

2024.04.30

3.3 Deputy K.L. Moore of the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning regarding the progression of the community schools' pilot (OQ.70/2024)

Will the Minister advise whether he plans to progress the community schools' pilot that was planned for 2024?

Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier Central (The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning):

I thank the Deputy for her question. The community schools scope is very wide indeed. Indeed, the pilot mentioned in the question was not defined to a clear specification. When I look at the Ministerial Delivery Plan on page 4 of P1.2 - I want to read this to give a context - it says: "We will identify pilot schools in different contexts (primary, secondary, rural, urban) to understand how the community schools' model can be developed to deliver ambitions of the Council of Ministers. We will work with partners across Government and the third sector to develop partnerships across health, care and community service, for the benefit of children and young people and their families. These partnerships will be modelled across different schools and begin to be delivered." The pilot appears to be more about identifying what is part of a future project. I want to move away from this type of generic plan and move to actions. What we are doing regarding nurseries and some of the areas already in the action is more about doing exactly this. There is an element of community provision across all of our schools, and I would say that all of our schools are community schools, summer schools, after school clubs, wraparound nursery provision services embedded in the community like language therapy and mental health services. They are led by schools because our schools know their population and they understand their need. Indeed, I was at Samarès School the other day to watch their school elections, which I must say were absolutely fantastic. I want to give credit to all the children involved. It was interesting that they are providing community services such as language therapy nearby, so that parents do not have to go out to Les Quennevais. So these things are happening and they should be led by schools, and that should be what I am reacting to, to support it. In short, yes, I do support the scope of community schools and the project. We need to get on with taking some actions rather than just planning.

The Bailiff:

I remind Members that a response to questions should be no longer than one minute 30 seconds, and I am timing them.

3.3.1 Deputy K.L. Moore:

Could the Deputy commit to some actions that would enable the extension of the school day in identified schools, where there will be a benefit, and the provision of extended activities for the pupils of those schools?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

One of the ways in which we will extend is in our nursery provision, which is the first part of the C.S.P. We have already taken action on that by, for example, settling N.E.F. (Nursery Education Fund) payments for the next 4 years, which means that our negotiations are not spent on those, but are spent on developing that provision across our schools, using the facilities we have there, extending them across all of our providers to extend the school day for parents who need nursery provision. In terms of extending the school day for provision of other services in schools, that is already happening in so many schools. We see it all of the time. What we do have to do though, is build the confidence of our teaching staff after a really difficult time. We have also done that by settling a 4-year pay deal, so we do not have those negotiations in the future. They now know the priority that they have in my

eyes and the eyes of this Government and, therefore, we can move forward to develop those projects in a wider sense.

3.3.2 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour:

Once again, I am really pleased to hear the continued focus on nurseries. I would just like to understand if any further schools have come on board from the original plans of extending the nursery hours since the previous questions.?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

The initial plans were just generic plans. In terms of actual pilots, we are looking at some areas to pilot. It is difficult for me to talk about this because they are in ... I would like to make sure they are certain before I announce them, because as I have said before in nursery provision, we do not want to make promises we cannot keep. But what we have managed to do is start a dialogue, which is a positive dialogue with nursery providers. One of the most positive we have had for a long time by removing other negotiations, which were, to be quite frank, not what we wanted to spend our time on, and we now have a positive response, for example, from the Jersey Early Years' Association. We are very happy to put out that response, and we can now work with them to increase those nursery provisions, both in our secondary schools where those places are available to adapt them as necessary, and to try and free up, most importantly, places for 2 year-olds across our Island where there is a desperate need.

3.3.3 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

The dialogue which was happening for several months to get headteachers on board with the community nursery extension, is that dialogue going to result in any extension of nursery hours from September this year?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

The original dialogue, yes, was very positive. But from that came, and I have mentioned this before, all we had before was a plan to plan in September. I am hoping that we can have some actual pilots in place in September, and we are working on those as we speak. It will be great to see some of those in place, so that we can model what goes into the future and try and extend that as early as we possibly can. I fully understand and support the need for nursery provision, and I would like to see the extension of the N.E.F. for 2 year-olds. But as I have said before, and I will continue to say, we will do that when we have the provision in place, we will not make the mistake of the U.K. (United Kingdom). When they made their promise they cannot keep, it disappointed parents and has created havoc throughout the sector in the U.K. We will not be doing that. We have a positive dialogue with the sector and we will continue that.

