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3 Deputy J.H. Perchard of the Chairman of the States Employment Board regarding the identification of public sector reforms and sustainable efficiencies required to fund an additional 0.8% increase in consolidated pay: (OQ.154/2019)

Further to the statement in a press release on 10th June 2019, that “the additional 0.8 per cent increase to consolidated pay that [public sector] unions sought” in pay negotiations is to be “funded through identified reforms” and “sustainable efficiencies”, will the Chairman advise what reforms and efficiencies, if any, have been identified to date?

[10:00]

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré (Chairman, States Employment Board):

In a series of meetings with N.A.S.U.W.T. (National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers) and the N.E.U. (National Education Union), a number of proposals were discussed and refined and included in the final offers made to both unions. One example was the introduction of a new role of senior teaching assistant, which will provide a range of benefits, including support for teachers and taking their P.P.A. (planning, preparation and assessment) time alongside tangible benefits, including reduction in supply teacher costs and further reductions of the costs of lunchtime cover. I think the key thing to stress is that the pay offers included the establishment of a joint working group to look at that and other potential savings and efficiencies, including from non-payroll costs. An overarching requirement was that changes brought about through this work will lead to quantifiable improvement to educational outcomes, which provide assurances that changes support the Common Strategic Policy of putting children first. Before I conclude, I just want to emphasise the key factors that there is a working group with representatives of the unions and the employer on it and it requires the agreement of both sides before those efficiencies are crystallised. Bearing in mind we are a little over a week and a bit from that initial press release, it is probably a little early to say those have been crystallised.

3.3.1 Deputy J.H. Perchard:

Could the Minister please list what he deems to be a non-payroll cost within Education?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I am going to be cautious, because we have made it very, very clear that terms and conditions are the responsibility of the States Employment Board, but anything that goes outside the terms and conditions is very much within the remit of the Minister for Education, if it goes into policy territory. So, the example I will use is not educational related, but I will say there has been an example very much in the past of when I was in my time of what was then T.T.S. (Transport and Technical Services) or D.f.I. (Department for Infrastructure) when an individual identified a different route of procuring the U.V. (ultraviolet) bulbs that they use for the U.V. treatment and that saved the department annually a substantial sum of money. That would be a non-payroll cost, as I hope is clearly understandable and in this instance that would then count into as if it were recurring, one could then contribute it to the 0.8 per cent that one is trying to achieve for the teachers.

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

The Chairman mentioned reducing the cost of supply teaching. Can he give some more detail on this please and specifically will supply teachers' pay be maintained at current levels and will they be receiving the pay award?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I am not entirely clear on the situation on supply teachers in terms of receiving a pay award. I assume that supply teachers are paid the going rate and the going rate goes up according to the pay awards, but I will come back and just clarify that. What it is, is at the end of the day supply teachers are brought in, as I have always understood matters, to cover full-time teachers who, for whatever reason, cannot be available. I have understood that in certain circumstances they are used to cover costs, which do not necessarily require a teacher to provide that particular service. So, it is not about reducing the pay levels of supply teachers when they are used, it is whether one can be more careful in how they are used. Again, I really do emphasise the point that efficiencies in that type of utilisation of things, all these types of variables, have to be agreed by the various and by the working group, if that is further identified.

3.3.3 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Is there an intention that C.P.D. (continuing professional development) courses will be restricted, because that is where frequently supply teachers are used, when the class teacher is on a course?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

One of the conditions on the agreement with unions is around promoting professional development and also health and well-being, so I would say we have no intention to reduce C.P.D.

3.3.4 Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier:

I welcome the consultation across unions. Does this mean the end of a single union partnership agreement signed by the last Chief Minister that had been so divisive in finding agreement in these situations?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I do not think that is a matter for the States Employment Board and I am not commenting on that, because that would definitely be into the territory of the Minister for Education.

