

Changes to NEF and States unnecessary spending on new nurseries

On Wednesday 23rd March at 5 pm (last possible time before private preschools and schools closed for 3 weeks) we were advised by Justin Donovan that the NEF would be means tested and only in the private sector, that the NEF grant would be frozen for a second year, both in accordance with the States aim to control spending, AND the States were planning to build, equip and staff new nurseries in the remaining state schools and JCGP starting in September 2016 with Springfield.

6 years ago the partnership between state and private nurseries was set up to ensure that there were sufficient nursery places for all pre school children on the island without the need for more states spending and this has worked extremely well, ensuring that we have parity of care and education.

1. By providing the market with more non means tested free States nursery places it will kill off the Private Pre Schools , which cost the states nothing, and seriously damage the day nurseries. (it is almost impossible to ' make money' on under threes with good quality staff because of the ratios)
2. Create inequality in the private setting with some children claiming NEF and others not. Disclosure at re registration due to the monitoring will discriminate against those 'paying for their place' .
3. It is suggested that the means testing of the NEF will result in an annual saving of £250,000. It has been acknowledged that States nurseries will be built, equipped and staffed in all the remaining states schools including JCGP. The costs arising from that, both revenue and capital, have not been disclosed. However, in respect of Springfield which is to open in September 2016, we were advised that building costs are subject to confidentiality, but that equipping and staffing for the year will be a minimum of £122,000. New nurseries would be considerably more.
4. When Mr Donovan was asked why he felt this expenditure was necessary he replied that it was better for children at the top end of the primary school, if a nursery was within the school. Our concern is with the nursery children themselves.
5. There should be choice for parents who prefer their children to be in a totally nursery environment for these very formative years.
6. Jersey has a level of excellence in Pre School practice at present, with choice. The decisions, without any consultation with private providers, will seriously damage this.
7. Decisions will also affect the timing of mothers returning to work which in turn will mean less income from salary taxation for the Treasury.

In paragraph 3 I refer to the additional costs to be incurred by the States. I feel very strongly that these will far exceed the projected annual savings from means testing of the NEF, in the private sector only, of £250,000 . I do not believe that this significant aspect has been disclosed, or publicised by the media.

Finally on purely personal evidence The Acorn Nursery School has already felt the impact of 2 new day nurseries and 2 new preschools opening in this academic year.

I would like to extend an invitation to the scrutiny panel to visit The Acorn Nursery School and observe for themselves the uniqueness and high quality of one of the pre schools on the island . Our establishment will be unable to continue if the decisions disclosed on 23rd March are carried through. I have already had communication from parents who sadly will not be able to send their children.