

23.09.12

**6 Deputy S.Y. Mézec of the Minister for Children and Education regarding representations to the States Employment Board on the effect of real term pay cuts on recruitment and retention of teachers (OQ.177/2023)**

Will the Minister advise what representations, if any, she has made to members of the States Employment Board, regarding the effect that years of real terms pay cuts has had on the ability of schools to recruit and retain teachers?"

**Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North (The Minister for Children and Education):**

Before I answer the question, I would like to thank the Bailiff to allowing me to remain seated as I am recovering from a foot operation.

**The Bailiff:**

Yes, that is absolutely fine, you can remain seated.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Answering the question, I would like to advise that I regularly discuss the ongoing dispute with the chair and the vice-chair of S.E.B, and I really hope that all sides can come to the agreement.

**Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

That answer said representations were made but did not say what those representations were, which is what my question was.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

The question was actually if I made representations, if any. So the answer was that I have ongoing discussions with the chair and vice-chair of S.E.B.

**The Bailiff:**

I think the question is: will the Minister advise what representations, if any. So if there are any representations, what were they?

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

I have listened to the teachers and the headteachers. I have raised the various points with the S.E.B., which it is important for me that all sides would come to the agreement soon.

**Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

I am sorry, but we are really not close to an answer to my question, which is about what representations she has made regarding the effects of years of real terms pay cuts. She may make representations that say it is a jolly good thing or that it is a terrible thing, but I am none the wiser from the answer she has given so far.

**The Bailiff:**

I take your point.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

I will continue my answer. I think what is important in this question, the Deputy asked about 2 things that needs to work together. One is about the pay and another is about recruitment and retention. I think it is important to recognise there is a wider range of factors that can affect recruitment and retention, and pay is not a single factor. Recruitment and retention of all employers is a priority laid out in my Ministerial plan. Recruitment of all teachers is more challenging than it was in previous years. At the same time, listening to the headteachers back in September, I have made representations and this is why the Chief Minister, as chair, and vice-chair of S.E.B. work together with us putting together a delivery team that helped with recruitment and retention this year.

**The Bailiff:**

I think the question is directed, and I do not want to get into too much detail because we do have time constraints, but it is whether you have made any representations to the States Employment Board about the effect of what is described as real term pay cuts on the ability to recruit and retain. It may be you have made representations about that and it may be you have not. But I think that is the thrust of the question. Minister, are you able to provide clarity about?

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

I have representations to the States Employment Board about the terms and conditions of the employment of staff that needs to be reviewed. This is what is happening now because the pay is one of the jobs and conditions package that is offered to really valued and important teaching staff.

**5.6.1 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

We are slightly closer, I guess. So I guess I would like to ask the Minister, therefore then, seeing as what is on offer to teachers this year is yet another real terms pay cut, is she making a representation to the States Employment Board that she is personally satisfied and supportive of giving teachers a real terms pay cut? Or does she believe that somehow a package that includes a real terms pay cut is a positive thing for trying to retain and recruit the best teachers possible to teach the children of the Island?

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

It is important to have a balance. For me, the package that is offered for the teachers is important, and this is why I have ongoing discussions with the States Employment Board about terms and conditions, including wages. Because the package is not just the numbers, as we have seen, because the numbers are different and they are not always met. Today it was recognised even by the chair of N.A.H.T. in the newspaper, we know that the inflation is above 10 per cent and we are offering 7.9. This is where the times are hard for everyone.

**5.6.2 Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Does the Minister accept the concerns of teachers and headteachers over recruitment and retention and see the effects of long-term real term pay cuts on that recruitment and retention long term in the profession?

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

I absolutely accept the concerns of the headteachers about recruitment and retention, and this is why we are working together. We have more challenges in specific areas but, at the same time, our retention is under 4 per cent. I think it is very difficult to speak with the numbers because, like I said before, the numbers are different. But I emphasise that I understand the feelings and I understand

the overwhelming conditions because the teachers, and all of us, have gone through the pandemic. Over the pandemic the teachers were the front line. So the burden that happened there, we need to look and support teachers with the well-being as any other very valued members of the staff. The situation is more complex, I would think, than just about the number.

