

23.07.04

8 Deputy R.J. Ward of the Minister for Children and Education regarding recruitment and retention within education (OQ.131/2023)

Further to the reporting of comments that Jersey is “facing an unprecedented crisis in recruitment and retention within education”, will the Assistant Minister explain whether or not it is his assessment that the Island indeed currently faces such a crisis?

The Connétable of St. Peter (Assistant Minister for Children and Education - rapporteur):

I thought we had covered much of this in the previous question, question 5. Recruitment has, without doubt, become more challenging in recent years, as there is a teacher shortage across the U.K., especially in some subjects, such as science and maths. As advised earlier in my answer to Deputy Mézec’s question, we have strengthened our recruitment capabilities through joint work between the Education Directorate and the Delivery Unit within the Cabinet Office. We also continue to focus on providing new learning and development opportunities for staff to aid retention. I go back to that data I quoted earlier. We have 18 teacher vacancies. Of those 18, 7 are out on offer. The 18 is just 2 per cent of the headcount of the current workforce. That 18, as I said, is the predicted number for September. Our teacher attrition ratio for the last 12 months is the lowest it has been for 4 years, at just 3.6 per cent. Are we facing an unprecedented crisis? Over the past 18 months we have taken measures so that we are not facing an unprecedented crisis. The improvement in both retention and attrition over that period is testament to that.

3.8.1 Deputy R.J. Ward:

The quote came from the headteachers, so I would ask the Assistant Minister whether he is going to sit down and tell headteachers that they are wrong, that he knows more about their schools than they do, and whether he will be doing that today, tomorrow, during the demonstration, and when he will make an appointment for himself and his colleagues within the department to sit down and tell headteachers that they are simply wrong about their own interpretation of their own schools?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

We are always interested to sit down and talk with the headteachers and other teachers. If they have data that is significantly different to ours then we would wish to see that. Until I see that data then I cannot comment on that.

3.8.2 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

It is clear that there is a complete difference in opinion between the profession and the Assistant Minister. Could the Assistant Minister elaborate on why he thinks that those spokespeople for the profession are wrong and he is right?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

I have just answered that in saying that if there is data that we are not aware of then we need to see that. Without seeing that, I cannot comment on that. We have data. We can show that we have recruited additional teachers, 88 more teachers than we had in 2019. We have a lower attrition rate. We have 2 per cent or less vacancies. If there is data out there then bring it to us and we can have a look at it.

3.8.3 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Is the Assistant Minister telling us that because he has seen some numbers on a spreadsheet from Broad Street that he is the one living in the real world, while those who are working on the ground dealing directly with these issues are the ones who somehow live in a fantasy land?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

I did not say that. What I said was if there is alternative data, let us see it; bring it forward.

3.8.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

I love the little chimes there: bring it on. The Assistant Minister says the actions they have taken on recruitment and attrition have avoided, he suggests, any crisis. Could he list for us what actions he has taken on recruitment and attrition?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

I have already said the work that we have done with the Delivery Unit and the Education Directorate. We have a teacher graduate training scheme. Last year we trained 18. We had a further 18 teachers coming through that this year. If my colleague wants further information on what the Education Directorate have done then I am happy to get that for him.

3.8.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is the Assistant Minister aware of what has happened to these 18 trainees this year and last year and how long have they lasted in the job? Has he got information on that? I believe the numbers will be rather different to the ones he confidently predicts?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

I do not have those figures in front of me. As far as I am aware, of those 18 staff the majority of them have been retained. I am happy to get that information, but I do not have it in front of me.

3.8.6 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Could I ask the Assistant Minister to give a time and a date when he will sit down with teachers and headteachers and perhaps do a tour of schools and explain to them why their belief that they are facing an unprecedented crisis and recruitment and retention within education is so wrong?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

At this point, I cannot give a date and a time, but I will ask for a meeting to be set up. But at this point, I cannot give a date or a time and whether the Minister may wish to do that rather than myself.