

## STATEMENT ON A MATTER OF OFFICIAL RESPONSIBILITY

### 5. The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture - statement regarding Jersey examination results

#### 5.1 Deputy J.G. Reed of St. Ouen (The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture):

On Wednesday last week the *Jersey Evening Post* released what was effectively a league table of G.C.S.E. (General Certificate of Secondary Education) results in Jersey schools, compiled by an individual using a large amount of data provided to him by my department. I had previously chosen not to do this because of the risks involved of using narrow statistics out of context. Exactly as predicted, and as a direct result of this reckless, selective use of percentages, considerable concern has been caused among parents, staff and pupils at the 4 States secondary schools. They have been stigmatised in precisely the way my policy sought to avoid. It is now essential that Members have the facts. I have already explained why it is wrong to use narrow academic criteria to judge our schools, but I think the point bears repeating. Jersey has a very different education system to that of the U.K. designed to meet the educational needs of all individuals regardless of ability or social background. Ours is a highly selective system, but overall our students still perform above the U.K. average. If the percentage for some schools is higher than the average, then simple maths tell you that to balance out the numbers there must be schools that score below that average. I repeat that overall the same proportion of our young people achieve the top academic milestones as in the U.K. They are just spread unevenly across our schools. Some people however have deliberately chosen to ignore this fact. They do not understand the significant negative impact of what they have done. The States education system has been required to adjust to demands placed on it by the States, parents and perhaps more importantly the pupils in our care. This is especially the case for our 4 11-to-16 state schools. These schools face significant challenges. Not only are they required to deliver an academic curriculum for the most able, but they are equally expected to support students who are more suited to vocational training and those with additional needs. These schools consistently provide the foundations of an academic education which allow students to access Hautlieu at 14 or 16 dependent on their ability. These schools are not failing, and to those who claim they are I say: "Where is your proof? Do you have evidence that compares like for like in a fair and honest way?" These schools are performing well and meeting the challenges set by our current selective education system. We know this because we monitor our schools more closely than schools are monitored in the U.K. We are not complacent and know that there is always room for improvement. We want standards to improve. However we do not support the name and shame culture that is being promoted by some. Parents need to know what is happening in our schools, but in a meaningful way. Information is already available at each school, and head teachers are more than willing to help parents make an informed choice over the schooling that best suits their child. I want to be able to publicly recognise the performance of each school, and my department has been working on a new system of measurements that will achieve this. Working with experienced educationalists we are piloting a scheme that will compare results based on the amount of progress each pupil has made. This will be a far more meaningful indicator of how our schools are performing across the Island. It is right that there should be an open and honest debate on the future provision of education on the Island, and since I became Minister a number of major reviews have been undertaken to help inform that debate. These reviews are now complete and a Green Paper will be issued in April to allow everyone the opportunity to have their say. This has been my intention from the start and it is a commitment I aim to keep. I want to assure Members and the public that the education provided on the Island is good and we have much to be proud of. Teachers in our schools are well qualified with a wide range of skills and experience, fully committed to improving the learning experiences of the students in their care. So, is it wrong to celebrate the achievements of all Island students? Absolutely not; and I will continue to do so. In the Education Service we do not just pay lip service to the idea that we value everyone in our society. We genuinely, actively do. To achieve this requires a degree of

sensitivity and understanding that so far has been lacking in the debate this past week. The Green Paper on Education will be published shortly. This will be the opportunity for the public of Jersey to have their say on this and many other aspects of education as part of an informed debate on the future of our service. Whatever the views of States Members, members of the public or the teaching professions, I will want to know what you think. I want to be part of a community that values the contribution of all individuals to our Island's prosperity regardless of ability. Working closely with the schools, my aim, and that of the department, will be to do all we can to make sure that each individual is provided with the best possible education for them to make a constructive contribution to the Island's economy and live fulfilled lives. I sincerely hope that Members share this view. **[Approbation]**

**The Bailiff:**

Now 10 minutes of questions.

**5.1.1 Senator J.L. Perchard:**

It is true that the 4 state secondary schools start with fewer academic students due to the 41 per cent the Minister mentioned the other day in his statement attending fee-paying schools, and at 14 years the transfer of approximately 15 per cent of students to Hautlieu. That said, my question is about the comparative performance of the 4 state schools who all operate within the same guidelines. Thanks to the *Jersey Evening Post*, we know that Les Quennevais students obtain 38 per cent.

**The Bailiff:**

Concisely, please.

**Senator J.L. Perchard:**

With respect, it is the core of students achieving A-star to C grades at G.C.S.E. including maths and English. Grainville students on the other hand achieved 18.3 per cent under the same criteria. The Minister asks in his statement where is the proof that any schools are failing. I say to the Minister, the proof is contained within his own now published results.

**The Bailiff:**

What is the question?

