12 Senator S.C. Ferguson of the Minister for Education regarding the procurement of P.C.s by the Island's schools: (OQ.233/2019)

Will the Minister advise whether schools have been informed that they cannot link non-education purchased P.C.s (personal computers) to their networks and, if so, will she further advise how such a policy ensures that primary school children have access to the appropriate level of equipment and software to enable them to learn the skill of coding?

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

The schools have been informed that they can link non-education-purchased P.C.s to their networks if they choose to do so and a number of schools have already followed this route.

4.12.1 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Supplementary. According to one headmaster: "As I understand it, the Education Department are not giving us permission to link non-education-purchased P.C.s to the network." Who has decided they prefer to spend money, rather than take advantage of a generous 2(1)(e)?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

I would suggest that there are clearly some miscommunications happening, or going on here, so I am happy to look into that particular situation but I can confirm and I have been given an assurance by the team within C.Y.P.E.S. (Children, Young People, Education and Skills Department), that it is possible to link non-education-purchased P.C.s to the networks.

4.12.2 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

We are wanting to give our children the best start in life and we are clipping their wings before they start, as well as costing the taxpayer millions. Who is accountable for this?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

I would not suggest that we are not doing anything to support children, it is not just focused on I.T. (information technology) in terms of education, but we provide a selection of coding applications such as Python, Scratch, LEGO Education, WeDo, Lego Mindstorm, Co-Do, Game Lab, Flow Wall, App Inventor, Sonic Pi, a number of things that we have in place to support our children. We also have to allow and enable our teachers to provide the correct education and lessons that are deemed suitable for the children within their care and their provision during that school day.

Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Supplementary.

The Bailiff:

That was your final supplementary, Senator.

Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Absolutely, the final, the Minister …

The Bailiff:

No, you just had it.

4.12.3 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

I was just getting another one in, because the Minister is ...

The Bailiff:

The Connétable of St. Helier attempted to do that.

Senator S.C. Ferguson:

... well aware that the facilities that are provided by the free computers, by this particular generous individual, put our children well ahead, not just with Python and Scratch, but HTML and Java and various other things. So, will the Minister try to sort out this problem, please, because we cannot afford to clip the wings of our children, as is being done by her department?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

With all due respect to the Senator, I have engaged with the individual that the Senator has referred to on numerous occasions. I have introduced him to the officers at the office of the Chief Executive, with the central I.T. team to identify what we can do going forward. I have already committed to consult with schools and review the current education information technology infrastructure arrangements by the end of June 2020, following a Scrutiny report from the Education and Home Affairs Panel on post-16. There is plenty of work going on. I do engage with the Senator and the individual that she has referred to. There is further engagement happening from central I.T. and Deputy Wickenden in terms of how we move this particular process forward and we are trying to ensure that we provide all the correct offerings and information to our students in the right format and in the right way.

The Bailiff:

We come to question 13 ...

Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Could the Minister report back to the States ...

The Bailiff:

No, Senator. Senator, you have already had 2 final supplementaries and you are about to be punished during questions without notice. **[Laughter]**