

Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel

Anonymised Evidence Submission

(2)

Date/ Place Seen: N/A

Documents: 1 Provided (attached below)

Background:

Wants to provide Petting Farm

Problems

Current Issues:

Needs to convince Minister.

SUBMISSION:

April 30, 2015

Mr. Mick Robbins
Scrutiny Office
States of Jersey

Dear Mr Robbins

I understand that a consultation is in progress to assess current Special Education Provision in Jersey and to assist the Education Department in developing appropriate future provision. I understand that submissions are requested from people with experience in SEN and with knowledge of current provision in the Island.

I have been prevailed upon to write to you because it is believed that my experience and a project I have in mind may be relevant to the situation.

I qualified as a teacher in 1973 (London Institute of Education) and taught first in the UK, then in Jersey and finally back in the UK. For a time I was greatly involved in youth work amongst disadvantaged youth in Jersey. I am also an ordained minister so some of my career has been spent primarily in pastoral ministry, but I have always been involved in the training and nurturing of young people. I have to say at once that I do not have a great deal of experience in SEN, apart from working as an English teacher in a school specialising in provision for children experiencing dyslexia.

MR 06.05.2015

The main reason for writing is on account of my own interest in providing an educational resource in Jersey in terms of something akin to a 'petting farm', where children and young adults would benefit from a variety of hands-on experience in a working environment which would supplement the classroom learning context. In the early days of my teaching career I was also farming with my father in Jersey and we tried to employ, or otherwise give work experience to, young people with special educational needs. In these and other circumstances I have seen the enormous benefits to young people of working (and learning) in connection with nature and of being able to develop skills and knowledge in a variety of 'workshop' environments.

I imagine that the Island will already have a variety of resources akin to what I have in mind and I have no wish to duplicate these. (I have only recently returned to the Island and I am no longer conversant with existing SEN and wider educational provision.) On the other hand I would aim to develop a facility that would complement existing provision and be of genuine benefit. I have land which lies in the vicinity of one of the Island's main SEN facilities, which I might develop as indicated above, subject to necessary authorisation.

I will briefly outline the principles which inform my interest in this matter. I believe they are relevant to SEN provision. They will not be new to the Department but may be helpful in underlining the importance of practical involvement with nature, and of creative activities, for the learning process.

1. It has always been my conviction, borne out by experience, that education for all abilities, and especially youngsters with special needs, should be as relevant as possible.
2. The motivation to learn is crucial to effective learning and child development, and relevance makes a vital contribution to motivation.
3. Children are naturally inquisitive and love to be actively involved in exploring their environment. Nothing delights and inspires most children more than being involved with nature and being allowed to participate in ordinary tasks, especially those relating to the natural environment.
4. From a very young age children love to be active, but they also thrive when they are making a useful contribution in a constructive, creative and productive manner.
5. Most learning arises more effectively out of, and in connection with, such activities. Again: Motivation is a crucial key.
6. Acquiring and developing practical skills is just as important as academic achievement. However the former can often lead to the latter as the usefulness of mathematical and literary skills, for example, becomes apparent.
7. A 'farm' environment provides one of the best contexts in which the above can be achieved. (Ideally this would include artisanal/craft workshops.)
8. This environment also provides an ideal context within which all learning styles can be catered for. Personally I am inclined to believe that everyone benefits if we can provide for all learning styles as fully as possible.
9. Children often pick up skills and knowledge most easily from their peers or from those slightly older or more advanced than themselves. 'Farm-based' activities lend themselves to this process.

10. Young people with special educational needs often require support beyond school age. A 'farm-type' facility could provide a sheltered working environment for some and an ongoing educational and training resource for others.
11. Developing an apprenticeship scheme linked to such a resource (i.e. placements backed up by the Base training facility) would be a desirable further option.
12. Young adults active in such a facility could, where appropriate, interact with younger children, to their mutual benefit.
13. Knowledge about nature and respect for our environment are a vital part of a young person's education and development. These elements would be best conveyed in a farm-type facility. Children thrive through active involvement in such an environment.
14. Every aspect of a child's development must be catered for: spiritual, moral, emotional, cultural, social, academic, etc. The development of practical and artistic skills and of positive character and self-esteem are at least as important as academic success. The 'farm' environment that I advocate is an ideal environment for this holistic approach.

I am uncertain as to the way in which the current review is being conducted and how, if at all, my small contribution might be used. May I request that my ideas for the kind of farm resource described above should not be circulated beyond a few individuals who would understand that it is a project which I would like to develop if it would be a useful facility, but that I am in the very early stages of research and consultation? I would relish leading such a project because I am passionate about relevant education for our young people and about the preservation of our farming and natural heritage. I also believe that my training, varied experience in education and business, and the development of my team-leading skills have all equipped me for such a role.

If any of my thoughts are useful for wider dissemination perhaps they could be extracted from this document. If it would be helpful for me to present my ideas in a different format I would be glad to do so.

Yours sincerely