### **5.6.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Would the Minister accept that when teachers at the top of the pay scale, those that were given as an average by the States Employment Board in their press release, every time there is a real term pay cut, their pay is eroded? Would the Minister accept that they are essential, for example, to be the mentors and teachers within the J.T.T.P. (Jersey Teacher Training Programme), and therefore has a long-term effect on our education and profession on this Island?

### **Deputy I. Gardiner:**

I agree with the Deputy that it is a very complex situation. I cannot deliver my Ministerial plans without headteachers, teachers and teaching assistants. This was the reason that personally I secured an extra £6 million to support staff within the school. This is the reason that this year we recruited 113 extra staff to schools. I recruited 62 teaching assistants extra, on top of the vacancies that we have, to make sure that teachers have other staff recruited, 25 teachers and 6 school leaders. There is investment going in and we can decide how we continue to recruit to make sure that staff are supported and they have more time for their professional development and other things which are important, that the unions told me and also headteachers told me. The money is limited and I will do at most to make sure to balance between the books and support and the teachers.

### **The Bailiff:**

I have Deputy Kovacs, Tadier, Southern, Feltham and then final supplementary. That is going to take us well over the limit normally allocated for individual questions but I have had notice of those wishing before I have called time, so I will call upon them. But if they could be succinct, please.

### **5.6.4 Deputy R.S. Kovacs of St. Saviour**

Regarding recruitment and retention of teachers, the Chief Minister has said earlier in her response that there are no vacancies of teaching roles in primary schools and just a few in secondary schools. From speaking with different teachers in schools, and I could see teachers present in the gallery nodding in disagreement, no, the reality is not quite there. I am happy to hear the Minister say that recruitment had increased, but does she think it is sufficient for the needs of the schools?

### **Deputy I. Gardiner:**

I thank the Deputy for the question. I am aware that in some schools they can have multiple teachers and assistants all at the same time off. Some of them are on parental leave, some of them on sick, and some resignation, so it is extremely challenging.

[10:30]

The numbers that I have received, I do not have any vacancy at the primary school, and I am talking about the vacancy that when we put the offer and gone through D.B.S. (Disclosure and Barring Service) check, but currently there are no open vacancies at the primary schools. I have 13 vacancies at the secondary schools. We are working to review it, but again it is important ... there is complex between the fillings and the number. I completely recognise that the work of the teachers is extremely difficult. It is very challenging. We have dedicated teachers and headteachers and

teaching assistants working with their hearts. I understand and I emphasise that I can completely respect why this has happened, but at the same time, we do have the numbers. I am trying to support as much as I can, from the policy and from the recruitment point of view as Minister.

**5.6.5 Deputy R.S. Kovacs:**

Can the Minister circulate by email all the vacancies for teaching and teaching assistants in all the schools for this school year?

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Absolutely, I will do it.

**5.6.6 Deputy M. Tadier:**

Teachers have written to all States Members and explained that their profession runs on goodwill and that a third of the hours they do are unpaid. Does the Minister recognise that we seem to have reached an impasse now between teachers and Government? The Government says they cannot give more in the form of a better package. Surely the only option then is for teachers to give up their goodwill and to give less? Is that a situation she wants to find the Island in?

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

No, I do not. I would like really to work with the teachers and with all teaching staff, because it is not just teachers, it is teaching assistants and headteachers. I can see all of them working together and delivering the best education possible for our children. At the same time, even today, we have seen the difference between N.A.S.U.W.T. they would call off the strike and, as local representative, Marina Mauger mentioned in today's *J.E.P. (Jersey Evening Post)*, they are taking a pragmatic approach and they are sitting with us and it was really ... I have been at least told, very good workshop last week, where representatives from the union and some of the teachers sitting and discussing their terms and conditions. As she mentioned, the terms and conditions package cannot be done quickly. This is why we need to work towards the multi-years still. So there are different approaches. At the same time, I was very clear in the Assembly, without support of all our teaching staff, I will not be able to deliver policies and the best education possible to our children. We do need to work together.

