

#### **4.8 Deputy P.D. McLinton of St. Saviour of the Minister for Education regarding the testing of students for dyslexia:**

It is good to be in the Assembly to ask this question. Can the Minister inform the Assembly what arrangements, if any, are in place to test students for dyslexia?

[10:45]

#### **Deputy R.G. Bryans (The Minister for Education):**

This is a complex area, because the term “dyslexia” often causes confusion. There are many reasons why a child may have difficulty with reading and writing and our job is to identify precisely what the problem is and how to help the pupil overcome it. This is an ongoing process over the course of a child’s schooling. There is no single test for dyslexia. However, over the past 3 years, our educational psychology team have developed a comprehensive new tool for assessing children with a range of literacy difficulties, including possible dyslexia. I can hold this up and, in future, people will be able to see what I am holding up. It is called the “Jersey Literacy and Intervention Tool” and is used to identify strengths and weaknesses. Issues around reading and writing all come under the term “Specific Learning Difficulty.” The term “dyslexia” is not generally used unless there is no improvement over a long period and after help has been put in place.

#### **4.8.1 Deputy P.D. McLinton:**

As a pupil is being continually assessed, I wonder if the Minister could cast light on the fact that I have recently come across a 17 year-old student who has only just been diagnosed, at the end of her educational career on Jersey, with dyslexia, having had her educational career entirely compromised. I wonder if the Minister could (a) explain how that could happen and (b) explain, perhaps in more depth, what he and his department intend to do about avoiding this happening in the future.

#### **Deputy R.G. Bryans:**

Obviously, I cannot comment on that specific case because I do not know the particular details, but I sat with the head of a primary school just yesterday, talking about this subject and a lot of other subjects besides it. His school has over 200 pupils, has one student that has been identified with these learning difficulties, and another one who is going through the process. To outline to the Assembly what the process is, either a parent or a teacher, who are very intimate in terms of the knowledge of their children, can identify learning difficulties. They would then get in touch with what we call S.E.N.Co.s, which are Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators, who will then bring in an educational psychologist. On a child-by-child basis they will look at that particular situation and evaluate that child and see what those learning difficulties are. Then there will be an intervention and strategies will be put in place to help that particular child.

#### **4.8.2 Deputy M. Tadier:**

On this subject, a constituent has submitted a question which I will quote more or less verbatim. She asks why parents are not being told that children have problems until they are in Year 6 and about to leave, and they are not picking up on learning issues or behavioural issues before that stage?

#### **Deputy R.G. Bryans:**

Again, I do not know that that is particularly true. It is obviously true in the case of that individual that you have asked the question on behalf of, but I do not know the case. What I can say is that our teachers are highly skilled. As I have intimated before, they are very aware

of their particular children in the classes. The problem we have is that children mature at different rates, so something that may be perceived as an inability to read very well, or literacy problems of one kind or another, can disappear as the child grows older, so it is very difficult to identify. We do have this tool, we do have that special educational needs in place co-ordinated and we do have an educational psychologist that can intervene where necessary.

**4.8.3 Deputy M. Tadier:**

Is it also possible, even at an unconscious level, that we have teachers and healthcare professionals who are working under increasing strain and with difficult conditions and that there are resource issues which may make them reluctant to diagnose at the correct stage, leaving students, pupils, in the lurch for too long so that these issues are not picked up until it is quite late, if not too late?

**Deputy R.G. Bryans:**

I know of no teacher that would prevent any child from gaining an intervention of the kind I have described.

**4.8.4 Connétable D.W. Mezbourian of St. Lawrence:**

Is this new tool to be used in all schools, including secondary schools? When older pupils have been identified as suffering from dyslexia what procedures will be put in place to ensure that they are aided before they reach the end of their school life?

**Deputy R.G. Bryans:**

Thank you to the Connétable for the question. Yes, all schools have been trained, and staff are now using the new tool, alongside other methods, to address literacy difficulties. The recent work means that schools are now far more adept at identifying literacy needs and developing bespoke packages of intervention to address each child's individual needs. All primary and secondary schools have had training in the new assessment tool and 2 conferences related to dyslexia were held earlier in the year to ensure that there is a more robust understanding of how difficulties, including dyslexia, can be identified and then addressed. If there is a particular case in the way you describe it, they have access through our educational psychologist to identify those problems and intervene.

**4.8.5 Senator S.C. Ferguson:**

Surely it is essential to the Minister that these cases are identified at the primary school level, because otherwise you have children coming up suffering a great hindrance to their education. The one place I have not heard him mention is the Dyslexia Society in the Island, which I understand is quite active and has done some very useful work. Where does this fit into the Minister's discussions?

**Deputy R.G. Bryans:**

I think I have already said that the primary schools are very involved in this, and one of the problems that we come across, and there is no fault at any of the schools that I am aware of, primary schools in particular, where the teachers do not, when they think there is a learning difficulty of one kind, give consideration to that particular child and provide interventions of one form or another, using this tool and speaking to the special educational needs co-ordinators. With reference to Dyslexia Jersey, I have been on the website, I have seen the information provided. We provide as much information as we can, we work very closely alongside them in that sort of concept, and they themselves identify that there is a consideration. It says here: "Dyslexia tends to run in families and is not related to intelligence or to a person's background" and it goes on in relation to the difficulties and real strengths that can be identified. We do do

that, that is part of what we do, and I am very secure in saying that I feel that all primary schools in particular are now well versed and have that opportunity to intervene where necessary.

**4.8.6 Deputy J.A. Martin:**

I am not sure really how to frame this. It is a concern of mine, and I would like the Minister to answer: we have got the Assistant Minister with, I think, responsibility for part of Children's Services, definitely C.A.M.H.S. (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service), asking the Minister for Education what he has done about dyslexia in the Island. He has pointed out what many of us know about the Special Educational Needs service, which does work with C.A.M.H.S. My question then is: why are the ministries not working together? Why does the Assistant Minister for Health and Social Services not know what the Minister for Education is doing with children who have special needs when he is working with these people in his own department? Are they not working together at the top?

**Deputy R.G. Bryans:**

Yes, very much so. The holistic overview of health for children, of one kind or another, whether it is to do with learning difficulties or any other problems that children encounter in their school lives, the considerations that I have with the Minister for Health and Social Services and various other Ministers in the Council of Ministers, are taken into consideration. I think people are very aware of the situation that we deal with and, as I have displayed, I think we are on top of the particular problem related to dyslexia.

**4.8.7 Deputy P.D. McLinton:**

Yes, we do work together, however, this is just an interest of mine as to how this could slip through the educational net. I am reassured there are tools in place. I wonder if the Minister could reassure this Assembly that we make sure that, not only are our young people taught information, and at school we are all taught information, but strangely, not taught how to learn, because we all take in information in different ways: kinaesthetically, auditory, visually. If we are taught how to learn I am sure many educational difficulties that our young people go through would be picked up a lot earlier. Could the Minister reassure that he will look into this?

**Deputy R.G. Bryans:**

Thank you to the Deputy. This is related to Deputy Martin's question to some extent, and I thank Deputy McLinton for his answer; we do work together and one of the things I will attempt to do is take Deputy McLinton into some of the primary schools so he can witness for himself the kind of excellent teaching that is being provided in our primary schools. That may allay any of his fears.