



18th November 2022

Dear Deputy Curtis,

Re: Scrutiny Panel Review of the Proposed Government Plan 2023-2026

Every Child Our Future would like to thank you for the invitation to comment on the Proposed Government Plan 2023-2026 and, in particular, the three areas of inclusion, demographics and needs assessments and new school and educational developments.

In reverse order, we would like to offer some observations on the actions covered in these projects. We would, however, like to make an overarching point that however good or appropriate the plans are, they will either remain as unfulfilled plans or will fail to achieve expected returns unless the right quality and number of professionals are in post to implement them.

1) School development.

Rouge Bouillon. Government plans include figures that relate to the development of primary schools in St Helier. We would endorse fully the necessity of redeveloping schools but especially Rouge Bouillon. It does not sit well with government pronouncements on equity that some of the most disadvantaged children have one of the poorest quality facilities. Given the changes some few years ago on the adjacent site, it is also disappointing that greater progress on a long-tabled issue has not happened. We note that in the recent publication of Ministerial Plans the Minister for Children and Education has included as a priority the review and delivery of the capital plan but we are concerned by the implication that the roadmap for the re-development of schools in St Helier is still in the production stage.

- **School libraries.** We would like to see a stated provision that any new premises and redevelopment for schools include and prioritise a dedicated space for a school library. With space restrictions, school libraries in some schools have been given up for other uses.

Libraries play a positive role in boosting literacy. Libraries allow children the choice to explore books about subjects that interest them. Libraries also offer calm and relaxing environments. Reading for pleasure is a key factor in a child's educational development, wellbeing and their chances of success in life.

Children are shaped and inspired by what they read but many do not have access to books at home. In the UK, a recent survey reported that 1 in 11 disadvantaged children and young people have no book of their own at home. Our experience through our Book

Buddies programme, run with the Jersey Library and Rotary Club, would suggest that Jersey's experience might not be very different.

The evidence to support the importance of reading for pleasure as an indicator of academic attainment is strong. Research indicates that "There is a difference in reading performance equivalent to just over a year's schooling between young people who never read for enjoyment and those who read for up to 30 minutes a day"

Additionally, there is an economic impact to be considered. In the UK, a report commissioned from the National Literacy Trust demonstrates the positive improvement in numbers achieving 5 GCSEs and securing higher earnings if all children were to read for pleasure. It estimates that the consequence of increased skills and incomes would be to raise the UK's GDP by £4.6 billion per year within a generation.

Among the current Ministerial priorities is for education to be "shaped around children, their needs and their human rights". The UK's Children's Laureate, Cressida Cowell, included a child's right to access new books in school and in libraries in the Children's Charter and has said:

"How can a child learn to read for the joy of it if their parents cannot afford books, and their primary school does not have a library? It's a social mobility time bomb. Libraries transform school life far beyond the library doors. They boost attainment, ambition, and attention in the classroom; and improve well-being, alongside increased empathy, confidence and self-worth. Libraries are a space that nothing else can replicate, and the results are clear: they are an intervention that works. We must work together to change this story and put a library and a librarian in every school."

Cressida Cowell MBE, children's author

The final point is one Every Child Our Future would very much highlight at a time when staffing levels are under review. A library is not just a depositary for books. It needs to be managed and children's interests and views need to be reflected in its stock. It needs to be led by somebody skilled in helping all children but especially reluctant readers to discover the books that appeal to them and set their literacy development on an accelerated course. Jersey needs to ensure that both the space **and** the resources are in place.

- **Music development.** Every Child Our Future endorses plans to upgrade and widen access to music as part of a child's education. A new centre might well have a rightful place in those plans but we would like to see a programme that makes music a meaningful part of the current school life of all children in Jersey. To do so means the purchase and maintenance of instruments and the provision of places and opportunities to practice. It means the employment of qualified staff focussed on the engagement and proficiency of children. Music must not become another topic that a school is unable to deliver fully and enthusiastically and children find too difficult to access and to master.

We cannot offer an analysis of whether the funding requested is sufficient but we would suggest that if wider and in-school access is what is sought for all children including the less advantaged, investment in staff is critical.

2) **Demographics and Needs Assessment.**

Every Child Our Future has no comment on the assessment of the volume of children that the States will need to accommodate. In respect to the funding model used, however, which takes into account “the prevalence of young people with elevated levels of need”, we would expect that the definition is more than those children with or estimated to have a formal record of need and currently designated as SEN by schools. The Inclusion Review talks of children with additional needs and, on the assumption the aim is to extend individual support to children with unmet needs, financial provision needs to be made for them and for the teaching resources required to support them. An indication of the percentage of children calculated to be in this category of “elevated” would be useful.

3) **Education Reform – Inclusion Review.** Every Child Our Future endorses the attention and funding directed towards a fuller understanding and provision for children with a range of additional needs. We would like, however, to see specific mention of two areas of additional need that are essential if all children are to reach age-related levels of literacy at age 11 and to be able to access the secondary school curriculum. These are:

- **Speech and language.** Exacerbated by the Covid pandemic, there are alarming numbers of children entering nursery and Reception with delayed language and communication skills. In one school nursery, more than 2/3s of the intake fell below the levels expected. The vocabulary gap between these children and their peers, especially those from more affluent households, is significant and can be as much as 18 months on starting school. A busy nursery school teacher or TA finds it hard to give these children the individual attention or is not equipped to address the issues. Without language, these children face early hurdles as learning phonics is a challenge.

Addressing such needs requires coordination between the CYPES and Health where the specialist skills reside. If the investment recommended in the Government Plan is to make a demonstrable difference, there has to be not only mechanisms in place to make cross-departmental activities operate smoothly but also a shared resolve to make them work in a timely manner for the support of children.

- **Literacy and Numeracy.** Every Child has long argued that given that literacy and numeracy are the building blocks of academic success at school and for earning a decent living afterwards, they justify separate scrutiny. Some 25% to 30% of Jersey’s non-fee paying primary school children still move into secondary school with literacy and numeracy levels below that which enables full participation in the curriculum. The chances of attaining 5 good GCSEs for those children in the lowest attaining groups are poor. The description of activities on P57 of the Government Plan makes no reference to these children although some will also have needs that are mentioned. Reading Recovery support is in place in some schools and this kind of support needs to be available to all children who need it. This intervention indicates clearly that this is a

fixable issue for approximately 90% of children: children can be brought up to the level of confident readers and can maintain this standard.

- We would like to share the view that the “suite of changes” will “support delivery of improved outcomes and experiences for children and young people in Jersey’s education system” but we would want to see a statement of the outcomes expected and a regular public report on progress.

At the moment, there is a chronic shortage of TAs and teachers. If the initiatives already in the Government Plan and the priorities of the Ministerial Plans are to be met, the risk is all in the delivery. This manpower gap is the most critical issue to resolve. There will be no value for money if the plans are undertaken without the requisite level of resource and skills. And Jersey’s children will not be well-served.

Yours sincerely,

Gillian Arthur

Director