

2024.11.12

3.3 Deputy H.M. Miles of St. Brelade of the Chair of the States Employment Board regarding the dispute between the Association of Educational Psychologists and the Government: (OQ.217/2024)

Will the Minister provide an update on the dispute between the Association of Educational Psychologists and the Government?

Deputy M.R. Ferey of St. Saviour (Vice-Chair, States Employment Board - *rapporteur*):

I thank the Deputy for the question. We are working with the national officer of the Association of Educational Psychologists and the educational psychologists to resolve the dispute collaboratively. An independent review of the Educational Psychology Service has been started. The terms of reference for review have been shared with all parties who are fully engaged with the review. Our priority is to deliver services for children and their families.

3.3.1 Deputy H.M. Miles:

Delays in dealing with grievance matters are becoming a feature for many departments. Indeed, the prison governor expressed similar frustrations in her departure interview. How are the States Employment Board getting a grip on these matters?

Deputy M.R. Ferey:

This review is going to be carried out at speed. It starts next week and will last for 2 weeks and a report will be produced into its findings 5 days after the end of that 2-week period. So this particular issue is being dealt with at pace to make sure that the Educational Psychology Service is correct for Jersey and is properly staffed and that young people are getting their needs served.

3.3.2 Connétable D.W. Mezbourian of St. Lawrence:

Will the Minister advise how many educational psychologists are actually employed by the Government now and what is the optimal number?

Deputy M.R. Ferey:

My understanding, there are currently 4 educational psychologists although we are having to rely on external consultancy on this matter. The review will make sure that the number of psychologists that we have working is the right size for Jersey, so that will be part of the throughput of this work to make sure that the right staffing is available, to make sure that our children have their educational needs served.

3.3.3 The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

If we are waiting for a review to tell us what the exact number is, is the Minister telling the Assembly that at the moment we are in the position of not knowing how many educational psychologists we should be employing to manage the needs of our young people?

Deputy M.R. Ferey:

I think the review will make all that clear, and that is the point of having the review, to make sure that we have clarity around that question.

3.3.4 Deputy C.D. Curtis of St. Helier Central:

At the moment the C.E.H.A. (Children, Education and Home Affairs) Panel first heard of this problem we arranged a meeting with the representatives of the educational psychologists. We then arranged for a briefing with the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, which I am grateful for. The panel continues to follow this up. I believe the matter was first raised about 8 months ago, and seeing as it is such an important issue, can the Minister explain why this matter was not dealt with sooner?

Deputy M.R. Ferey:

The background to this issue has only surfaced fairly recently - has only come across my radar recently - so we did instruct for this review to be taken out at pace as soon as we understood that there was a problem. Beyond that, I do not have any further information.

3.3.5 Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Just if the Minister could confirm that he has only known about this recently, when I believe the grievance was first raised many months ago.

Deputy M.R. Ferey:

That is correct that the grievance was raised months ago but the review into the service as a whole has only surfaced recently.

3.3.6 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade:

Deputy Miles's question raised was about the wider culture and I do not feel it was particularly answered. Is the Minister confident that Jersey is meeting best practice in terms of dealing with grievance procedures when they arise, given the number that seem to have risen recently.

Deputy M.R. Ferey:

I was keeping my answers to the Educational Psychology Service because that was the ambit of the question. So that is why I answered purely on the service. As for the wider issues, I am happy to speak to those, and I can confirm that the ex-prison governor, I have asked to meet with her so that she can air any issues that she has, I can air them, and I can deal with those issues as they arise. But the thrust of my answer was to stick to the original question.

3.3.7 Deputy J. Renouf:

Just following up Deputy Curtis's point, can he clarify that he did not hear about the issues regarding the educational psychologists until recently?

Deputy M.R. Ferey:

That is correct.

3.3.8 Deputy H.M. Miles:

I thank the Assistant Minister for his answers. I have to say I am concerned that a grievance of this nature that was raised in February, that has already attracted the interest of the chief internal auditor, was not brought to the attention of the States Employment Board until now. My final supplementary really, our education services need highly-skilled professionals to support our children and particularly those who are vulnerable with additional needs. Is the Chair at all concerned that States of Jersey is becoming a less-attractive place to work as a result of these unresolved high-profile disputes?

[10:15]

Deputy M.R. Ferey:

I am concerned about that matter, and this is why we have made sure that this review is carried out at pace, to make sure that we do have the right service for our children's needs.