

2020.06.30

7 Deputy K.F. Morel of St. Lawrence of the Minister for Education regarding the provision for schoolchildren to attend clubs and activities during the summer holidays: (OQ.176/2020)

Given the abrupt disruption to the social, physical and mental development of our Island's children caused by the closing of schools due to COVID-19, will the Minister confirm that there will be provision for all schoolchildren to attend clubs and activities during the summer holidays and what investment, if any, is the Government of Jersey making in those clubs and activities?

Senator T.A. Vallois (The Minister for Education):

I am confident that there is capacity within the childhood sector to meet the identified needs of children coming through this pandemic. I estimate that there are approximately 1,500 places available over the summer in the 29 holiday and activity clubs registered with my department. While there is no planned investment above that described it is important to recognise that throughout this pandemic the childcare sector has been well supported in terms of sustainability from access to the co-funded payroll scheme and other business support measures established by the Government.

4.7.1 Deputy K.F. Morel:

The Minister speaks of a childhood sector and also of no investment planned so does that mean the Minister is relying on private fee-paying activities in order for students of whatever economic background to avail themselves of such clubs and activities. If so, does she not agree that many children will be in the situation where their parents economically hard hit are unable to afford the activities that they may want to undertake?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

I am advised before my time that we did offer, perhaps 6 or 7 years ago, a number of primary school sites but the decision was to close these. This was due to there being sufficient capacity within the private sector to meet the needs of children and families. We also recognise that we have the Youth Service offering to assist various socioeconomic households' children, particularly vulnerable and young carers as well, and they have continued to do so throughout the pandemic even though they have reprovisioned their services. We need to recognise that those registered providers who provide an excellent service have been impacted by COVID during the Easter holidays and May half term when they could not open.

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

Has the Minister had sight of the letter which J.C.R.T. (Jersey Community Relations Trust) wrote to the Chief Minister and all Ministers which raised an issue along these lines asking for provisions like this but not just for play clubs but for extra educational provision, perhaps in the holidays or after school? So if the Minister is adding some extra provision in this area could she make it so that there are some extra educational provisions there to try and balance out some of the inequalities that are arising as a result of the crisis that we have had?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

I am aware of the letter. Officers are providing a response to the Chief Minister, to provide to the J.C.R.T. In terms of educational provision, there are some of our schools that do provide some opening. They are looking at that. One in particular I am aware of that was considering this was

d'Auvergne and we are looking and setting our home-learning provision, our I.T. (information technology) offering and what we have in terms of further educational offerings that we can provide during this period.

4.7.3 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Can the Minister envisage that the Jersey Premium scheme could be extended and further investment put in, in that area, to facilitate things such as holiday clubs and the extra education that is going to be needed going forward?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

I am sure, as the Deputy is aware, the Jersey Premium is applied through the claiming of income support. That budget is handed over to the relevant schools and they will utilise that in the best way that is sufficient for the children within their care. Whether that is employing extra staff to support on one-to-one or 2-to-one basis for their particular needs or extra resources, it will be determination for the head teacher what is appropriate to provide for those children under the Jersey Premium offering that we have?

4.7.4 Deputy K.F. Morel:

Given the Minister's answers it seems that the Education Department is ridding itself of any responsibility to ensure that children have some sort of social and educational activities to undertake during the summer. Could the Minister explain why, given the disruption to their education, the Education Department has not decided to undertake a co-ordinated approach to ensuring all children of all ages have something to do where they can mix with each other and try to make up the lost months, such as opening schools for the groups that, as she mentioned, used to take place 6 or 7 years ago?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

Can I just state that we are not ridding our responsibilities? We have been working and teachers and head teachers have been working throughout this pandemic to support children in the best way that we possibly can, considering the circumstances we find ourselves in. I recognise Deputy Morel's concern, particularly over the social interaction, and of course we are working with a variety of different schools. Like I stated, some already consider what kind of provision that they may provide over the summer but we also need to recognise that social interaction is not just an educational offering. It is also sports clubs, activity clubs, whereby we have 1,500 places in the childhood sector that we do support through our registration team and we are assisting around the public health guidance in terms of their opening and how they will work during the summer period. We also have the Youth Service that do many reach-out programmes over the 3 months and they go into hot spots and they support children, whether that is on the beaches, in the parks, in different areas to help and support them with their mental health and also answering questions or concerns that they may have.