

23.07.17

7 Deputy R.J. Ward of the Minister for Children and Education regarding the impact of delivering of a full curriculum (OQ.154/2023)

I assume it is the Assistant Minister taking the answer.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Yes.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

In light of the concerns raised by all teaching unions over recruitment and retention, will the Assistant Minister explain whether in his assessment there will be any impact on the delivery of a full curriculum in both primary and secondary schools from September?

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

I do not expect any impact on the delivery of a full curriculum in primary and secondary schools from September. I have no doubt there will be some gaps in rolls caused by resignations received in May, but it is quite normal and something the department, headteachers and schools deal with every year. As a former teacher himself, I am sure the Deputy is aware of this, but for the benefit of others I will explain. Teachers have 3 dates a year on which they can resign, and these are the last days of February, May and October. In most cases it is simply not possible to advertise, recruit and have a substantive permanent replacement in place by the start of the next term. In rare cases, we may find a recruit who is not currently working in a school and they have no notice period to work, but in the vast majority of cases teachers will be working in other schools. As an example, if we are notified of a resignation at the end of May and advertise and offer the appointment by the end of July, a teacher already working in a school would not be able to hand in their notice before October and move to their new role until January the following year. This clearly leaves a gap from September to December that needs covering and we do this by our use of supply staff, internal cover and, more recently, U.K. supply staff to fill the gaps.

4.7.1 Deputy R.J. Ward:

What the Assistant Minister fails to recognise is that supply staff do not necessarily fit subjects. I will ask him, though, his reference to the U.K. supply staff. From 2 questions, and just bear with me for one second, from 1st September to January 2023, last year, there was a total of £35,840 spent on supply staff. With the average cost, that would be 112 days of supply staff. From January to July this year there is a total of just staffing, not the extra costs, of £226,663, equivalent to 763 days of cover staff. Is the Assistant Minister genuinely saying that by using agency staff who are non-specialist in subjects there is no threat to delivering a full curriculum to every child on this Island?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

What I said was that this is something that occurs every year and to date we have not experienced significant problems in ensuring that the curriculum continues. Of course, in most cases we would want a specialist teacher. That is not always possible. However, we are aware that there will always be some gaps. There are 30 to 40 per cent reductions in U.K. recruitment for teacher training in science and maths. This continues to impact recruitment efforts, but initiatives such as the Jersey graduate teacher training programme are delivering some teachers who can fill these gaps. I would

say that the situation this year is certainly on a par with previous years, where there has not been a significant problem in filling those gaps.

4.7.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

Is the Assistant Minister taking into account the potential for industrial action and working to rule not being resolved by September when he answers Deputy Ward's question about whether the core curriculum can be effectively delivered in September?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

Well, of course, that is an unknown at this point and probably my colleague in the S.E.B. would know more about when potential strikes might hit us. Nevertheless, at whatever point they hit us, they will impact us. We can only plan on a basis of what we know and what we do not know, and we cannot plan on what we do not know.

4.7.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Assistant Minister sounds, if I may say so, somewhat complacent when saying that this happens every year. The question must be: what special measures, what new initiatives, does the Assistant Minister have in mind in order to eliminate, or reduce at least, the situation this time around?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

The fact of the matter is that we have already explained why there is a gap. Teachers will tend to resign in May. Inevitably, due to that, there will be a gap between September and December. That occurs every year. Every year we have been successful, as far as I know, in recruiting and closing those gaps. So I do not understand why we would need special measures this year.

4.7.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

We might need special measures because of what the Assistant Minister reported about the dearth of fully-trained teachers in the U.K. So the situation is going to be worse. What measures does he have in mind, special measures? For example, perhaps a Jersey bonus for certain subjects where we know we will have gaps, as he says. What measures is he implementing to ameliorate what is happening?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

Well, I can only repeat that we do not see the need for any special measures. We have filled these gaps in the past. We have no reason to believe that they will not be filled this year.

[16:00]

I spoke to staff on this exact subject this morning and they do not believe that the situation is very different from any previous year. Yes, there are subjects where it is more challenging. Nevertheless, we have to date been able to fill those posts with the required specialist teachers.

4.7.5 Deputy C.S. Alves of St. Helier Central:

Is the Assistant Minister aware of any kind of tracking of impact there may be from those students who end up having teachers who are non-specialists in core subjects especially?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

I am not aware of any tracking. Nevertheless, throughout education there have always been instances where it has been necessary for non-specialist teachers to cover posts. It is regrettable

that that occurs on occasions, but to date I am not aware of that having caused a significant problem. I am certainly not aware of any method of tracking that.

4.7.6 Deputy C.S. Alves:

So would the Assistant Minister consider putting in some form of tracking or observation to see if there is any impact? Because to say that he is not aware of it when there is no tracking going on is a bit counterintuitive.

The Connétable of St. Peter:

Well, like any additional measure, that would need consideration as to its impact and how that tracking would be undertaken. I am quite happy to put it forward and we can assess whether it is feasible or not.

4.7.7 Deputy R.J. Ward:

I just ask the Minister's reassurance for parents out there that their children will not be facing any disruption to their curriculum due to a shortage of staff from September because he is confident that those posts will be filled, and perhaps he could give some sort of estimate of the spend on U.K. agency staff up until Christmas this year.

The Connétable of St. Peter:

Given the nature of the question, I am not quite sure how relevant the spend on staff to December is and I certainly would not have brought that information with me. So perhaps you could decide whether that is relevant. I cannot see how it is relevant to the question.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Can I just say we have been told that the gaps are plugged by using U.K. agency staff so, therefore, there is a direct correlation between the number of agency staff being used and how many gaps need to be plugged. It is just simple logic.

The Deputy Bailiff:

The question is about the impact on delivery of the full curriculum. In any event, you cannot answer the question, can you?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

No, I cannot answer the question and I do not believe it was relevant. Thank you very much.