

States sitting – Tuesday 9th October 2007

Transcript of Question 8

Deputy F J Hill

As the Minister was unable to secure funding via an amendment to the Annual Business Plan, in order to extend the opportunities for children aged three and four years to access free education, what steps, if any, will the Minister be taking to secure funding from other sources?

Minister for Education

Thank you Sir. I will continue to explore options for funding nursery education for all and will be meeting with the Jersey Early Years Association shortly to further discuss the issue. However funding of the magnitude required cannot be found from within existing resources without seriously impairing existing services. I will of course also be reflecting on comments made by States Members during the debate on nursery education and will look again at alternative options. And the issue is being examined by the Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel and I will of course be taking their conclusions into serious consideration.

Deputy F J Hill

Sir, a supplementary. Will the Minister consider looking at partnerships possibly with the finance industry. There is probably quite an interest there and one must remember most States Members were circulated with a number of e mails from people within the finance so will he not consider making contact with industry to see if any financing inducements can come that way?

Minister for Education

Sir, I'm prepared to look at all options. My concern is to provide nursery education for all as well as nursery education for certain sections of the community.

Deputy Le Hérissier

Thank you Sir. What is the Ministers view towards the means testing of nursery provision?

Minister for Education

Sir, I will look again at the means testing but in the many papers that we presented to the States there were serious arguments based on very long research showing that it had some very detrimental effects on the poorest in our society. Sir, I would need considerable convincing given that evidence but as it was raised in the debate, I will be reconsidering it.

Senator Syvret

Does the Minister now accept that it is not particularly responsible to come to the Assembly with a proposition seeking a great deal of additional spending without indicating how the additional revenue should be raised given that he was not indicating that it should not be taken from another budget.

Minister for Education

No Sir

Connetable of St Helier

Thank you Sir. Is the Minister concerned that his inability to deliver equitable funding for nursery care means that the Council of Ministers will be in breach of their agreement in the Strategic Plan to deliver this by the end of the current year.

Minister for Education

Sir, we will be increasing the provision by a new nursery class whether it is at the end of this year or the beginning of next year and yes it looks like unfortunately we won't be able to meet all the aspirations as highly as we would wish and of course that was a decision of the States.

Deputy Scott-Warren

Thank you Sir. Concerning the Ministers reply regarding means testing, does the Minister accept that he used the word detrimental. And there is nothing more detrimental than continuing the present totally unfair system to parents?

Minister for Education

Sir, I've been trying to convince the States for some time now how inequitable and unfair this system is but like I said I will look again. But I don't actually believe that means testing will get rid of all the inequity and that is part of the problem.

Deputy K Lewis

Thank you Sir. I am sure that the Minister is aware that there is a considerable amount of mothers who would dearly love to get back to work but are unable to do so because it is simply uneconomic to do so. Does the Minister agree that there will be savings in other areas and this will not be a complete write off?

Minister for Education

Sir, I totally agree that there will be savings in other areas, not just with some mothers being able to get back to work though we do have a very high percentage of working mothers. But the real savings will be in the long term for a better society for the future if we provide nursery education for all.

Deputy Ferguson

Does the Minister not concede that if the nursery care is purely for the purposes of getting people back to work, than that really isn't the purpose for which it was intended.

Minister for Education

I thought I just made that clear Sir in the answer I just gave. The primary purpose of extending nursery education for all is for the whole benefit of society to give every child in the island a better start in life. One of its ancillary parts is that it will allow some mothers if they so wish more freedom to return to work possibly on a part time basis. But the raison d'être for nursery

education, and it's been agreed by this States for over 20 years, is for the benefit it gives to young children for their future lives.

Deputy F J Hill

Thank you Sir. The Minister said he was opposed to means testing because it might affect the poorer people in society. Will the Minister explain why than he went for means testing for Old age pensioners and not for nursery education?

Minister for Education

Sir I've never for means testing for old age pensioners.

Deputy F J Hill

I meant to say for TV licences. Sorry

Minister for Education

Sir, I came to this House first of all with a proposal that TV licences should be available to all over 75 olds. This House turned it down and suggested I came back with a system of means testing instead and I did.

Connetable of St Helier

The Minister on a couple of occasions has appeared to lay the blame for the failure of delivering equitable childcare and nursery provision on the States. Could the Minister remind us how long he has had this portfolio and whether he does not accept some responsibility himself for not having cracked this problem by the due date.

Minister for Education

Thank you Sir. I accept the responsibility that I have yet to convince the States that we should provide free nursery education for all by increasing the funding to do so, yes.