3.3.5 Deputy R.J. Ward:

It was signed by the Chair of the States Employment Board, the agreements, as I say I welcome consultation across unions, because it is much more constructive. Will that continue, or will that now be ended?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Yes, I will clarify. I believe it was signed in the capacity of Chief Minister, rather than the capacity as Chairman of the States Employment Board. I know it is a question of hats, but I think it is an important question of hats. I would not have said initially and I am very happy to be corrected, that a partnership arrangement on education matters is directly a matter for the States Employment Board and it is very much, in my view, a matter for the Minister for Education.

3.3.6 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier:

Just for clarity, is the Chief Minister saying he will replace qualified teachers in charge of classrooms with assistant teachers and when he refers to the going rate for supply teachers, does he not recognise that if he uses assistants that going rate will go down, instead of teachers, who are on the supply list?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

The point is there are certain points where a fully qualified teacher is not required, let us say it is for lunchtime cover, but in certain instances they are utilised for lunchtime cover. As I understand it, that might be an area where one can generate some efficiency. That is because this is one of the arguments around what roles do, as I understand matters, that teachers raise - I am hesitant, bearing in mind I am looking at a lot of teachers across the room, or former teachers - and my understanding is that one of the issues that teachers keep raising is the expansion of their responsibilities outside of direct teaching. So, without getting into the detail - and I said the detail is very much for the working group, including the unions, to identify - but there are areas where teachers are used where it may be possible to use someone, who is a more efficient use of the resources we have. But that is around with agreement of all the parties looking at this matter.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Supplementary, if I may.

The Bailiff:

You will have your opportunity during Chief Minister's questions time later on, Deputy.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat of St. Helier:

My question has already been asked by Deputy Southern.

The Bailiff:

Very well, then Deputy Southern you can have your supplementary. Then we will have a final supplementary after that from Deputy Perchard.

3.3.7 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The question was: why, then, has the Chief Minister started with the issue of cover for absent teachers in classrooms and saying that they can reduce costs by using teaching assistants? Is he clear that people not qualified to teach will be taking specialist classrooms?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

First, I do not think I started with that. Secondly, it was an example and, thirdly, and we have been very clear, that when I say an example, an example that is out there in the discussion territory of what this working group is going to look at. I really emphasise that, that it is very much a collaborative approach to achieve the outcome that everybody is trying to achieve. What I really do want to stress though, because it has been raised, it has been raised on a number of occasions, this is not about, for the sake of argument, taking a language teacher out of a school for a year and replacing them with a teaching assistant for a year. It is not. Be very clear about it. It is that, in certain circumstances, it is appropriate where a senior teaching assistant can provide short term, and I mean short term cover, which achieves exactly the same outcomes. But that is very much a matter for the working group, the employer and obviously schools as and when affected.

3.3.8 Deputy J.H. Perchard:

I do not think there has been any clarity given on what kind of efficiencies are going to be identified give that schools' budgets ... over 80 per cent of the budgets, typically, are spent on staff, so therefore payroll, and apart from changing a few lightbulbs I am no clearer on what S.E.B. (States Employment Board) considers to be an appropriate efficiency saving in schools. So, could the Chief Minister please provide us with a list of the possible efficiencies that are going to be saved, that are not going to impact staff and, therefore, the education of children?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I think the principle is that, as the Deputy referred to in her question, the press release was on 10th June; it is not that long ago. The point is that the working group gets established and they come forward with the details that they want to promote. We have given possible suggestions. I do not want to get prescriptive, because that is not my role in this. It is very much a working group come together and they do believe that there are some areas that jointly and I will say there have been some areas, raised by the unions themselves, which they believe will generate the objectives that they are trying to achieve. As we see, as soon as one raises one potential example, other people will either agree or disagree. It is a matter, as far as I am concerned, for the union representatives, as well as the employer representative and, where appropriate, the Minister as well, to make sure there is agreement around all parties. That is the line.

Deputy J.H. Perchard:

Point of clarification, Sir?

The Bailiff:

You have had your answer, Deputy. You can come back in Chief Minister's question time.