

2016.03.22

3.11 The Deputy of St. John of the Minister for Education regarding notification to parents of changes to the curriculum:

Could the Minister advise why only in the last week the department have notified parents of the change to the curriculum and produced an online document specifying the new requirements which were implemented in September 2015?

Deputy R.G. Bryans of St. Helier (The Minister for Education):

Thank you to the Deputy for raising this important fact. The recent leaflet that went out to parents has basically been a tying-up of loose ends. It brings together in one place the information about all the changes that are happening in primary and secondary schools. As the Deputy knows, there was an unprecedented change in England over a very short period of time and we have reacted to this and informed parents as soon as we have confirmed what will be happening in Jersey. Every primary school parent received a letter from the Director of Education last summer before September 2015 and an online link to this booklet, which has been available in schools too. Individual schools have also been working directly with the parents to make sure they understand the changes.

3.11.1 The Deputy of St. John:

I thank the Minister for his answer but what worried me in his answer was the fact he said that the department "reacted" to the change in the National Curriculum and in fairly short period, so I ask the Minister what support his department is providing to the teachers and head teachers with the significant pressure that has been placed, not only on them but on the children, in meeting the demands of this new curriculum to ensure that the children do not feel like failures?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

They get full support from the department and have done since the changes were revoked. To give the Deputy a more fulsome answer, I can give an example of one of the town primaries that she may be aware of and what they have done since this happened. The head teacher has given a presentation to explain the changes, the parents' guide to the new curriculum has been available in the school reception area since it was produced last summer, the changes and new expectations have been explained directly to parents at face-to-face parental consultations, 4 during the academic year where parents have had a chance to ask questions. There have been parental workshops to inform about developments and explain how parents can help. They were held each term last year over a week, with one workshop in the morning, one at lunch and one in the evening so that as many parents as possible can attend. Parents have been invited to achievement assemblies on the last day of each term to find out what the children have been working on. There are drop-ins 2 days a week where parents can watch the children in class and then chat informally with the head teacher over refreshments, in this particular case called Thursday Treats and Friday. Lastly, mostly importantly, all of our schools have an open-door policy. I would absolutely urge any parent who has concerns to speak to their teacher and their head teacher if necessary, and get the advice and support they need. We want all children to succeed and I know our staff do whatever they can to make that happen.

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

Could I ask the Minister if the full version of the Jersey curriculum is available to parents and where is it available? Is it on the department's website, please?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

Yes, I believe it is on the website. If it is not, then I will make sure that it is but I believe it is to be found there. Once again, I would just say that if anybody has any particular concerns ... and as a department we have had no concerns relayed to us by parents at all about the particular changes at the moment. I know there are some concerns in relation to the timings but it was imposed on us in a sense by what happened in the U.K. and we have dealt with it as efficiently as we possibly could.

[11:00]

3.11.3 The Deputy of St. John:

I respect the fact that the Minister, the teachers and the head teachers are doing the best they can with what has been, as he has just stated, imposed upon him. My concern particularly is around the time that is available to add in an extra year's curriculum, especially primary school children's daily work, and the ability for the parents to support, especially when both parents are working. So what work is the Minister doing with Social Security to encourage flexible working for parents so that they can support their children in this particularly difficult time?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

I think there are 2 separate issues there. In terms of the pressures on teachers and staff relating to the schools, we are working very closely with the schools. In fact, I have been on my annual tour of all of the schools just recently and head teachers have said they welcome the challenge of raising this. This is not a separate curriculum; this is just the raising of the standards within the curriculum that we already have in place and we have changed the curriculum in some respects with regards to making it 'Jerseyfied.' With regard to the Minister for Social Security, we have meetings but we have not had meetings about this particular aspect. Thank you.