

Acting Chairman, Deputy D W Mezbourian  
Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel  
Scrutiny Office  
States Greffe  
Morier House  
St. Helier  
JE1 1DD

11<sup>th</sup> June 2007

Dear Deputy Mezbourian,

**Early Years Education and Child Care**

Thank you for your Panel's letter inviting La Petite Ecole Group of Day Nurseries to submit our views on the proposal of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture to provide a free entitlement for all 3 – 4 year olds of 20 hours early education per week for 38 weeks of the year.

As Chairman of the La Petite Ecole Group, I attach a submission that was made in response to the then Education Committee's 2005 consultation paper 'Investing in Our Future: A Vision for Early Childhood Education and Care for Children in Jersey'. Whilst I broadly welcome the proposals, from our prospective as private providers there are some outstanding areas that need to be addressed if these proposals are to be put into practice. This submission covers a number of the key issues, and I trust that the paper will prove to be of assistance to you.

I would also like to extend an invitation to the Panel to visit one or more of our facilities should you feel that this would be of help to you during the course of the Review. If the Panel would like to receive oral evidence from the perspective of a private provider, I would also be pleased to make myself available.

Yours faithfully

Mr F J Laine  
Chairman, La Petite Ecole Group of Day Nurseries

when only the best will do



**La Petite École**  
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28<sup>th</sup> September 2005

Dear Sirs,

**Response of the Proprietors of La Petit Ecole to the Consultation Paper**

I write as Chairman of La Petit Ecole in response to the Committee's consultation paper : ' Investing in our Future : A vision for early childhood education and care for children in Jersey'.

As a private provider I welcome the Committee's attempt to map out a strategic direction for the future development of pre-school day care and hope that the following comments may prove to be of assistance to you in those endeavors:

**Strategic partnership:** I welcome attempts to clearly delineate the responsibilities of the various committees for advancing day care facilities within the Island. Perhaps if there had been clearer articulation of those responsibilities in earlier times a better partnership may have been forged between the States and the various providers of pre-school care in the Island, avoiding the rather patchwork profile of current arrangements. Since my involvement in local provision through La Petite Ecole I have become interested in examining opportunities for closer partnership with the States in developing further high quality day nursery facilities locally only to find myself somewhat at a loss as to how to engage at a practical level with the States in such an endeavor.

**Proposed changes:** As I understand the situation the Committee seeks in practical terms to address a number of related issues within its proposal. These include:

- Achieving equality of opportunity for parents by introducing subsidized payments to those using non-states day care facilities to equate to the

free provision available within States pre-school nurseries for thirty weeks of the year.

- To deliver that subsidy by means of grant made available to those private sector care providers who satisfy the standards of care provision viewed as desirable by the Education Sports and Culture Committee.
- In this way the Committee feels it will be able to incentivise and exert a strong influence over the private sector to improve standards of care for the infants in their charge and thereby maximize their potential.

Whilst the Committee should be applauded in seeking to address the inequalities of care provision [ created when the States entered the field of pre-school nursery provision ] the proposals require further careful thought before any plans for implementation are agreed. Some of the concerns I have regarding the current proposals as I understand them are as follows :

- *The principle of subsidized care* : surely the States needs to determine as a principle whether it supports the concept of subsidized care for parents ? There appears to be little logic in supporting such a principle for 30 weeks of the year and suspending it for the remainder [ although I am aware the current proposals are designed to achieve exact equality with the States provision which operates for 30 weeks of the year only].
- *How the grant is delivered* : careful thought needs to be given to the simplest and most effective method of dispensing the grant without undue bureaucracy. It is also to be hoped that the grant will be set at a realistic rate rather than a minimized hourly rate, which fails to reflect the true cost of care to the provider.
- *Eligibility for grant* : it is to be hoped the Committee will take a proactive and positive role in assisting the various day care providers to meet whatever standards they determine as desirable. La Petite Ecole is fortunate in having a strong business backing which has allowed for rapid development of standards on all fronts within a short time frame e.g. staff training, physical environment and equipment/ play materials. However we are aware that they are numerous smaller day care businesses within the Island who would struggle to meet any sudden changes in standards, imposed as part of the proposed grant-aiding scheme, if such changes were to have significant resource implications.

I would hope that the Committee and its Officers would be dedicated to the task of clearly communicating any changes it deems necessary to standards of care, environment or philosophy of care as well as the practical means by which all care providers might attain the same within a reasonable time frame. Better links between the private sector and the Committee's pre-school

nurseries by means of staff exchange, joint training initiatives and the like could all help to achieve a uniformly high standard of care for our children.

The Committee will no doubt wish to carefully consider how it might adjudicate fairly on issues of eligibility particularly within the context of the current legal framework of inspection and registration. The latter appears to have been rather ineffective in the past in dealing with nurseries with which the Committee / Department had concerns. However there is surely potential for fresh problems to arise within any new hinterland created between **required** standards for registration and **desired** standards for grant eligibility. The application of grant eligibility needs to be beyond reproach, administered in a transparently fair manner using clearly articulated criteria endorsed by all parties. The Committee will no doubt wish to examine the legal implications of administering what will be effectively be two sets of criteria and in particular the need for proper parameters of appeal in respect of those failing to achieve eligibility for grant assistance.

Related to these concerns it is hoped that the Committee, through its officers, will seek full consultation with, and involvement of, the private providers in determining what should constitute the required standards for grant eligibility. Reference is made within the Paper to the approaches employed by the Pre-schools of Emilio Reggio in Northern Italy which appear to have been successful in promoting improved emotional and social stability among children through collaborative involvement in expressive arts and creative play. If this approach is to be used as part of the eligibility framework everyone involved needs to have the opportunity to learn more about the approach and how it could be adapted to local provision. Evidence-based development is to be applauded but history is littered with instances in which a particular approach has been vigorously endorsed in a professional field only to be overturned, modified or replaced due to subsequent adverse review.

It is to be hoped that any clear change(s) in direction, whether it be in philosophical approach or delivery of care, can be universally understood, endorsed and pursued through collaborative partnership, rather than imposed without dialogue or consensus. I am sure this will be the intention of the Committee.

I hope these comments, which are put forward in the spirit of true partnership between the States and the private sector, are of some assistance to the Committee. We are all concerned to provide the highest possible standards of care for the young children of the Island and hopefully we can all move forward together in close harmony to achieve those aims in the future.

Yours faithfully

Mr F J Laine  
Director, La Petite Ecole Group of Day Nurseries