

5. Questions to Ministers without notice - The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture

The Bailiff:

We now come to questions without notice. The first period is to the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture. Deputy Trevor Pitman.

5.1 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Could the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture, whether confirm or deny, that a child suffered a gunshot wound to the face from a starting pistol handled by a teacher at Le Rocquier School and that that teacher was subsequently and is still suspended?

The Deputy of St. John (Minister for Education, Sport and Culture):

I think normal course under these circumstances would be to suspend that teacher pending a police inquiry. In fact a police inquiry is underway. As I understand it, is still underway so I can make no comment further.

5.1.1 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Supplementary, Sir? I respect what the Minister said there. But can he at least advise us that the child is in fact okay and, on the same lines, can he advise, assure us, that teacher's suspension has been continually reviewed as this inquiry goes?

The Deputy of St. John:

All teacher suspensions are kept reviews, yes. My understanding is that the child is okay. But, it is still subject to a police inquiry.

5.2 Deputy S. Power of St. Brelade:

My question will relate to Les Quennevais School. The Minister has been in office since the end of 2011 - 19 months. What options are being considered for what is now regarded as a major investment to be needed in a second level school in the west of the Island? Has the redevelopment of the existing school been considered, given that many consider it to be in a congested residential part of a 2-estate housing residential area?

The Deputy of St. John:

I thank all States Members - Deputy Power is one of them - who have expressed their support for the school generally. Officers from E.S.C. (Education Sport and Culture) and Property Holdings have reviewed the original proposals, which date from 2002. They have produced a feasibility study with all of the realistic options. In fact, there is another one just been added only in the last few days. That includes the refurbishment and building of a new school and all of the various options that go with it. Additional work, however, is underway and I am hoping to be able to present the options by October.

5.2.1 Deputy S. Power:

Can the Minister clarify whether an intensification of the use of the existing site that the school sits on, given that it is already regarded as congested, is being regarded as an option?

The Deputy of St. John:

That is one of the options, yes, but it is only one of 10 options.

5.3 Deputy S. Pinel of St. Clement:

With reference to P.36 on 30th April - the proposition for the music service user pays - I asked the Minister 2 questions, both of which he said he would look into. The first one was: will the loan of an instrument at a small charge be indefinite or will the students have to purchase their

own instrument after a year. The second one was: will shared lessons be charged at the same rate as individual lessons, £55, a term for one-to-one tuition instead of a group? Thank you.

The Bailiff:

Your question, Deputy, is: will he answer them now. Is that right?

The Deputy of St. John:

Both of those particular questions are currently under consideration by the Jersey Music Service who are in the process of redesigning everything they do. I have brought those 2 questions to the notice of the Director of the Jersey Music Service. As yet no final decision has been made on them, but we are certainly aware of them and it is under consideration. Fairly soon we will know the answers. Thank you.

[11:45]

5.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

Would the Minister comment on the cultural importance of the Sunset Concerts which are taking place on Friday, 28th June and Saturday, 29th June at Grantez? Will the Minister be attending in person to represent the department?

The Deputy of St. John:

I think all sunset concerts of all variety and everything cultural is significant and important. I have an Assistant Minister who looks after culture. I am sure he would like to make comment separately to the Deputy on that. Will I be attending personally? I have not decided: yes, I hope to be able to. I cannot guarantee it: it depends on the other things in my diary, which is quite full.

5.5 Deputy J.M. Maçon of St. Saviour:

I certainly endorse the Sunset Concerts, they are fabulous events. What I would ask the Minister is: further to the former Senator Shenton's proposition being adopted by this House, when will this Assembly be debating the White Paper on the structure of the higher secondary education? Thank you.

The Deputy of St. John:

A group of Ministers has met 3 times to consider the questions that the Deputy is referring to. So far we have looked at the background, the history, previous reports. The Ministerial sub-group... it has now been decided that we will be formally constituting this by Ministerial Decision and then there will be terms of reference that will go with that. That is due to be brought to the Council of Ministers at the next opportune moment, which will be either the next meeting or the one after that.

5.5.1 Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Supplementary Sir? Can the Minister please explain when the States Assembly has requested the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture to submit a White Paper to this Assembly that any action going forward will be done by Ministerial Decision? Can the Minister just explain that process, please?

The Deputy of St. John:

Yes. The Council of Ministers, as are all Members of this Assembly, are very interested in the education system and its structure. It is felt that if there is to be a White Paper it will come as a Council of Ministers White Paper in the same way that major reforms to do with housing and health were brought through the Council of Ministers in one way or another. So, it is likely that anything will be a Council of Ministers proposal rather than a Minister for Education, Sport and Culture one.

5.6 Deputy J.H. Young:

Would the Minister advise the Assembly on when he will be publishing his plans for the future use of the d'Hautree School site, which has been reserved for educational use for about 2 decades? If he is unable to do so, would he be releasing the site for other purposes?

