

5. Questions to Ministers Without Notice - The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture

The Deputy Bailiff:

We now come to questions without notice of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture. The Deputy of St. John.

5.1 The Deputy of St. John:

I will not reiterate what I said earlier because I know the Deputy of St. Ouen's mother is listening in. So I will change the subject. Recently, or in October 2007, a film called "Innocent Truth" on global warming had been proved to be a lot of non-truth. Judge Michael Burton of the High Court of England and Wales found the film to be a political statement, not a work of science. On 9 test points the film was found to be using facts that were either inversions of the truth or innovations. Those reports that the case claimed they used those 9 points to prove the case and that there were at least 35 other similar errors. The judge decreed that it would be a breach of Article 406 and 407 of the 1996 Education Act to show the film to school children. Will the Minister for Education, when or if the film is shown within the Island make sure that it is clear to all concerned that it ... well, in fact, it should not be shown to school children.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Minister, if you feel able to understand that question, I invite you to answer it. **[Laughter]**

Deputy J.G. Reed of St. Ouen (The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture):

I will convey the concerns of the Deputy to my department.

5.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

I remind all Members that concision does not just apply to Ministers. Will the Minister confirm that 4 teaching assistants at one secondary school have been made redundant recently because of budget considerations alone?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I am aware that a number of teachers' assistants were notified some time ago that due to changes at the school their employment would no longer be required. It is unfortunate that any individual is found not to be able to retain a position. However, due to a number of factors within the school, the decision was taken some time ago.

5.2.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Minister confirm or deny that budget reconsiderations were the prime mover? Will he also assure the House that standards in that secondary school will not slip and will he report to the House further redundancies taking place in the education system as of now?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Firstly, with regard to the situation leading up to the 4 teachers' assistants being no longer required, it is linked, in part, to falling pupil numbers within the school and the fact that overall the school currently employ or were employing 15 teachers' assistants and it was felt, as I understand it and has been conveyed to me by the headmaster, that the school could properly provide for the children within its care with 10 teachers' assistants. Thank you.

5.3 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

As a former professional educator, I was truly disgusted by the comments by Mr. Edward Trevor, widely reported in the media. Would the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture join me in condemning the malicious, and, I have to say, wholly damaging and ignorant comments by the chairman of the Charities Association?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I do not necessarily believe I should be commenting other than to say that I would hope that the person concerned would reflect on what he said and to pay attention to the concerns raised by this Assembly.

5.4 Deputy S. Pitman:

I believe I have asked this question of the Minister this year at some point. But I cannot remember what he said. So I ask it again. Is a review of the impact of the student loans and increase on student fees being undertaken now and if it is not, when will he expect it to happen?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

A number of reviews have been undertaken since I took over as the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture, and, indeed, we are carrying out a major review on all higher education funding and issues relating to that, with the aim of completing the variety of reviews that will form this overall review by July/August next year. Thank you.

5.4.1 Deputy S. Pitman:

Sir, supplementary, please. The Minister did mention that reviews have already been done. Could he endeavour to pass those on to States Members?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Sorry, I did not say they had been done. I said they were being undertaken and as soon as ... and I have arranged a meeting with the Scrutiny Panel that oversees the Education Department to bring them totally up to date with what we are doing, how we are doing it, so that we can ensure that scrutiny gets involved at the appropriate time.

5.5 Senator B.E. Shenton:

Can the Minister explain why, at this time of financial restraint, he went against the understanding of the Assembly and failed to introduce charges for nursery care in the public sector for more than 20 hours, thus maintaining inequality for parents of private sector children and the private sector nurseries themselves?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I do not believe I have failed anybody. As my understanding is, this States Assembly chose to provide 20 hours of provision to those people that were unable at the time to access early learning. As such, the department has implemented the decisions made by this Assembly, no more, no less.

5.5.1 Senator B.E. Shenton:

Can the Minister confirm that in the public sector he is providing more like 30 hours per week and not 20 hours per week?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

There is a question, and I do understand that there is considered or could be considered to be an inequity within the current provision of service, but that was known by this Assembly when it approved the provision that people are now enjoying and I would hasten to add and underline the word "enjoying". As I understand it, every individual, including the private sector partnership that we are involved in, are more than happy with the provision that the States elected to provide these young people.

