

STATES OF JERSEY



DELIVERY OF THREE BILINGUAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS (P.45/2024): AMENDMENT

Lodged au Greffe on 3rd October 2024
by Deputy Sir P.M. Bailhache of St. Clement
Earliest date for debate: 22nd October 2024

STATES GREFFE

DELIVERY OF THREE BILINGUAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS (P.45/2024):
AMENDMENT

1 PAGE 2, PARAGRAPH (a) –

Designate the existing paragraph as (a) and for the words “to request the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning to take the necessary steps to convert, by the beginning of the academic year 2025-2026, a minimum of three” substitute the words –

“to approve in principle the conversion of at least two”.

2 PAGE 2, PARAGRAPH (a) –

Delete the words “in 2025”.

3 PAGE 2, PARAGRAPH (b) –

After paragraph (a) insert the following new paragraphs (b) and (c) –

- “ (b) to request the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning to conduct a survey, in cooperation with Statistics Jersey, of the views of parents of pre-school children as to the desirability of establishing bilingual English-French primary schools in Jersey, and their willingness to send their children to such a school; and
- (c) to request the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning to appoint, subject to a positive outcome from the survey referred to in paragraph (b) above, an appropriately qualified project manager to ensure a smooth transition to bilingual teaching, and to establish at least two bilingual English-French primary schools by the beginning of the academic year 2026-27.”.

DEPUTY SIR P.M. BAILHACHE OF ST. CLEMENT

Note: After this amendment, the proposition would read as follows –

THE STATES are asked to decide whether they are of opinion –

- (a) to approve in principle the conversion of at least two primary schools into English-French bilingual schools, with a progressively phased introduction of bilingual tuition in these schools to begin with reception classes;
- (b) to request the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning to conduct a survey, in cooperation with Statistics Jersey, of the views of parents of pre-school children as to the desirability of establishing bilingual English-French primary schools in Jersey, and their willingness to send their children to such a school; and
- (c) to request the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning to appoint, subject to a positive outcome from the survey referred to

in paragraph (b) above, an appropriately qualified project manager to ensure a smooth transition to bilingual teaching, and to establish at least two bilingual English-French primary schools by the beginning of the academic year 2026-27.

REPORT

Introduction

1. This amendment responds to the Minister's [Comments](#) on P.45/2024 (Delivery of Three Bilingual Primary Schools), to the [Head Teacher Survey Results](#) (R.146/2024) and to discussions with the Minister and his officials since the proposition was lodged on 19th July 2024. It presents an alternative proposal for only two bilingual schools with effect from 2026 and not 2025. It is hoped that this might be regarded as occupying middle ground between my original proposition and the Minister's position. Importantly, the amendment seeks only in principle support for French/English bilingual education dependent upon a positive outcome to an up-to-date survey of the views of parents of pre-school children. Such a survey was conducted in 2014 and resulted in 62% of parents expressing the view that they would send their child to a French-English bilingual school if one were available. If the response is similar today, it would represent a convincing argument for the establishment of bilingual schools.
2. Of course, not every parental wish can be met. But bilingual schools are also very much in the public interest for all the reasons set out in my original report. To be bilingual, or multi-lingual, is a huge educational advantage. The Minister quotes from a paper by Dr Eowyn Crisfield (co-author of the CYPES Languages Policy) that "not all bilingual programmes are a good fit for every student". That may be so, but attendance at a bilingual school in Jersey will not be compulsory. The Minister did not quote Dr Crisfield's statement in the same paper that "... bilingual education produces equal or better results in terms of language acquisition and academic achievement as compared to monolingual approaches"; nor her opening statement that "Bilingual education is becoming increasingly common in international and state schools around the world."

The Minister's Comments Paper

3. The Minister's Comments were disappointingly negative in tone and failed to pay regard to the exciting possibilities inherent in having a Francophone and Anglophone section of our population in 25 years' time, adding to the multi-lingual cohort of Portuguese, Polish, Romanian and other language speakers that already exist. The proposition is not backward looking in the sense of being rooted in our past, although our history and heritage are significant elements of our culture. It looks forward to a future where an entirely new dimension could be added to our cultural life. Education at French as well as British universities and colleges would be possible. Even if only a couple of two-form entry primary schools become bilingual, that is 100 pupils in every year. After 25 years (in 2050), there would be 2500 bilingual young Islanders, capable of conversing easily in French, teaching in our bilingual schools, doing business with our closest neighbours, and (for a few) defending our interests in the fields of government and diplomacy. What a wonderful and stimulating prospect! Yet none of that positivity emerges from the Comments paper.
4. The litany of minor obstacles is not insurmountable. Catchment issues, families with more than one child, changes to the policy for admissions and translations of syllabus are not insuperable problems. With goodwill, they could easily be overcome. It is true that a new policy would have to be devised that took account

of parents' wishes as to whether they wanted bilingual education or not. That is not the end of the world. Bearing in mind that bilingual education would be introduced only gradually, it would affect a relatively small number of families. Parental choice is, however, key.

