

2019.02.26

8 Deputy R.J. Ward of the Minister for Education regarding the Minister's policy position in respect of industrial action taken by members of the teaching profession over pay: [OQ49/2019]

Has the Minister, with her Assistant Ministers, agreed a policy position to support the teaching profession in its industrial action over pay? Is it her assessment that morale in the profession has been damaged and, if so, what solutions, if any, has she identified to ensure that such damage is repaired in the long term?

Senator T.A. Vallois (The Minister for Education):

No, I have not agreed a policy position with my Assistant Ministers to support the teaching profession in any industrial action over pay. I acknowledge the right of any staff member, of course, to take industrial action and I respect their choice to do so in accordance with the law. I am, as the Deputy knows, passionate about the education of our children and young people and the impact on their education, and inconvenience and financial impact on their families caused by industrial action is, of course, a concern to me as well. I am pleased that the action planned for today has been suspended and hope a resolution can now be found to avert any further action. I am sure that morale in the profession has been affected by the pay dispute. This is evidenced by the strong support shown for industrial action in recent union ballots. Teachers and all other school staff are committed employees who want to do their best for education in Jersey and I value all that they do and will work with my Assistant Ministers and officers of the department to improve morale wherever possible. I regularly meet with the union leaders as part of the Education Consultative Council and I am about to start a series of school visits so I can meet more staff face to face to see first-hand the success their hard work achieves but also to hear their concerns so I can support them moving forward.

4.8.1 Deputy R.J. Ward:

May I say I agree and am pleased that hopefully a resolution to the industrial dispute may be reached quickly with proper consultation for the first time for a long time. May I ask the Minister whether she will commit to addressing - which has been somewhat ignored in the past, I believe - the issues of workload and work-life balance for teachers and issues such as bullying and harassment in the workplace, which have been so evident from both surveys and from input from individuals as this is one of the biggest issues around morale, not just pay?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

Yes, I completely understand. Workload and bullying and harassment has been going on, particularly during last term, even more so with regards to ... the Education Consultative Council that I referred to have been working really well with union leaders about bringing in appropriate policies to try to support teachers in terms of workload, but also a recognition as a department in terms of the type of school funding that needs to be appropriately put in place to support teachers in terms of resources. Also the fact that the Assembly agree regularly different types of legislation that have an impact on the administration of these schools as well, so there needs to be extra support in terms of the head teacher and the senior leaders within schools to ensure that they can do their job as teachers, as leaders, to support our children. In terms of bullying and harassment, of course, the States Employment Board have earlier this year released a phone line that all members of staff can access and a new bullying and harassment and grievance policy is circulated. I am assuming that

that training will be ongoing and it is not just a piece of paper that will be handed out, that appropriate support and training will be provided to all staff as necessary.

4.8.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

Is the Minister aware that teachers and educational staff generally often do work that they are not contracted to do and that they do not get paid for? So when they are not even given the correct pay resolution for the work that they do do, that results in a lack of morale. Does the Minister understand that to be the case and one of the aggravating factors in the current dispute?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

I believe it is not just teachers or any staff in the Education Department that work beyond the hours that they are contracted to. There are many staff within our public sector that work more, go above and beyond the call of duty in terms of their contracts as stated. I think it has come to a pinch point. I think the goodwill that has been seen is ... it is not that it is no longer there, it is just that it gets to the point where there is frustration and it feels like nobody is listening. They do not feel valued. They do not feel supported. So I can recognise that feeling that if they are going above and beyond why is it not the leaders or the people above them that are recognising and supporting that value that they add consistently to our public and our Island as a whole.

4.8.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does she also understand that if they are being told that there is no money left now and that there may be reduced money in the future that they may not be able to carry on doing the work that they are not paid for but also they may not be able to continue doing the amount of work that they currently or have been paid for in the past? So with that in mind, would the Minister look at a scheme to perhaps reduce their workload and is she also considering, for example, a 4-day week for the public sector in order to avert this crisis of a lack of funding to sustain the current public services?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

I am not personally looking at a 4-day week. That would be up to the States Employment Board to consider that. However, it would have a huge impact on our education and our schooling and our children in terms of the hours that are required under our curriculum to support the children moving forward. So, of course, that is of significant concern. In terms of money left, of course, we know the current situation, the financial constraints, as the Chief Minister set out to answer at question 4 to Deputy Southern earlier.

[10:45]

Recognising there may be a need to change working hours for the public sector as a whole is, of course, a decision for the States Employment Board to consider around policies supporting the workforce and how that moves forward, but flexible working and those types of things, of course, moving forward over the next 20 years, it is going to look a very different world. So, if there is no money left, that consideration has to be made by the States Employment Board and the Council of Ministers as a whole.

4.8.4 Deputy R.J. Ward:

May I ask the Minister if she would, as a suggestion for improving morale, ensure that both the policy that was developed with unions and the Education Department over workload and marking, in particular, is properly implemented across all schools and also the situation where informal warnings

are both given by the head teacher and judged upon by the head teacher, which seems to me intrinsically unfair, is addressed as a matter of urgency, which can lead to bullying in the workplace?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

This was raised at the last meeting of the Education Consultative Council by members of the National Education Union, who raised concerns about the inconsistencies of applying policies across schools. My officers have agreed to take that on board and follow that up and look into that. So I can only give that guarantee, but I am happy to report back once I hear back from my officers.