5.5.2 Senator B.E. Shenton:

The nurseries may be happy but I am certainly not happy as a taxpayer to be funding this at this time of financial restraint. I believe the House was misled at the debate because it was set out

that we would provide 20 hours free for all children and that the public sector would start charging for the additional hours so that we would end all inequality.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I do not believe that the House was misled. Indeed, I remember quite, perhaps, perversely at the time that I voted and spoke against the provision that the States Assembly chose to accept because... and I pointed out the inequality that exists and also I questioned the amount of funds that were required. I have since been proved wrong in part. I am well aware that many parents have now elected, because of the new provision, to move and take advantage of the private sector provision rather than the public sector provision that they were offered and *vice versa*, which is absolutely as it should be. Thank you.

5.6 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

It has recently been reported that 35 per cent of students who leave primary school do not meet the appropriate standards for mathematics and 34 per cent do not meet the appropriate standards in English. Does the Minister think this is satisfactory, bearing in mind this will hamper their secondary education, and what steps is his department taking to correct these deficiencies?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

My department and the schools continue to aim to improve the areas of numeracy and literacy within our young people. The problem that I have and the department has in providing statistical information in this area is it does not reflect the true picture. I have spent time on a number of occasions outlining the fact that there are good reasons behind some of these figures, including the fact that we do accommodate a multicultural - and we are a multicultural community - a number of individuals that we are educating for whom English is a second language, as such, that I would encourage any Member that would like to understand and know more about and get behind the figures to come and speak to me and my department, who would be more than happy to further explain why they say that the headline figures of 33 percent do not relate to what is actually happening on the ground. Thank you.

5.7 Deputy C.F. Labey of Grouville:

As it has been about a year since an agreement was signed for the proposer of the Jersey anthem, could the Minister tell this Assembly what has been done to promote it, and, what indeed has happened to it?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I have had a number of meetings with the composer himself and my department. We have contacted all the schools and encouraged them to use the anthem wherever possible. In fact, I had the most enjoyable occasion 2 or 3 months ago when I attended St. John's Primary School where the young people sang the anthem unaccompanied. It has also been used throughout the Island Games and indeed I believe in February or March next year they will be working with the composer producing new recordings of the anthem linked to the Island's band. Thank you.

5.7.1 The Deputy of Grouville:

Sir, could I ask a supplementary? Could the Minister inform this Assembly if he has any intention of bringing it to States Members, to this Assembly for approval?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I am not sure and I cannot quite remember at the moment or recollect the actual history but I believe that the Deputy herself was one of the individuals who promoted the idea of the Jersey anthem. I do believe it is necessary that we have a number of national songs and anthems that we can use and the Jersey anthem is but one. I do believe it has not been promoted satisfactorily and it is my intention to first of all ensure that that is done to enable the public to hear the anthem

and then at an appropriate time it is possible that I may come back to this Assembly to get further confirmation that indeed it is an anthem that is worth being recognised as one of our national anthems.

5.8 Deputy A.E. Jeune of St. Brelade:

Would the Minister confirm that - I think they are called P.S.E. (Personal and Social Education) teachers - give instructions to pupils on such issues as A.I.D.S. (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), the consequences of drug and alcohol intake or use or abuse in all the senior schools? Thank you.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Much effort is place on educating our young people into issues and matters that affect their personal wellbeing and health and this includes drugs, alcohol, A.I.D.S., issues surrounding their sexual behaviour and other matters that are appropriate for our young people to learn about. Equally, we work with other agencies and partners to reinforce various messages. Most recently we have had crime days where Prison? Me! No Way! organisation has worked within all our schools to again draw the attention of our young people to inappropriate behaviour, including the use of drugs and alcohol.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Thank you very much. That ends the 15 minutes allotted to the Minister for Education Sport and Culture.

Deputy S. Pitman:

Sir, could I request before the Assistant Minister comes into her time of questions that Minister's do keep their answers succinct, because there seems to be a policy of theirs that they take their time during these question times, which means that less of us are able to ask questions.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Deputy, you are absolutely right that all Members should keep questions and answers succinct and, for what it is worth from the Chair, I thought the Minister for Education Sport and Culture was extremely succinct in nearly all of his answers.