

2025.06.24

3.6 Deputy H.M. Miles of St. Brelade of the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning regarding childcare provision for 2 – 3 year olds in States primary schools (OQ.149/2025):

Will the Minister outline his vision and strategy for the provision of high-quality childcare for 2 to 3 year-old children in States primary schools?

Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier Central (The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning):

I thank the Deputy for her question. I currently have no planned expansion of school-based 2 to 3 provision and this reflects data from the last Childcare Provider Survey, Quarter 4, 2024 that said there are sufficient places in the registered childcare sector. However, the childcare pilots in schools, Stay and Play, with J.C.C.T. (Jersey Child Care Trust) at d'Auvergne are showing very positive early results in children's learning, development, communication and language, so I plan to sustain them for the foreseeable future. These provisions are making a significant difference and these children will now be starting nursery in September in line with their peers and not significantly behind. Similarly, the Best Start Plus offers to families in Rouge Bouillon called Little Phoenix, and Samarès Pathways will also continue.

3.6.1 Deputy H.M. Miles:

I thank the Minister for his answer. On the basis that the pilots are going to continue, will this provision be solely for children with identified additional needs or will it become a universal offer?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Early indicators from the first parent's survey, which I plan to publish in the summer, indicate continued difficulty in securing childcare places for children with additional needs in this deployment at those particular places at the moment which is addressing this need. That needs to enable young people to be able to start school in terms of a developmental par with others is really important. That is, if you like, the area I think we will focus on around our schools. The universal offer for 2 to 3 year-olds will be available because there are places available for 2 to 3-year-olds, it appears, across our sector which is quite reassuring. There will be a universal offer but the targeted support I think is the right thing to do as well.

3.6.2 Deputy C.D. Curtis of St. Helier Central:

Does the Minister plan to meet with the private nursery providers this year to discuss plans?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

There have been a number of ongoing meetings with the providers - I have detailed them to the panel - not necessarily just myself but certainly officers as well to talk about a whole range of the factors involved for 2 to 3 year-olds. Whether me meeting personally is going to add to that or I just simply discuss what has already been discussed, I do not know. I am always open to meeting with all stakeholders as long as there is a positive outcome and we are adding to what is already happening with the dialogue that is happening in the background.

3.6.3 Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Has the Minister assessed the impact, if any, on the private nursery providers and would it not be helpful for him to speak to them directly?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Yes, the impact on private nursery providers, such things as what would be the rate for a 2 to 3 year-old, they are directly involved with because they are discussing with officers from the Economic Department where we are coming up for the model for the 2 to 3 year-old provision. I can also sit and discuss that if that is what is wanted. I have made clear that I am not expanding the 2 to 3 year-old provision in schools because of the provision that is available across nurseries, so that is support for that. These changes are no threat to any nurseries, they are simply there to try and increase provision for 2 to 3 year-olds' hours for parents and for children; that is the most important part of this.

3.6.4 Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity:

I thank the Minister for his answers so far. As I have not been following this closely, my question to the Minister is just to understand some of his answers. Of course, we all know that nursery provisions are a huge cost to many families, and women have to choose sometimes between following their career and taking time off because of that. When the Minister is talking about a universal offer, what does this mean for families? Does this mean a discount going for 2 to 3 year-olds, a free offer in the nurseries? So just to understand what he means by universal offer.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I assume that the Deputy is talking about for 2 to 3 year-olds?

Deputy H.L. Jeune:

Yes.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

This has not been finalised yet so I am not announcing anything now, I want to make that clear, but I have talked repeatedly about the provision of 15 hours of paid-for childcare to be used in nurseries universally available to everybody. The question is whether that will be for 35 or 48 weeks per year; I personally would want it to be for 48 weeks per year. That is the type of provision that has been made available for 2 to 3 year-olds. Then that goes in conjunction with the 30 hours that is available for 3 to 4 year-olds through the N.E.F. (Nursery Education Fund) but the 2 to 3 year-old provision would be available for child minders as well.

3.6.5 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour:

I can see the Minister is addressing the affordability of childcare. Can he comment on the accessibility in terms of the hours available? What time do these provisions open and close and indeed what is the Minister doing to ensure that the private nurseries, who provide the bulk of those extended nursery hours, are able to continue and that they do not close and that we lose spaces for this age group?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I am sorry, I lost the first part of the question because I was focusing on the second. Could you say the first part again?

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

The hours in the primary schools that this provision is available but also what the Minister is doing in the private sector to make sure that those extended hours are still available in the private sector.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Yes, the 2 to 3 provision will be for 15 hours; parents may need to pay for additional hours. At the moment if you have your child in full-time nursery care you will be paying for every single hour of that, so that is the reality of it. I do not see this will affect any private nurseries. Private nurseries have been involved in the discussions over what this rate would be. In terms of the hours available for private nurseries, they do vary across the Island and they are private businesses, so I cannot determine what hours they provide. I would hope that across the sector this would provide a greater opportunity for people to put their children to use those nursery hours in as flexible a way as possible in order just to help families in the best way they can. A classic example for me is if this is used for 2 days a week and we can get somebody returning, for example, to the education workforce for 2 days a week, it would be very, very useful for the education workforce. This fits into a number of areas across our society in terms of the need that we have and supporting parents which I know, when you have young children, is really, really hard work.

3.6.6 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

A shared goal across successive Governments has been to improve the quality available in early years. One of the goals was to have some funded early years' teachers in private settings. Are we any closer to achieving this goal and having funded early years' teachers that we send into the private nurseries to help them with their staffing and the quality?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

In terms of early years' teachers, if you mean teacher-qualified, that is not part of this scheme; no, it is not. In terms of the quality of provision, there is training provided throughout for staff in private nurseries. I am pleased to say that we are working with child minders as well to provide training when it is accessible to them. That has been a really good uptake and there has been a very positive response from child minders, which I would like to thank them for publicly, because it is a really positive way forward that we are getting. In terms of teachers in private nurseries, there is an issue around the perception of that as to whether it is childcare or teaching. I think we have got to move on from that and we have got to all look and say: "Okay, what is it we want best for our children?" which is good, quality childcare available for all children across our provision so that they can reach their best goals. I will just add quickly, this is why targeting the provision in those schools for those most needy children to get them, if you like, up to a point where they are ready for their primary school starting is such an important point of what is going on here. There will be a significant number of children who are more ready for school than they ever would have been, so they start early on and catch up early on and do not lose that later on.

3.6.7 Deputy H.M. Miles:

In view of the fact that high-quality childcare is expensive, can the Minister tell us what financial modelling has been done to understand the full funding implications of the strategy and whether we are going to be able to afford it?

[10:45]

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Yes, the money is always the issue, absolutely. The modelling I have undertaken, which we are still working on but I am happy to share with the panel when we have got it, is whether we have 15 hours, 30 hours, whether it is 30 weeks a year, 48 weeks a year, where we would have the best impact. Yes, there will be a cost but I would say that that cost is an investment in our families, it is an investment in our children and it is something that we should take the brunt of that cost. I would be very supportive of spending that money in this area. I am pretty sure that

I think across this Assembly there may be support for that as well, given the needs that we have for our young people in the Island.