The Deputy of St. John:

The old d'Hautree School site is earmarked for educational purposes. We are currently, as the Deputy will probably be aware, seeking co-operation between Highlands and Hautlieu. There are many things going on in the Education Department, many things under review at the moment. One of them is the d'Hautree School and the possible expansion of vocational facilities. For example, Highlands currently has over 1,000 students, which is quite intensively used. There may be some issues there that we need to consider in the future. So, where we are at the moment is that we are keeping our options open on d'Hautree and we want to keep it that way. There is also the added question that it is one of the options for a possible new primary school for the St. Helier area. We keep our options open for that one as well.

5.7 Senator L.J. Farnham:

Does the Minister happen to know by what level funding for sport, including investment in new sporting facilities has reduced by over the last 10 years?

The Bailiff:

You would be quite lucky if he has those figures.

The Deputy of St. John:

I do not have those figures in detail that I can give the Senator. But, I appreciate that. That is one of the things that the new Sports Strategy is looking at under the other one of my Assistant Ministers, Department Le Hérisier. The whole question of this will come out in our White Paper, which we are hoping to bring by the end of the year. So, there will be a lot of detail around sports funding in that White Paper, yes.

5.8 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The issues seem to move rather slowly through the Education Department. I am asking a question which might require quite prompt action. In the light of the ballot of teachers, which was overwhelmingly in favour, of action up to and including strike action and in the light of the pending head teachers ballot on action, what measures does the Minister have in place should it come to strike dispute?

The Deputy of St. John:

I obviously, sincerely hope that it does not come to that. But, I cannot pre-empt the outcome of any ongoing pay negotiations as the Deputy well knows. As I say, I would like to acknowledge the valuable contribution of teachers across Island schools generally. We have many talented and committed individuals throughout the service. I am sincerely hoping that it will not come to strike. If it does, then any actions taken are operational. I would not necessarily be involved, although I would be no doubt kept informed. I do not have that information here today.

5.8.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Minister does not have what options he has in place... does not know what options he has in place, in the light of potential strike action. Is that what he is saying, because I cannot believe the Minister does not know what would happen in the case of strike?

The Deputy of St. John:

I do not know personally, but of course I know a man who does and that is my Director of Education. Obviously they are discussing with head teachers what their options would be in the

unfortunate situation where a strike happens. So, if that looks likely then of course I will be briefed in detail. I am not briefed at this point in time and I continue to say that I sincerely hope that it will not come to that.

5.9 Connétable D.W. Mezbourian of St. Lawrence:

How often is bullying in schools reviewed?

The Deputy of St. John:

There is a bullying policy and on-going action groups within each and every school. So, bullying is reviewed, I would say to the Connétable, almost on a daily basis.

5.9.1 The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

Supplementary, Sir? Is the recorded incidents of school bullying increasing or decreasing?

The Deputy of St. John:

My understanding of the latest statistics is that bullying is being treated extremely seriously on a zero tolerance basis across all schools. On that basis I am pretty confident that it is reducing.

5.10 Connétable S.W. Rennard of St. Saviour:

We have just heard about the sports funding being cut. I would like to know what happens to the world dancing people. Do they get help? I have been asked to sponsor 4 young people to go to Brighton to compete, which I have done, having gone to watch them perform what they are going to be doing for the competition. I have an interest in dancing, although you might not look at me now and think I did, and did do a lot of dancing in my youth. I found that the children, when I went to see them at New Street and again another time, were dancing very, very well and there was a lot of them there who could have been otherwise employed in all sorts of other things. Are we supporting these children who are dancing, which may be not considered a sport? I think it is just as important to have these children who are dancing and going to represent us on the world stage. I would like to know if we are supporting them or if their funding has also been cut.

The Deputy of St. John:

I do not think it is a question of their funding having been cut or not, but we do make grants to several arts organisations including the Jersey Arts Trust, who are there for this very purpose, to assess each and every application for grant assistance to the various arts and culture bodies. I would say to the Constable and through you, Sir, that I am very supportive of the dancing that takes place by those children. I would encourage the parents and/or their organisation backing up them to make the necessary applications to the Jersey Arts Trust and see where that can go.

5.11 The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Following an article in the *J.E.P. (Jersey Evening Post)*, could the Minister confirm whether he or any other Ministers have met with a local hotel proprietor to discuss the possibility of creating a youth centre at Fort Regent?

The Deputy of St. John:

My understanding is that my Assistant Minister, Deputy Bryans, has in fact been in touch with that person.

5.11.1 The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Are there any particular actions that the Minister is planning to take, following that discussion?

The Deputy of St. John:

This is just imminent, as the Deputy probably knows, it has only just happened in the last very, very short period of time. I know that my Assistant Minister is on the case. I have not had a personal briefing from him yet but I am confident that he is on the case and can respond to the Deputy almost immediately but I am not aware of the detail.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Sir, just a final supplementary.

The Bailiff:

You have had 2 already. [Laughter]

5.11.2 The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Will the Minister inform this Assembly when he can update this Assembly on the potential actions that would follow this meeting?

The Deputy of St. John:

I am not sure what the actions are but, as I say, my Assistant Minister has delegated responsibility for Art and Culture and would cover this area. I have no doubt that he will be informing the Deputy and any other Member that is interested and I believe he can do that pretty well straight away.

The Bailiff:

Very well. That completes questions to the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture.