



Deputy Louise Doublet,  
Vice-Chair,  
Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel

29<sup>th</sup> April 2021

Dear Deputy Doublet,

Thank you very much for your invitation to submit comments in relation to the Scrutiny Panel's review, **Covid-19 Response: Impact on Children and Young People**. We welcome the Panel's investigation of the specific items listed under its Terms of Reference especially regarding work streams to counter the ongoing effects of the pandemic on children.

There have been a wide range of factors that have a bearing on the questions posed by your review. We will limit our response to those related to children's learning experiences and to educational attainment. We will leave to others better positioned and with greater expertise to comment on health and wellbeing although children's mental and social needs clearly influence learning and attainment and are of great concern. We will also not cover questions about the length of school closure, exam decisions and the quality of communication around these issues as under the third term of reference, young people and parents are invited to do so directly.

Our submission will highlight issues important to us as a charity, particularly inequalities in both education and life chances and intervention in early years. We too often observe that Putting Children First has become an initiative focussed on child protection and safeguarding to the detriment of many other factors that hamper children reaching their full potential. The Proposed Common Strategic Policy 2018-20 stated that **"We will put children first by protecting and supporting children, by improving their educational outcomes and by involving and engaging children in decisions that affect their daily lives"**.

We are grateful that time is being spent by your Committee on these important questions. We hope that while understanding and learning from Jersey's experience is a vital step, it is nonetheless the first step in creating a clear, publicly available plan of action that goes beyond mere recovery and which fully embraces the ambition of **"making Jersey the very best place for children to grow up in by giving by them the best start in life so that they can go on to fulfil their potential"** (2018-2022 Common Strategic Policy).

To assist your review, we would offer the following comments:

### **Positive and negative experiences and effects**

Data in Jersey is largely unavailable. No analysis of the impact on educational attainment has been released to the public that provides detail on how various groups of children fared. However, data from other jurisdictions tells us:

- There is a correlation between the length of school closure and learning loss. Given that disruption to Jersey's schools was shorter than that in the UK, the UK's children will be harder hit than local pupils.
- Many research papers and reports were based on the first lockdown, however, so the indicative findings have equal relevance to Jersey
- There are some positives expected from a situation where children and adults were struggling to adapt and cope such as resilience and closer family bonds. Many children welcomed the additional time available for their own hobbies and to read. Given that reading for pleasure is an important determinant of educational achievement, this is to be celebrated. Additionally, many children found it easier to learn remotely and were well-supported by their parents. Some relished the increased freedom and the reduction in academic pressure.
- Globally, the most reported and robust findings are that Covid-19 has had a negative effect on progress and attainment. A **"best case"** scenario is exemplified by the Netherlands with a short lockdown, equitable school funding, and world-leading rates of broadband access. Despite these favourable conditions, primary school students made little or no progress while learning from home across the basics of maths, spelling and reading. Learning loss was most pronounced among students from disadvantaged homes with children among less-educated households, the size of the learning slide is up to 60% larger than in the general population.
- The finding of the disproportionate impact on disadvantaged children is echoed in the UK. The Education Endowment Foundation found a "large and concerning attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their wealthier peers, with poorer children seven months behind". In Jersey, the pre-Covid gap between Jersey Premium children was about 20% and this is therefore highly likely to have been exacerbated. This has both social and economic implications and addressing it is central to the Government's commitments to children in the 2018-22 Common Strategic Policy: **"achieving the aspiration of equity and fairness for the most vulnerable children"**.
- Children in early years of primary and those starting secondary school were the most likely to be negatively impacted. By autumn 2020, the Education Policy Institute was recording primary children falling behind in reading and maths. In light of known evidence on literacy that the years between 4 and 8 "represent the last critical window of opportunity in which change is possible", the life chances of many young children have been put in jeopardy.
- Significant numbers of children already start school unprepared to learn. The charity, Kindred, found that in the UK 46% of children entering reception in 2020 were not school ready. Interim findings from research by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research suggests that there is cause to be concerned over Foundation Stage and KS1 children's oral language and their communication skills. Literacy progress will undoubtedly be hampered as a consequence. Again, there is no available Jersey data but the picture will be similar.
- Anecdotal data suggests that those children with EAL might have been especially hard hit by lockdown. A Belgian study confirms this: year-end assessments discovered a gap, equivalent to seven months, more than in maths. Many in Jersey would not have spoken English for a number of weeks. In a school like Rouge Bouillon, EAL students account for 70% of the children and so working to make up for lost progress is a huge challenge for teachers.

### **Jersey's response at different stages of the pandemic**

- There is much to be commended in the response by schools. They had to switch to remote learning and yet keep schools open for vulnerable pupils and the children of essential workers. They were dealing with a wide range of changing challenges from the acquisition of hand sanitiser, re-routing pick-up points and the management of bubbles to assessment and examination decisions and to checking in with disengaged students.
- Alongside the immense challenges of continuing to teach children, it is unclear how much attention was being paid to the question of interventions and support mechanisms to ensure children do not fall behind. Arguably these approaches would need to be planned across schools and funded centrally. We saw quite rightly the Health Department deploy resources to address the issues Covid presented but there was little indication that officials in education were either similarly empowered or sought that empowerment. There are therefore questions on the readiness and speed of response and on the championing of education within the government structures.
- As a comparison, the UK was quicker and more resolute in its decisions. It allocated funds for a national tutoring programme before Jersey. It recognised and addressed digital shortfalls in schools before Jersey. The Prime Minister has now appointed a senior educationalist to report to him and the Minister for Education on recovery. While the outcomes remain to be seen, it is worth noting in the context of your Terms of Reference regarding "the ethos, culture and processes in relation to children and families within key decision-making bodies" that the public statements made in the UK convey an informed understanding of the detrimental effects and a far greater sense of resolve about tackling them. There was evident leadership. Interrupted leadership in Jersey with 3 successive ministers in a matter of months is regrettable. We would call for quick resolution of this issue and the appointment of a senior, ambitious and objective individual with the drive to make Jersey objectively one of the best education systems in the world.
- To date, Jersey has not presented a picture of the educational impact or presented a road map of comprehensive measures. One notable programme, tutoring has been introduced and some action has been undertaken to reduce the digital gap. We will comment on these below and while the interventions are valuable, the delays and extent of the support forthcoming would suggest that the educational success of children and young people is not at the heart of government decision-making.

#### **1) Tutoring**

The tutoring programme which provides additional support to pupils either on a one-on-one basis or in very small groups is a well-chosen and effective response. It uses trained teaching staff to hone in on the individual needs of children and allows them to work with and support the learning process very closely. The programme started to work with children at the end of the autumn term. We would question why this support was not made available to children earlier, either at the end of the summer term, over the summer or at least by the beginning of the autumn term. It is our understanding that the proposal, at least in draft, was ready. The Common Strategic Policy recognises that "**ensuring timely support to specialist support**" is required and we would suggest the Panel investigates the reasons to this delay.

- Delays might not be deemed so serious in other areas of government activity. In education, however, it is critical, especially in the earlier years of all child's schooling. If Jersey wishes to give "**ALL children an equal opportunity to fulfil their potential**", then time is of the essence. It is worth reminding the Panel that 80% of the difference in GCSE results between rich and poor children has already been determined by age 7.

- Funding of approximately £1million was allocated to this programme. This buys a good number of teacher hours but the question is whether it is sufficient to fill the gaps intended and whether it will be in place for long enough to address each child's needs. Without robust data it is of course hard to examine but it must be targeted and successful. Evidence of the impact so far would also be helpful.
- We would also ask, as we mentioned in our last submission to the Scrutiny Panel in October 2020, that the Government of Jersey looks beyond catch-up for the period of school disruption and take this opportunity to support children to catch up with peers. It should be more than taking children to where they might have otherwise been which, in the case of those children on Jersey Premium, is 20% behind their peers. A number of studies confirm that tutoring is a positive way of raising the level of disadvantaged students. We would ask that this programme is considered as a permanent feature in supporting struggling learners. Too many of our children are currently underserved. The 2018-2022 Common Strategic Policy seeks **"to narrow education attainment gaps"**. We would encourage Jersey takes this opportunity to work to **close the gap**.

## 2) IT devices

In respect to access to learning during school disruption, there were considerable variations in teaching time and time spent home learning. According to UK reports early in the pandemic, children from independent schools were twice as likely to take part in online classes and better-off children spent 1.5 hours more each school day on lessons, often aided by parents confident about directing their child's learning. Knowing this, Jersey needed to work quickly to address the barriers.

- One barrier to lockdown participation was a digital divide, specifically access to a suitable device. One Jersey school reported that when it followed up with those children who are not participating at the required level, access to a device was frequently identified. It received almost daily requests for support because even where the family has a device, there is, as the Centre for Research in Educational Underachievement wrote, "a world of difference between working on a large screen PC or laptop in a quiet bedroom or home study, and sharing access to Google Classroom with other siblings on a single mobile phone or tablet in a small living room or kitchen with the television on in the background."
- Every Child approached 9 schools in May 2020. no response to this offer for support was received from 5 of these schools. In June we provided funding for 123 devices for 3 primary schools with high numbers of Jersey Premium and EAL children and for one secondary school with high unmet technology needs. Our expectation was that CYPES would step in to stop the extensive gaps that even these schools had identified but the need persisted and so in November the charity distributed additional funds of over 5 times the initial amount, bringing the total to £207,000 and close to 800 devices. This was distributed to 5 primaries and represented a significant improvement in the schools' ability to deliver online support programmes. Every Child's delivery of this funding was the result of a determination to address the need and perhaps a greater freedom to act than that enjoyed by CYPES.
- On 20<sup>th</sup> April 2021 a press release described the purchase by CYPES of additional devices from charitable and government funds, the latter portion amounting to £255,000. While this is welcome, it is perhaps a year late and a year after the Government had first taken action on the digital divide challenge by teaming up with JT and other providers to offer free connections to households with school children where there is no access during the period of lockdown and school closure.
- The issue has changed in the meantime with a recognition that technology now plays a larger and more permanent role in teaching practice and so the woeful inventory of devices in some schools must be made fit for purpose. Not only was the response too slow to both

school closure and subsequent classroom needs but also a needs analysis was carried out too late. But most importantly, with the shift to more remote and device-based learning, do our schools have what is required to deliver quality learning experiences for all students?

### **Missed opportunities**

We have commented above on two of the responses that will have an impact on existing inequalities if focused towards schools and children who need the help most. We would also like to mention a missed opportunity to mitigate the damaging effect the pandemic has had on less advantaged children. Again, this speaks to questions around whether there is sufficient commitment at the heart of Government decision-making to put in place appropriate and timely workstreams.

- In May 2020, Every Child shared with 9 primary schools and with CYPES its interest in working with schools to offer some schooling provision over the summer vacation. We heard back from only two schools and through subsequent contacts, supported these and one secondary school. Our support came in the form of securing funding of £60,000 to make the programmes viable, specifically funding the time of a specialist Reading Recovery teacher and in providing volunteers to support reading. At the core of each programme was a focus on the fundamental skills of literacy and numeracy.
- It is fair to say that there is mixed data on the effectiveness of summer schools. Irrespective of this, it was important to give consideration to helping children recover in 2020 and to design programmes that assisted in this way. Given that summer is a time when disparities between advantaged and less advantaged children are perpetuated or exacerbated, it was especially important to act in those catchment areas where there is a high proportion of Jersey premium, EAL and vulnerable children. It is disappointing that excepting some support for Janvrin's offering, there was not wider encouragement and facilitation of more summer learning events.
- As a result of these programmes, 273 children in Janvrin, d'Auvergne and Haute Vallee enjoyed targeted catch-up support from teachers and teaching assistants in small groups and were involved in a number of enrichment activities. Alongside progress on academic competencies, including the fundamentals of literacy and numeracy, the 2 to 4 week engagement contributed to improvements in physical and mental wellbeing and to social and emotional development. All of these were supportive of the 2018-2022 Common Strategic Policy's aim **"to address the underlying causes of that contribute to the known gaps in learning and development"**. In particular and of critical importance, the children were better prepared for the return to school in September. A spiral of disengagement had been reversed. Pupils had established or re-established relationships with teachers, EAL students were using the English language and the children had greater confidence. More information on the range of benefits including the improvements in academic competencies is available.

### **Ongoing workstreams**

Without a comprehensive plan it is uncertain what initiatives will be carried on or introduced. We have commented already that we would like to see the tutoring programme extended permanently, that more still needs to be done on the digital equipping of schools and that targeted activities during the summer vacations should be designed. In addition, we would like to see articulated plans that support:

- **Early Years.** The 2018-2022 Common Strategic Policy states that recognition will be given to **"the critical importance of children's experiences in the first few years of their lives – understanding that it lays the foundation for their future development and can be predictive of future outcomes"**. Disadvantaged children start school already up to a year behind their more affluent peers and, anecdotally, there is evidence from teachers in the UK

that shows growing concerns about development gaps. This week the Education Endowment Fund issued a press release referring to a recent survey where 96% of schools reported being “very concerned” or “quite concerned” about levels of children’s language and communication skills.

Over and above the support currently provided, a step up in resources is required to increase the capabilities of both States and private nurseries. Although extra funding was granted in the UK, it is not sufficient on a per child basis to counter the pressures on a struggling sector. Jersey could ensure that it does not fall into this trap and properly invests in more than recovery.

In view of the Scrutiny Panel’s interest in the mental health and wellbeing of children, it must also be stressed that the provision of high-quality early years support in boosting oral language and communication skills will, in and of itself, underpin social and emotional wellbeing.

- **Literacy and numeracy.** These two areas are the building blocks of educational success. In a previous submission to the Scrutiny Panel, we called for greater attention to be given. To quote:  
“We would like to see more explicit statements around literacy and numeracy as priority areas. We would like to see struggling readers and those struggling with numeracy broken out as focus groups alongside EAL, Jersey Premium, SEN and LAC. These categories all overlap but do not necessarily include all the same children. As gaps are narrowed, standards will need to be reset in line with the aspiration to match **“the best in the world.”**”

The impact of Jersey’s experience of the pandemic will take time to become fully apparent. But much will depend on the actions taken by bodies such as the Council of Ministers and CYPES. The decision-makers will need to mitigate the damage done and work across the school system. There is an opportunity to do more than catch-up and to turn the aims expressed in the 2018-2022 Common Strategic Policy into reality. Putting Children First has widespread support but there is much to do to make sure that it adds up to **“giving ALL children an equal opportunity to fulfil their potential”**.

We would like to thank the Panel for its invitation to contribute to its review on the impact of Covid-19. We trust that some of our comments and observations might be of help to it. But may we leave with a plea to the Government of Jersey? That is that it delivers a clear and honest analysis of the impact on local education and commits to an ambitious and fully fundable roadmap for how it is not only going to make good the negative impacts but also reach the goal of offering Jersey children a world class education.

Yours sincerely,

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