**Senator J.L. Perchard:**

So I ask how does the Minister explain the huge differential and why does he believe that covering up such a differential is in the public interest?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

As I just explained to the Senator and others, determining and understanding the data that is provided from each school and recognising the different challenges that they face requires some thought and knowledge. That knowledge will come to the Senator and others if they accept my invitation, which I am considering offering to him to come and talk to my officers at the department to find out the facts, rather than coming to the unsubstantiated conclusions **[Approbation]** that he chooses to make on a regular basis. By the way, as a final, they are not my results that I produced. They are not my league tables; they are tables created by an individual who is not either involved in education on the Island or as an educationalist.

[12:15]

**5.1.2 Deputy M. Tadier:**

While I share many of the concerns of the Minister and reservations about the meaningfulness of these statistics and also the unintended consequences that these statistics may bring about, does the Minister accept that over the years his department has been putting itself in a vulnerable position making a rod for its own back in the fact that the statistics are published for the selective schools; and year on year we are told that these schools are doing so well, we have got 95 per

cent pass rates. Hardly surprising for academics to get pass rates, but while holding back the exam results for the States schools. Does the Minister accept that that is a valid criticism and it is understandable that the public would be frustrated at the perceived double standards?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I do not believe that the public are frustrated in any shape or form, though the one thing that I do know, and the contact that I have had with parents, is that they are extremely frustrated by individuals who choose to select-out a particular group of schools that are providing education and good education to our children. With regards the Deputy's comments, I would refer him to, I think it was an extract from the Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel Report on School Suspensions, where on page 78 of 88 - and this is one of the comments that they make, not myself - it speaks about the issue of league tables arose during the course of the Sub-Panel's review, and the comment made by the panel was: "It was unanimously believed that league tables would have a negative impact on the Island's secondary education system. Ultimately league tables could deter some parents from sending their children to certain schools. This would then have an even greater impact on the school." Those are not my words; they come from the Scrutiny Panel that the Deputy is part of.

**5.1.3 Deputy M. Tadier:**

So a very quick question. I stand by those comments. But the question which the Minister has not answered is why your statistics released for certain schools, the selective schools, are not released for the States schools?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

We provide once a year an overall view of how our Island's children are performing. That is the policy of the department, and that is the policy that I currently operate. It is true that we need, and we recognise, the importance of demonstrating the effectiveness of each of our schools. As I said in my statement, we are working towards that. We are developing measurements that we can properly show and give the confidence that, whether it is States Members or the public, require about our schools. If we are going to make changes to our educational system then we need to do that as part of a process and a debate which will be included in the Green Paper.

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

If the Minister does not want to answer the questions, simply say so, but do not filibuster.

**5.1.4 Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier:**

The Minister uses the word "reckless", which seems to me very strong. Does he not agree that we as local parents and taxpayers have the right to know how our education system is performing in comparison with the U.K., given that many of our children will either be going to university there or indeed seeking jobs there?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I would like to just remind the Constable that we do provide that information. That information is readily available if anyone chooses to visit and discuss with the schools that they are choosing to send their children to. Therefore it is not a case of choosing to be secretive. It is just that you cannot just focus on one narrow selective measurement in determining the performance of the educational value of the school. **[Approbation]**

**5.1.5 Deputy J.M. Maçon:**

How apt. In the figures released, are N.V.Q.s (National Vocational Qualification) and possibly B-Tech qualifications included, and if not, does the Minister agree that when analysing our secondary schools, the range of qualifications that can be gained by individuals must be considered and not just G.C.S.E.s alone?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I thank the Deputy for an opportunity to deal with this matter. A to C is a figure that has been chosen within the U.K. We have in our 4 secondary schools a range of youngsters ranging from 85 per cent to 96 per cent of all youngsters in our 11 to 16 schools that take G.C.S.E.s and achieve 5 A-star to G passes or more in G.C.S.E.s. That is 85 per cent of our youngsters are successful in achieving 5 or more G.C.S.E.s at various different grades.

**5.1.6 Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

I am so excited there. Wise parents certainly do deserve to know facts. Does the Minister agree that wide improvements must be made rather than electioneering? It is important that some Members understand that to give a true picture of individual schools, a school with a demographic like Grainville, for instance, really they need to have the results taken into consideration of those young people who transfer to Hautlieu and do very well. That gives the true picture.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

We have a very selective education system which everybody seems to choose to ignore at times. But it is the case, and it is developed over a period of time. We do have to be aware of the challenges that each school faces. It is not just about catchment areas. It is about the number of individuals that we require the schools to provide for. We have a full and total social inclusion policy that has been supported and currently is being supported by my department, and this Assembly that requires our 11 to 16s schools to provide for youngsters for whom English is not a first language, and those with additional needs. Last year for instance, there were 30 youngsters that arrived on our Island from non-English speaking families who were required to be placed within 2 of our 11 to 16 schools, because our responsibility is to provide education to all.

**Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

Is it possible to have a supplementary to that?

**The Greffier of the States (in the Chair):**

Very briefly; time is running out.

**5.1.7 Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

The Minister mentioned inclusion. Is it not the case that in the U.K. permanent exclusion rose as a result of basic league tables being applied to schools?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

Absolutely. We do not have permanent exclusion here, and also I would just like to point out that in England, 12,000 children are missing from the education system and there are individuals that suggest that we should design and compare our model with theirs.