

2025.06.24

3.15 Deputy K.M. Wilson of St. Clement of the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning regarding the placement of children with special educational needs in their preferred schools (OQ.151/2025):

Will the Minister advise whether there are any challenges in placing children with special educational needs in their catchment preferred school from next term and, if so, how such challenges are being addressed?

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

I thank the Deputy for her question. Just a couple of things just to give context to this, the allocation of non-fee paying primary schools places is undertaken by Education centrally and it is based upon a set of criteria. The top of that criteria is having the special educational needing to access a specific school. But within schools there are additional resource provision centres. I have an awful lot of data, I will pick out some of the data. There are challenges but what has happened is there is flexibility in the allocation of places to children to meet their need. What that means is there is one person reception has been placed in a special school which is not in their catchment area in order to meet their need. There are 2 that have been placed in an A.R.P. (Additional Resource Provision) secondary school which is not in their catchment area school based on the school having a specialist nurse provision to meet their needs. I want to make sure this information is accurate, 2 people are being required to remain in the mainstream where a bespoke provision is being provided. There are challenges about increasing need. However, I think the flexibility in the provision and the way in which schools are stepping up to the plate in terms of the A.R.P.s and what their provision in accepting children is meeting that need virtually completely but we can always do more. Obviously if we build the school in Gas Place, which will have our specialist school attached to it, we will have more provision. That could have been ready by this year if it had not been delayed but that is just a personal grab of my own.

3.15.1 Deputy K.M. Wilson:

Alongside concerns about placement capacity for these children, there have been ongoing reports of staffing shortages and delays in recruitment in educational psychologists in particular. As we know, these are particularly vital for timely assessments and support planning that the Minister just alluded to. Can he state what impact these delays and gaps in service are having on placement decisions? In cases where a child cannot be placed, could he just explain what alternative placement options are available to ensure their needs are being met?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

That is a very, very wide-ranging question. In terms of meeting the challenges, as I mentioned, and specialist provision, and that provision will be made for young people in schools. There is refurbishment of the pastoral secondary, which I am sure will be ready in this October. Part of it, we are hoping, may be ready earlier but I get very suspicious when I hope things, then they end up not happening. Then in terms of other areas, there are some issues around some areas of provision that are being solved at the moment in terms of educational psychologists; I think we can come to a conclusion to that relatively soon and improve that service. The other issues around recruitment are not new. there will always, I think, be issues around recruitment. However, I think they are making some changes in our provision. For example, to being able

to lease somewhere to live for particular groups could also help with that provision. I know there is work going on in regards to - and I cannot remember the words for it because it is not my specialist area - population but enabling people to be here and being able to rent across our sectors, that is the key.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Supplementary from Deputy Miles only. This Minister is of course answering further questions without notice later on this morning.

3.15.2 Deputy H.M. Miles of St. Brelade:

Just following on from the previous answer, given the totally unsatisfactory situation with the Educational Psychology Service, what reassurance can the Minister give to parents of children with special needs, that those needs have been and will be properly assessed and, therefore, their children will be allocated to the most suitable provision to meet those needs?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Sir, this has turned into a question about educational psychologists, if you think that is okay then I can do that.

The Deputy Bailiff:

No, it beyond the question of special needs.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I think the comments made by the Deputy there is a totally unsuitable vision; I think is unfair. There have been problems. However, the service has continued. In the past academic year you would wait to have assessments in 55 days; in the current academic year it is down to 19 days. There have been mitigating circumstances to get that service continuing. Of course it is not perfect and we do not want it to be the way it is. But an enormous amount of work has gone in to try and fix that problem. Yes, I am as confident, I think, as I can ever be that the assessments are happening. Are they ever happening as quick as you want them to? Probably not and we will continue to work towards that in the best way we possibly can.

3.15.3 Deputy H.M. Miles:

What extra support is being provided to schools to meet the needs of children who should be in special education but need to stay in an inappropriate provision because Mont a L'Abbé is full?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Yes, specialist provision, each case is a particular provision, so I could not go through each individual case. I am also not a specialist in that area, so I would not necessarily know what that provision would be. But I know schools are working, as they always do, and I think we should just give some credit to our schools. That will be a theme of my answers today if possible, to give credit to schools for the work that they are doing in this area. Also, yes, of course we want to expand provision as much as we possibly can; that is a difficult situation. I will say that Mont a L'Abbé, I personally think, in the next few years will need to be larger than we originally thought. The delay in that could be beneficial in the long term that we build something that is more suitable, so we do not end up in this position of not having enough places because of the change in demographic and what is happening with children later on in a few years' time. I am hoping there can at least be some positives that come from that.

3.15.4 Deputy K.M. Wilson:

I would just like to pay tribute to those teachers who are delivering special educational needs education. **[Approbation]** It is a very, very challenging area of professional practice. I just wanted to ask, the Minister just alluded to the fact that we need some expansion if demand does continue to exceed the capacity, does he only expect that a school is the solution? Is there anything else that we can expect to see from Ministers and officers from within his department to improve things like placement processes and the support provided to children with these needs?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

We have, for example, recently opened - the word “facility” sounds wrong to me - a provision, that is the word I am looking for, called Switch, which is an intervention provision for young people who are really struggling and need that additional need. That is a response to this increasing need that we have, so things are happening. The provision that was made within schools themselves is also increasing where we can. I think the way in which needs are being addressed is also being provided. I will say that I am pleased that the Deputy was talking about the work from teachers and support assistance and teaching assistants in the area of special educational needs.

[11:45]

But I would extend that across our schools because so much need is met by ordinarily available provision day-to-day by adaptation of what is going on in schools, across our school estate as well. Increasingly students are being reintegrated into schools who can access education. I personally think we do need a separate provision to be developed. We need a greater provision to be developed, which is the step between perhaps those children who need the intense support from Mont a L’Abbé and those who will respond to additional resource provision within the schools. But I think an additional provision which is desperately needed in the coming years, much should be provided for those students that fall within that gap because then we can get those students back on track and back into education and back to succeeding so they are ready for the rest of their lives.