3.3.4 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter:

Given that the Minister's answer on the community schools has been a large part focused on nurseries, does he have plans to reinstate plans for a nursery at Les Landes School, which I believe is currently the only state school without a nursery provision?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Thank you for the question. There is not a plan to build a nursery at Les Landes School because the school nurseries we have at the moment, we have 188 spare places. It would not be sensible to create that at the moment. If we develop those nursery places in the future across our other schools and are using them, and we find that need, then of course that is what we will try to do. I do not think that is the best direction of our funds at the moment, I am afraid.

3.3.5 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Perhaps that school may get some other priority around building a community school if it does not have a nursery to provide that at. One of the barriers to access the school nurseries, and those may explain some of those spare places there, is around the times of the day. I know that from speaking to parents. Does the Minister have any plans to address that?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I feel like I am repeating myself. First of all, the community school is wider than the nursery, so because the school does not have a nursery does not mean it will not be a community school. A generic term defined by the last Government, without a lot of substance to it, more about vibe. I do not want that type of politics. I want to get on and do something. Our schools are community schools. When we build new schools, we will build them as community schools as well. In terms of the wraparound time, yes, that is an essential part of our nursery provision. But to do that, what we need is the co-operation of all sectors. I believe we have that co-operation. We have an extremely positive relationship with all sectors - third sector, private sector and our state schools - and we can move that forward. In the background, there is an enormous amount of work being done to try and push that as quickly as possible.

3.3.6 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North:

I am grateful for the Minister, that he is taking forward the community school and recognises in his last answer that enormous work was done previously. Can the Minister agree that he will be not able to progress with delivery without planning? The planning is essential. Second, has the Minister asked officers to share all practical work that has been done from 23rd July to deliver wraparound care at 3 schools from 24th September, including the numbers that were in place.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

There was a lot to that; I lost the first part. My apologies, sorry.

Deputy I. Gardiner:

Does the Minister agree that needs planning? Second, has the Minister seen the numbers and practical delivery that has been developed from 23rd July to be able to deliver wraparound care in 3 schools as a pilot from 24th September?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I still have not got the first bit, I apologise. The planning of course is essential, but it comes to a point where you have to stop planning and you have to start acting. That is the point. Our schools are community schools. Our schools have been doing this for years. Our schools for years have been providing sports facilities, outreach, support for children, educational psychologists, language therapy, counselling services, support for families. They continue to do that. Just because a term “community school” was suggested by the last Government, or indeed any Government, does not mean it is something new that has been happening. What we need to do is support that as best we can. Indeed, I look at the Constable of St. John, and I remember - it has come back to my memory - that we have a meeting soon - very soon, it may well be next week - about sports facilities in schools and how we can extend those. Yes, work is being done, but not just planning, but actual work is being done. In terms of the 3 schools, yes, I am aware there are plans, but my priority with the C.S.P. was to get that number one in the C.S.P. Then we can take action on those plans, if they existed. I was not clear as to what those plans were doing, if I am absolutely honest. But I am not going to dismiss anything. Yes, I know we have really positive dialogue with the headteachers in the state schools and we will develop that. There is no obstacle in the way to us doing this, apart from taking the action. We have been through the planning. We know what we need to do. I want to see us get on and do it. It is the number one in the C.S.P. to do that.

3.3.7 Deputy I. Gardiner:

Unfortunately I think the Minister did not answer the questions. He gave the prepared answer about vision. My question was very simple. Has the Minister been presented by the officers numbers and very clear practical delivery that was developed from 23rd July to get 3 pilots in 24th September? It was very simple question, without going into this detail.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I think the answer to that is it is another one of those generic plans that happened without enough detail in it. I wanted to see some actual detail on what was going to happen. We have had an enormous amount of talk about what is going to happen in nursery schools and schools and community schools, but we have not seen a great deal happening. I am hoping that we have projects in place for September 2024. I am hoping we can extend that and we can model them correctly. One of the biggest obstacles to this happening was the constant negotiations around the N.E.F. The first thing I have done in the first week of negotiations with J.E.Y.A. (Jersey Early Years' Association) is to sort the N.E.F. for the next 4 years, so we are not using officers' time, J.E.Y.A.'s time, but we are talking about developing those nurseries. What we are getting is a rather ... I do not know. I just think that we can move forward. I would not throw anything away from the past. If it is positive, we will use it because we are all coming from the same place. We want to see what is best for our young people, and we will put that in place as soon as possible. If the Deputy wants to take credit as previous Minister, that is absolutely fine. We want to put things in place. But we have not got a lot in place at the moment, and I have only been in the job a couple of months and we are actually putting something in place.

