

**STATEMENT TO BE MADE BY THE
CHAIRMAN OF THE EDUCATION AND HOME AFFAIRS SCRUTINY PANEL
ON TUESDAY 2ND MAY 2017**

Review of School Starting Age

For young children in Jersey, the transition to formal schooling is arguably one of the most significant events of all during childhood. Being aware of recent changes in the U.K. and of significant parental and professional interest in the school starting age locally, the Panel agreed to undertake a review into the area. My key objective throughout this review was to keep in mind the needs of the Island's young children and to assess whether they were being well served by the Education Minister and his policies.

In gathering evidence for this review my Panel and I visited various Primary Schools on the Island, held public meetings and questioned the Minister for Education at public hearings. To assist us in obtaining objective, academic evidence for the review we engaged Professor Elizabeth Wood from the University of Sheffield who is a specialist in Early Years Education. A comprehensive list of sources may be found at the back of our report.

Our key findings can be grouped into 3 main areas:

The first is Parental Choice. Our current system does not enable parents to make informed choices about their child's early schooling experiences. We found that parents want more choice, both in what age their child starts school but even more so in what type of schooling they receive when they get there. The Minister should find ways to make the system more flexible so that children can start formal schooling at the age they are socially, emotionally and developmentally ready. The Panel found that only those who can afford to pay for private schooling have real choice in the type of education their child enters into. The Minister should consider ways to provide more choice to all families whilst balancing the efficient use of staff and resources. We recognise that changes to policy and legislation may be required in order to facilitate this.

Secondly, echoing all of the Panel's previous Education reviews, several of our findings centre around Communication. The information on school starting is mostly available on websites and in pamphlets, but the Panel found that it was often incomplete, inaccessible or given too late. The Minister should make the effort to go to where parents are rather than waiting for them to come to him. Parents should be given more, and better quality information much earlier and in a way that is accessible to them, so that they can make informed choices.

Finally our report touches on the importance of Consulting Teachers and Encouraging Professional Judgement in the early years when children are starting school. The Minister should continue to encourage the teachers employed by his Department to use their professional judgement in providing individualised education to children in the Early Years. Given that parents are equally or more concerned about the type of early schooling children receive as when they start, I do hope the Education Minister will give serious consideration to the creation of a Jersey Early Years Curriculum. We do not have to follow the U.K. in what we provide when children start school. The Minister has a wealth of experience and knowledge available to him locally and should consult teachers and other early years professionals. I would like to see him aim high and create something tailored to the needs of the island's young children.

Finally I would like to offer thanks to my Panel and our Scrutiny Officer for their hard work, and to the Minister and his Department for the time spent engaging with this review. Thank you to all professionals, parents and other members of the public who contributed to the review in any way. Most importantly thanks must go to the children at the schools we visited for allowing us to spend time in their classrooms. It was an absolute pleasure observing you at work and play.