

2.4 Deputy S. Pitman of St. Helier of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture regarding the affordability of school uniform requirements in Island schools:

What work, if any, has the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture undertaken to ensure that uniform requirements in the Island at schools are affordable?

Senator M.E. Vibert (The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture):

My department is always mindful of the need to ensure parents are able to afford uniform requirements. Schools direct parents towards local low-cost outlets for many of the necessary items of uniform. Parents also have the opportunity to shop online for these. Where specific items of uniform include a school crest - for example, blazers or jumpers - Island schools shop around both on and off-Island in buying bulk in order to get the best value for money for parents. No profit is made on the sale of these items. Parents of school children experiencing financial hardship do receive assistance from the Education Welfare Service in purchasing a school uniform. Any parents with concern should speak to either their children's school or the Education Welfare Service.

2.4.1 Deputy S. Pitman:

I am aware that the assistance the department offers to parents is only to secondary school uniforms; will the Minister consider opening this up to primary school uniforms?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

Yes, Sir. Presently the main help from the Education Welfare office is the transition from primary to secondary school which is quite often the most expensive time, when a list of secondary school uniforms are made available and 35 families were helped in 2007. Schools - primary schools in particular - have various ways in which they try to help families who approach them but, yes, I will look at whether we should extend what is currently happening and whether there is a better way of doing it.

2.4.2 Deputy S.C. Ferguson:

When I was at school and when my son was at school there were flourishing second-hand uniform facilities at the schools. What steps is the Minister taking to make sure that those are available?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

Some schools still operate second hand-uniform stores. Unfortunately - or fortunately depending which way one looks at it - there is less of a demand these days and most parents purchasing seem to purchase new uniform requirements, but there are, in a number of schools, second hand uniform shops.

2.4.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Minister agree to publish a list of the range of costs of school uniforms in our schools and, in particular, with a view that Members should know how much G.S.T. (Goods and Services Tax) is likely paid on such uniforms.

Senator M.E. Vibert:

I will consider it, Sir.

2.4.4 Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier:

I think I heard the Minister say that there is no profit made by any of the schools. I find this difficult because obviously purchasing children's clothing I would say most of the... Just as an example, Sir, jumpers purchased without the crest: the quality of the jumper I could probably buy anywhere for about £6 and the schools. When you get the crest put on is normally roundabout £18 to £20. So someone, somewhere, is making a profit and it may be our schools or whoever is purchasing is not doing the best job possible.

The Deputy Bailiff:

So the question, Deputy?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Could the Minister make sure that he looks at it from the top and where somebody is making a profit on, as I say, sometimes unsuitable or not very good quality clothes, just because it has to have a crest on it?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

It is certainly true that having a crest embroidered on an item increases the cost because it is a smaller number of specialist items. The last information I had, which was in December 2007, an example of a primary school, and for example a light blue polo shirt with embroidered emblem was £9.50 and a school sweatshirt with embroidered emblem was £12.95. The example I give is to show that though you may be able to buy a cheaper ones without the embroidered emblem, the embroidered emblem does not add significantly to the cost. In that sense, I think those are manageable costs and we will endeavour to help anyone who is experiencing financial hardship. The feedback we generally receive from parents is they appreciate and value having uniforms in this way with crests on, it helps identify and it also, for many parents, does away with the difficulty of children wanting to have the very latest in fashions to wear to school when there is a uniform to wear instead.

2.4.5 Deputy S. Pitman:

How many parents does the department help with the cost of uniforms and also the Minister talked about helping parents who are in financial hardship; what level of income do parents have to be on before they can access help by the department?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

Perhaps I am not the only one with trouble hearing as I answered the first part of the question just a couple of minutes ago in reply, which was that 35 families, I repeat, were helped in 2007 with secondary school uniform requirements. Applications from parents are treated on an individual basis, depending on how many children they have got and so on. But, I will endeavour to find out more detail; if the Deputy wishes to put her question in writing to the department we will answer it in full as much as we can.