5. It is said that the proposition potentially takes funding away from children with the highest level of need. That is not understood. Nothing should take money away from such children, and bilingual schools would not do so. In fact, as mentioned in the principal report, bilingual education has been shown to be beneficial even to children with special needs.
6. The availability of teachers with appropriate qualifications and experience is a challenge but should not be overstated. The Comments paper seems to misunderstand what is proposed. It states - "It is therefore the case that bilingual French/English teachers will need to be fluent in both languages." It is the pupils who will become bilingual and not necessarily the teachers. For the avoidance of doubt, teachers in bilingual schools would teach either in English **or** in French, but not generally in both. One would expect the native French teachers to have reasonable English, but it would not be essential for the English teachers to have any French. They would be teaching in English, and the expectation would be that communication between teachers would be in that language. School administrators and headteachers would not need to be fluent in French, even if some knowledge were desirable.
7. The Head Teacher survey results show that there are already 8 primary school teachers employed in the department who could teach the Jersey Curriculum in French.¹ Not all may wish to do so, but it is a start towards the complement of 14 required over the conversion period of 7 years. The UK, which has a population of more than 150,000 French native speakers, must have many primary school teachers among that number. That would be a pool for recruitment. There are also links with the Universities of Rennes and Caen which probably have teachers willing to teach in Jersey; that would, however, require some training in the Jersey Curriculum.
8. The estimated costs of the bilingual schools are based upon the assumption that all native French teachers will be additional staff. That seems to be a false premise. It is true that native French teachers will have to be recruited if not enough are available within the Department. Under the amendment, that is a maximum of two recruits per annum. But they need not be **additional** staff. 36 teachers left in the 12 months to end March 2023²; if half were primary school teachers, there were 18 vacancies in that period. Surely, two native French teachers could be recruited within that group. There would certainly be no need for redundancies.
9. The financial and staffing implications set out at page 12 of the Comments paper are therefore misleading. The financial implications assume that every native French teacher would be **additional** to the establishment. That is not correct. It is accepted that there would be some additional costs for planning, research visits and consultancy, and perhaps for a small number of additional staff, but

¹ [R.146-2024.pdf \(gov.je\)](#), p. 4

² [Letter – Minister for Children and Education to CEHA – 17th April 2023](#), p. [2]

the figures given seem grossly overstated. It ought to be possible to deliver the conversion of two bilingual primary schools for considerably less than the figures given.

Head Teachers' Survey results

10. No head teacher was in favour of converting his or her primary school to an English/French bilingual school starting with the reception class in September 2025. The amended proposition proposes starting in September 2026 but that is unlikely to affect the result. My discussions with headteachers revealed, however, an almost unanimous appreciation of the importance of language teaching and general sympathy for the enhancement of French teaching. Most were appreciative of the immersive aspects of the French Experience which has been very successfully delivered by 1.5 specialist teachers to some pupils in year 5 since 2019 or so. Teachers' objections were practical. Their lives were already busy and challenging, and they had different priorities. For most, it was a new idea appearing to involve nothing but additional work, stress and effort for little or no reward. Few had read my report and proposition, yet it seems that they were aware of the Minister's opposition to it. Some thought, wrongly, that the proposal would involve adding to the curriculum when they were already struggling to meet its demands. In fact, the curriculum remains the same – only delivered in two languages and not one. For some, it was an almost frightening prospect involving having to deal with French speakers when their own knowledge of French was limited. Yet some bilingual schools in London have monolingual heads and communication with staff is in English.
11. It is possible to sympathise with many of these concerns. Yet it is also important to keep in mind that the amended proposition involves the conversion of only two of some 30 States primary schools into bilingual establishments. If any encouragement or inducement to take a more positive view of bilingual teaching were to be offered by the Minister or his department, it would be surprising if volunteers could not be found to undertake the challenge of something new but potentially exciting and stimulating. The Director of Education has informed me that headteachers' salaries are calculated having regard to several factors of which one is the responsibility of the role. Undertaking the headship of a new bilingual school is undoubtedly a responsibility which is deserving of an additional allowance. That has not, so far, been mentioned.
12. At the end of the day, however, it is not headteachers of primary schools who decide strategic issues for the Island. It is the elected members of this Assembly. If the Assembly decides that English/French bilingual education is in the public interest, it is for the Education Department to deliver on that decision. To be fair to the Director of Education and his officials, that proposition was accepted without hesitation in discussion with me. I have no doubt that, if the Assembly adopts my amended proposition, it will be successfully activated by the Department with professionalism and skill.

The Vision

13. Members are asked to take a strategic decision and to embrace a vision which is not at all critical of the work done in the context of French teaching in recent years. On the contrary, it seeks to build on those foundations, and to create a springboard for the teaching of *Jèrriais*. The French Experience is partly an immersive experience. It is generally accepted that the only way for children to become completely fluent in another language is by immersion. We know that from the experience of the children of our immigrant communities – for example, the Portuguese, who become fluent in English by immersion in an anglophone school environment. A Portuguese bilingual school is not necessary – we need to encourage children from Portuguese families to speak their native language at home. Indeed, we need generally to encourage the use of first languages by multi-lingual children at home and, where possible, at school. French/English bilingual schools offer Jersey children the opportunity effortlessly to become fluent in the foreign language at the heart of our heritage, but which is **not** the language of the home.
14. The bilingual vision is not just a question of career, business or social advantage. It goes to the heart of who we are as Jersey people. It goes to our identity. The French language and *Jèrriais* lie at the core of our national identity. If we allow these languages to fade away, Jersey will be a much-diminished place. Conversely, if we establish bilingual schools, we will stimulate French teaching in **all** schools and ultimately create a cohort of French-speaking Jersey people which would be transformative and to the enormous advantage of the Island.

Financial and staffing implications

There are established lines of communication with parents of pre-school children, and it is not considered that the proposed survey would involve any material financial implication. It is possible that there are resources within the Education Department which would enable the appointment of a project manager but if not, it is estimated that a 12-month appointment would cost in the region of £60,000.

Children's Rights Impact Assessment

A Children's Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) has been prepared in relation to this proposition and is available to read on the States Assembly website.