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4.3 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Education regarding changes in primary school teacher turnover rates and overall primary school staffing numbers: [1(164)]

Will the Minister explain the changes since 2009 in primary school teacher turnover rates and, over the last 3 years, in overall primary school staffing numbers?

Deputy R.G. Bryans of St. Helier (The Minister for Education):

Thank you to the Deputy. I think the figures, the turnover rates and the staffing rates, are well illustrated in the written answer that was provided to the Deputy that Members might want to look at. But to articulate a couple of reasons for the turnover moving within departments, we had a head teacher who retired some time ago and then subsequently another head teacher moved into her role and then the deputy moved into that head teacher's role, and so there were about 6 movements just related to that one retirement and that is a real illustration of how these figures can be articulated. Equally, there is another reason which is right at the top, the other employments in Jersey. Obviously, the teachers are moving away from teaching, occasionally looking for other jobs. I saw one recently I had known for some time and I had asked him why he had moved away and he said it was because his skillset, he felt, was better served within the finance sector. It was something to do with the digital world, so that is a good thing in some respects. Equally, what figures do not particularly show is the movement from state schools to private schools, so moving to Beaulieu or FCJ or St. George's or St. Michael's, so that gives some sort of illustration as to why we have the fluctuations. With regard to staffing levels, we are fully staffed at the moment with regard to primary schools. That is all, thank you.

4.3.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Minister says that it is difficult to draw comparisons with the U.K. rates but the material I have been viewing suggests a turnover rate of around 10 per cent and consistently these figures are over, and in some cases well over, 10 per cent. Does the Minister have any explanation why these should be so different?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

Yes, the U.K. rates do not take into account the free schools and the new academies, so there is a distortion there in which case you would consider those, having looked at the information provided by the unions on some of the websites, it would be not dissimilar from what we have here. But we do have a different turnover rate because we are an Island. If you wanted to move around schools in Jersey, it is quite simple because you generally live in a place that is quite close to all the schools on the Island, whereas in the U.K. if you were moving, you would have to consider moving from, say, Manchester to Taunton, so it is a completely different concept in terms of moving families. But as a real illustration, I rang some heads in lieu of this question on what were their thoughts about this particular thing and there was a commonality between them all. They said the reasons for people moving around were things like maternity; that was not kind of illustrated. One of the heads I spoke to has had just recently had 2 people in, one is maternity leave, the other is somebody who has decided they now want to travel around the world, so there are going to be differences. One head I spoke to said that when she became head of a new school it was a new regime, there was a new sense of a different culture at that point in time. Some of the teachers then thought that was not the sort of culture that they wanted and they moved on. So these things do happen but I think it is quite a healthy thing. We have got a situation where sometimes teachers stay in schools for far too long and we need fresh blood and new ideas.

4.3.2 Deputy A.D. Lewis of St. Helier:

I wonder if the Minister could answer: did his figures illustrate the move from one school to another within our own network? The Minister also mentioned the moving around between schools is perhaps a beneficial thing and I wonder if the Minister could tell us if there is any attempt within professional development spheres to move our teaching staff within the schools we currently have so that teachers are not staying in one school for too long and benefiting from new experiences in the same jurisdiction. Would that help retention and is it something the department is doing?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

Yes, in answer to that question, one of the heads I spoke to said it is a double-edged sword. They send their teachers on training, we have got leadership training that goes on now, and they are very proud to say that at some point in time some of their teachers move through a career progression to become deputy heads or heads themselves. Of course, it is a double-edged sword because they are losing somebody, a really good individual within the school, so that is a problem in itself. With regard to are we saying to teachers or the heads: "We would like you to move from school to school", no we do not do that but we do suggest that there is a career progression available to them.

4.3.3 Deputy A.D. Lewis:

A supplementary? Does the Minister not think that would be a good idea, rather than having a teacher at one school for perhaps 25 years which is the case in some instances, which is good in some respects, to move staff around so they develop perhaps new skills in different types of schools as you would do perhaps in many businesses? Thank you.

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

It is about maintaining some sort of balance. The reason some heads prefer to keep teachers in their schools is because it gives continuity to the children, certainly moving through a primary school. I understand what the Deputy is relating to and I think there is an element of that. As I say, the head who spoke to me about the fact that she had lost some really good people recently does show that it is beginning to happen, certainly with the leadership training that we have offered. But we have not put in place anything that the Deputy has suggested but I will consider that. Thank you.

4.3.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

We all appreciate there will be fluctuations in staff turnover at primary schools but where there are perennial issues of constant turnover over a long period of time, does the department look at what the underlying reasons are for that, identify the schools that may have these trends, and have an action plan to deal with it?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

The very simple answer to that is, yes, we do.

4.3.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

A supplementary, could the Minister circulate the detailed policy with regard to that then?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

It is not necessarily a policy. What we do is we make sure that we have got a very tight contact with all schools, we are aware of everything that happens in relation to the turnover of the schools and, where necessary, the Chief Officer will then look at that particular situation and resolve it in his own way. Thank you.

4.3.6 Deputy G.P. Southern:

My eye is drawn to the top of the reasons for leaving the teaching profession: going to other employment in Jersey at 21.7 per cent of leavers suggesting that, what research has the Minister done as to the causes for leaving to go to another profession? To what extent is that related to stress within teaching and is it related to pay within teaching?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

I do not think we have done a detailed study of that. I think the Deputy himself was previously a teacher, as was I, and we both moved into other employment so there are all various kinds of reasons why people move around, particularly on this Island. Sorry, could the Deputy just repeat the second bit of his question?

Deputy G.P. Southern:

To what extent is the top of the table due to stress within the profession or pay?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

As far as I am aware and, again, just doing this quick poll of the head teachers and talking to teachers as I have been going around on my annual visits, it does not relate to either stress or pay, the top part. You can see as you go down through the reasons for moving around is that there is ill health which I think would take account for that, which is quite low in terms of its number, so the top figure, it does not relate to that. As I say, it also includes movement from state schools into private schools. Thank you.