Ward of the Minister for Children and Education regarding the prospect of further closures of private nursery providers (OQ.115/2022)

Given the announcement of a sudden closure of a private nursery provider, I know it is wraparound care, will the Minister advise what the current risk is assessed to be to the other families across the Island of facing a similar closure of their nursery provision?

Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North (The Minister for Children and Education):

A private provider before and after-school childcare gave short notice of closure last week. It was not a private nursery and I have assumed the Deputy is referring to that closure, and I will base my answer on risk assessment of similar closures of before and after-school childcare providers, not nurseries. I believe this is the first time that an after-school club has been served with an immediate closure notice, leaving us all shocked and taken by surprise. It was my belief that the after-school clubs are reliable entities and do not present a risk. My officers have followed the closure proactively and sought information with regard to the viability and sustainability of other school-based privately run after-school clubs in order to understand the level of risk. I am pleased to say that no immediate concerns have been raised but we will closely monitor the situation to reduce the risk of this happening again whenever it is possible.

3.8.1 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Does the Minister feel a widespread private provision of what has become an essential service for families - because both parents have to work nowadays to survive in Jersey with any standard of living - increases the risk of sudden change and the collapse of businesses?

Deputy I. Gardiner:

It is really important for me not to do generalisations because there are very successful private after-school providers and private nurseries and it is all business related. What we do need to ensure - and this is what I would be looking at with my team - that we will undertake work and assess viability and sustainability of the private businesses within nurseries and within after-school providers. What is really important for me is that it will not be repeated and the difficulties experienced by parents and upset caused by the children will not return.

3.8.2 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Following on from that answer, what options does the Minister believe she has available to her to improve resilience in making sure that these children have places for them in nursery or after-school care so that their families do not face that risk of when a business might collapse if this has just happened?

Deputy I. Gardiner:

Sure. What I instruct my officers to do, we will review our current contractual agreements that are in place to ensure that it does not happen in the future.

3.8.3 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

That is one option, I would have hoped to have heard more, but if a business collapses then a business collapses. I am not sure you can put in a contract you are not allowed to collapse; that would be a bit strange. Could the Minister further elaborate what options there are and what she is

doing to look at the state provision of nursery places and after-school care, as there is more certainty in that if the government is providing it and can have the flexibility there to make sure those children have that ability to be cared for there?

Deputy I. Gardiner:

Absolutely and it is really important to emphasise that following this closure my team stepped in and from 4 schools that were affected, in 3 of them we have current provision and we took it into house and our H.R. (Human Resources) Department moved very quickly to make sure that continuously care will be provided. On top of this we will look through the Day Care of Children Law, which was 2022, to ensure that conditions of certificate and registration are in place. We would have constant engagement. We can look into making everything government-owned and government-run but I think we really need to consider how we are making sure that there is ongoing communication between private providers. Because there are some of them doing a brilliant job and I do not think that we need to close the businesses that are viable businesses and delivering what we need.

3.8.4 Deputy S.G. Luce of Grouville and St. Martin:

I have just listened to the Minister's answer there. What I was going to ask was this and I think I will still ask the same question: is it time for government to provide all services for children 1,001 days; nursery, pre-nursery, before school, after-care services, not just secondary and primary education? Is it time that government got involved in all these sectors of education to guarantee that what happened last week will not happen again?

Deputy I. Gardiner:

First of all, we do need to review and, secondly, there is big work going around early-years intervention and our early-years provision. I would like to reassure the Deputy that my Assistant Minister, Deputy Louise Doublet, is working very closely with early-years providers. We are looking in the overall system in general. It needs to start at nurseries, going through the breakfast club, after-school provision and I personally would like to see extensive after-school provision in our schools, not just in secondary.

3.8.5 Deputy S.G. Luce:

I thank the Minister for her answer, and I would just like to stress, does she agree with me that it is not really acceptable for children to be attending a primary school in Grouville and then going to an after-school club in St. Helier where they have to spend a considerable amount of time on a bus between those 2?

Deputy I. Gardiner:

We are working to make sure there is a provision within school. As I mentioned before, this current provider that has gone into liquidation, it was 3 schools. First of all, at Mont Nicolle it was immediately supported with a short-term solution, in which we were involved. We stepped in and providing care for children with familiar adults and maintain the provision at least until Christmas and the long-term solution will be arranged straight after Christmas. At St. Martin's School, it ceased transporting children from St. Martin's to Grouville to assess Little Giants in the October half term. They have made their own site of after-school activities until Christmas, and we are currently in the process of finalising a programme for after-school activities with another established and registered childcare provider. At Trinity, this school already had been given notice to Little Giants, as it has

been their long-term intention to run their own after-school provision that we are supporting as a department as well. They have made their own on-site offer of after-school activities until Christmas and currently in the process to finalise a programme. They are running until 5.00 pm and from Christmas it will be until 6.00 pm. Grouville, we have 17 children now are being picked up each day by Centre Point Trust and taken to the after-school provision in town. It is not ideal but we needed to put something in place within, literally, 24, 48 hours. This school is working to engage services with another childcare provider to run their after-school club on site. A number have come forward and a meeting had been held last week and today between the school and providers and I really hope that arrangements will be progressed as soon as possible. There is a further meeting tomorrow on this site, so within really next week I hope we will have provision within the group. We are working towards this but this is as quick as we could react for this surprising and shocking closure.

3.8.6 Deputy R.J. Ward:

My question was taken by the Progress Party representative, which is an interesting one. Can I ask the Minister, there seemed to be a suggestion throughout those answers that provision is being looked at for after-school care within our schools? Is there a timescale for that provision? Is there a timescale for increasing that provision? Is there a timescale for giving that reassurance to parents? My children went to Grouville and I would like to have had them stay there afterwards but they had to be transported to after-school care as well. Is there a timescale for providing that sort of provision for parents so that children do not have to move around the Island?

Deputy I. Gardiner:

Can I ask for clarification of this question from the Deputy, please? Was the Deputy asking about Grouville or all after-school club provision around the Island?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Yes, there seemed to be a suggestion in the answers that the department is looking at increased state provision in that facility. Is there a timescale for that sort of increased state provision or even looking at it or even planning for it?

Deputy I. Gardiner:

First of all, we need to ensure that we have stable provision currently across these 4 schools. As a department, during 2023 we will be looking at options to increase after-school provision and I would say it always will be mixed between the department, private providers and also charities that would like to step in, Jersey Sport that would like to step in, and other providers. It needs to be mixed over to ensure that the children have various curriculum and activities after school.