3.3.8 Deputy J. Renouf:

There does seem to be slight confusion here in these answers. On the one hand, the Minister is saying that we already have community schools, but I think the argument we would make is simply saying a school is a community school does not make it so. The idea of community schools would be perhaps to open them for sports facilities and so on. He says he wants to get on with things. What things is he actually going to get on with to extend the range of community provision through schools?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Perhaps I should speak more clearly, I realise I have a slight accent but I should be careful in what I say again. Community schools, as the Deputy says - I absolutely agree with him - do not exist just because we have said it. But when you look at Ministerial Plans, that seems to be what we are doing. Community schools are there because they are schools at the centre of our community. They already provide significant numbers of services, and they have done for years. What are we doing about expanding that? Let me give you an example. I am meeting the Constable of St. John. We can look at practical ways to extend access to sports facilities across our school facilities ... estate is the word I am searching for.

[10:15]

In terms of other areas which are working, as I mentioned, Samarès School. I want to continue to support their provision of language therapy close to the school. That is a really good model of what sort of things we can do. What can we provide very close to the school so that parents do not have to make their way out to Edith Quenault Centre, for example, and it becomes an integral part of the school. The other really crucial thing, is we need to push ahead with the building of new facilities. When we do that, they will be available as community schools for our communities, particularly in the centre of St. Helier. That is the other really key point to what we are going to do. I would invite Members of this Assembly to come and see the schools with me to see what they are doing before we stand up in the Assembly, and say ...

The Bailiff:

Can you bring your answer to a close, please, Minister?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

So there is an open invitation.

3.3.9 Deputy J. Renouf:

I feel like that was a bit of progress because there were some specifics in there. Can he say when he will be doing these pilots, so that we can judge whether or not there has been a success or not? There was Samarès School and meetings with St. John's.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

In terms of the pilots for nursery, I think I have covered that. In terms of the pilots for sports facilities, we have to have the meeting first to see what is available and see what we can start with. So that will be as soon as possible. But I would say again, to the Deputy, we seem to forget what our schools are actually doing. Across our school estate, schools are providing after school clubs, summer clubs, support for parents, support for families, opportunities for Best Start to be involved, opportunities in nursery, wraparound care. There are so many things already going on. The key is to support the things they are doing, embed them and then extend them where it is best targeted. That is what we intend to do. That is exactly what we intend to do. This is not something new, because it was thought of at the last Government or the Government before or the Government before that, and it is not something new because I will mention it and the next Government will mention it. This is something that is integral to what our schools do. What we need to do is support our schools, support our school staff, and build appropriately modern school facilities so that all of our children have the best start in life and the best access to education.

3.3.10 Deputy K.L. Moore:

We have heard a lot from the Minister. I am grateful to him for his answers, I think. But if I could provide an interpretation and ask him to accept whether he thinks this is the right one. It appears that the Minister is taking a slightly new approach in terms of rather than taking evidence and building an evidence base for taking action and providing a standardised provision for every child in this Island to benefit, he prefers a piecemeal approach that will result in a postcode lottery for children.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

A simple answer, I could not disagree more with the Deputy's interpretation of what I have just said. It is completely and utterly wrong. What is piecemeal is creating generic plans with good vibe, but then having no substance to what has happened. I want to move away from that. I want to appreciate the work that is being done in schools, appreciate teachers. The last Government failed dramatically to do that because they had an industrial dispute for years, which they did not settle, and just made worse with the letters that they sent. We settled that. We prioritised what our schools do. That is what we would be doing in the future. That is not piecemeal. That is called understanding - lived experience for myself - schools, understanding need for education, and understanding what needs to be done. It is certainly not piecemeal. That is planning ahead, that is looking ahead, and that is having a Common Strategic Policy that can be acted on.

Male Speaker:

Could I raise the *défaut* on the Constable of St. Helier, please?

The Bailiff:

Indeed you can. The *défaut* is raised on the Connétable of St. Helier. Could I ask Members and urge Members to exercise discipline both in the questions and in the answers? A number of times, and it is

not only Deputy Ward who, in my experiences, has done this, the answers have gone beyond the one minute 30 seconds, which is customary to allow. That means that Members are not able to ask as many questions as they would like. Similarly, the question should not be, in my judgment ... they are there to ask for action or elicit information, not to seek support for a political statement. If there is a political statement made with a question tagged on the end, that is inevitably a long question and inevitably will give rise to a long answer. It is a matter, in my respectful judgment, that Members should try and exercise some self-control over when they are dealing with question time. Otherwise, at the moment, the way time is going, we will probably lose the last 3 questions if we continue in the same vein.