**5.6.7 Deputy M. Tadier:**

This Government has been in power for one year already. They knew that the pay negotiations were coming up. While there may be systemic changes that need to take place in education that will take longer, surely offering a below inflation pay increase, which is effectively a cut in real terms, only enflames the situation. Will the Minister, if she has not done it already, go back to Government, to S.E.B., and say: "You need to put a better offer to the teachers to resolve this situation, otherwise it will be a protracted strike, industrial action, possibly resulting in work to rule for the next 12 months and effecting the morale and education of all involved."

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

First of all, the better offer is an ongoing conversation because, as I said before, the offer includes a whole package. It is important that we will get a better offer. I have been updated over the last week and last weekend of conversations and various offers have been paid. I said it previously, during my public hearing and during my interviews on the radio, and the Chief Minister has mentioned it before, if we cannot come to an agreement, if an agreement cannot be reached, it would be helpful to go to independent arbitration. Every party can present. From my perspective, it does not matter what is happening with the arbitration. I will continue to work on what we have

started and we are developing the terms and conditions and maybe even evaluation. We are talking about teachers and the headteachers, but I am very personally worried about teaching assistants, which accepted the offer already and they are working today. At the same time, I do believe that we need to do a complete evaluation of the teaching assistant work. What they deliver at school is as important as teachers and headteachers. So we look at the whole staff.

**5.6.8 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Can we get down to some specifics? For example, will the Minister assure the members of teaching unions that there will be no return to taking pay rises out of the overall school budgets rather than putting extra money in for teachers?

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Currently, it is not planned but if it needs to go beyond 7.9 and all of us need to balance the books, it will be a conversation with C.Y.P.E.S., with my gross, as we continue to put extra support within the schools. We will not take budget for what was provided from the school, but to get extra additional budget the gross that will be offered for 2024 is for the Assembly to decide if we will put extra roles into the school or we will put extra pay rise.

**5.7.9 Deputy L.V. Feltham:**

Given the Minister's answers to previous questions, would she agree that the actions or inactions of the States Employment Board have impeded her ability to deliver on her Ministerial plan?

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

I am still on track to deliver my Ministerial plan. I have more ambitions. I am on track to deliver 2023 Ministerial plan and I hope the situation will resolve quickly to make sure that we progress with plans that we discussed last June at the headteachers' meeting.

**5.6.10 Deputy L.V. Feltham:**

Within the representations that the Minister discussed earlier, what actions, if any, did she request that the S.E.B. take to support her in delivering her Ministerial plans?

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

I thank the Deputy for her question. It is to review terms and condition and evaluations for some of the job to make sure that they are meeting current requirements. We know that requirements for various jobs have changed over the years.

**5.6.10 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

Teachers have faced a decade of real terms pay cuts and their earnings have reduced in real terms by around 11 per cent. That is a trend. Could I ask this Minister if she believes that that trend can continue without exacerbating the situation on recruitment and retention of teachers? Is it her position that in her term of office she is content to see teachers become poorer?

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

I thank the Deputy for his question. The numbers that I got from S.E.B., and again I am just quoting the numbers that I got, we do not like the numbers, but at the same time we are going back to the numbers. The last 5 years average earnings in Jersey was 3.3 per cent uplift and since 2019 the uplift was 4.1 per cent. As the Chief Minister mentioned, the uplift on average earnings this year in Jersey was 7.7 per cent and we offer 7.9 per cent. It is just the numbers. There are so many numbers

running around that, for me, the easiest way will be that the unions and S.E.B. will go to independent arbitration and present all their numbers, present their case, and an independent professional can iron down the number and what S.E.B. needs to pay.

**Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

Sir, again, that was not even anything close to an answer to my question. This is happening constantly throughout this morning. It is very unfair and disrespectful to Members who are trying to hold Ministers to account that they are waffling and not answering questions at all.

**The Bailiff:**

I understand the point, Deputy. The fact is ultimately other than indicating that it did not answer the question, it is a matter of responsibility for the Minister the nature of the answers that they give. The only consequences for that, ultimately, are likely to be political consequences. In any event, that ends this particular question. May I reflect on the fact that we have been joined in the public gallery by His Excellency the Ambassador for Spain to the United Kingdom [**Approbation**] and his party? I am glad that Members have welcomed him in the customary fashion. You are most welcome here.