

21.11.02

6 Deputy R.J. Ward of the Minister for Children and Education regarding School funding (OQ.217/2021)

Will the Minister advise what his policy is on the level of funding that should be available to school budgets to spend on teaching materials, headroom funding, once the basics of staffing and running costs are covered, providing the answer is either a per pupil amount or as a percentage of the school budget?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden (The Minister for Children and Education):

I thank the Deputy for his question. There is currently no set policy across all state schools for headroom. Currently in budgeted allocations right now, for non-staff and non-premise-related, expenditure sits at roughly 5 per cent to 7 per cent of the budget. School funding is much broader than just the percentage of headroom funding that a school has within its budget, it includes many other factors of equal importance setting a fixed percentage could limit the flexibility in the consideration of other factors that is required when setting budgets for schools at differing levels of means.

4.6.1 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Does the Minister have a comparison of that level of headroom funding with schools in the U.K. and other jurisdictions so as we get a picture of what is available in terms of resourcing for our schools and so they do not have to rely on P.T.A.s (Parent Teacher Associations) and private donations to have the basics of the needs of the classroom?

[10:45]

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

I do not have a comparison to hand, though I could probably ask my officers to try and find such a comparison or the Deputy could himself. We have increased our funding in schools to offset the deficits that have been created, as I explained in the Scrutiny Panel hearing yesterday with the Deputy. In the next Government Plan we are increasing that over above the deficit by £1.8 million, so that we do not have to have schools going over budget.

4.6.2 Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Does the Minister have any indication on what the difference in position on headroom funding is between the free state schools and the fee-paying schools?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

No, I do not.

4.6.3 Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Would he regard not knowing such a thing as being inadequate and does he consider that the current position on headroom funding, which leads to situations that Deputy Ward just mentioned before about even not being able to afford basics or having to do private fundraising for it, is completely inadequate and certainly not putting children first?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

Despite the Senator's posturing there, I do not get involved in the day-to-day administration of schools and their budgets. I do know that headteachers have a high level of autonomy for how they

spend their budgets and they can reprioritise non-staff spending and staff spending, which can also reduce levels of budgeting if they do it into staff level. But despite the Senator's posturing there, I do not get involved in the day-to-day running of every school.

4.6.4 Deputy J.M. Maçon of St. Saviour:

As part of the education reform programme there was a review of the A.W.P.U. (age weighted pupil unit) that the amount of funding schools get per pupil; I wonder if the Minister can advise the Assembly about the progress of that work, which is directly related to the overall budgets for schools.

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

Sorry, Sir, could the Deputy just ask the question a bit shorter, I have just missed a part there?

The Deputy Bailiff:

Could you repeat the last part of your question or perhaps summarise the question? Do you want the question, do you, Deputy Wickenden?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

Yes, please, Sir.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Could you repeat the question, please, Deputy Maçon?

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

As part of the education reform programme, can the Minister tell the Assembly the progress of the review of the A.W.P.U.?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

The school funding review that has been going on. We are at a point now where we are just finalising the detail of the report and just making sure quality assurance checks are happening and we should have something ready to go to this Assembly by December this year.

4.6.5 Senator T.A. Vallois:

The Minister mentions that he is not in charge of day-to-day projects that are running in schools, yet there has been no non-staff inflation, which affects headroom, since 2014 in schools. What are the risks and the potential damage it may make to further headroom issues in schools with option D of the efficiencies programme whereby non-staff inflation will be impacted when efficiencies cannot be made by C.Y.P.E.S. (Children, Young People, Education and Skills)?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

I thank the Senator for her question. The non-staff pay inflation amount has not been drawn upon since 2014 by C.Y.P.E.S. and C.Y.P.E.S., as in the education part of C.Y.P.E.S., was removed from the efficiencies programme. I have not allowed any money to be taken out of the budget for education on that basis because it would affect the running of schools. I refused any reduction in spending or in budgeting in that way. By not having this money means that if there are inflationary costs that come about in 2022, more money would need to be sought by the permission of the Minister for Treasury and Resources and the Council of Ministers.

4.6.6 Senator T.A. Vallois:

Could the Minister explain, therefore, the centrally-held funds for the non-staff inflation, how will the Minister go about making a case should there be an issue with regards to inflation? If he could provide an example that would be helpful.

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

I do not know if I can give an example. I have only been the Minister for Children and Education for 6 months and I have not had to make that case. If such a request was made it would be done on detailed information given by the schools and the department about the need for extra funding for inflationary reasons. I would have to take that information to the Council of Ministers and ask that monies were made available from budgets held centrally or other Ministerial budgets to make sure that we get that passed and that will be a decision by the Minister for Treasury and Resources and the Council of Ministers.

4.6.7 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Can I ask the Minister, would he support a minimum level of headroom funding, as that would enable the schools to ensure that the provision of resources is kept at a consistent level and it would mean that that money would not be lost in the wider issues over funding and, indeed, it would enable the Minister to expose those issues of funding earlier and deal with them appropriately?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

The school funding, as a whole, has been subject to an external independent scrutiny by the independent school funding review. This review included all aspects of school budgets that, when combined with headroom funding, would deliver sufficient resources to ensure high-quality education in the schools. As I explained earlier, in the Government Plan over and above what was declared as a deficit for all schools, we are putting an increased £1.8 million budget into schooling, so they have appropriate funds plus a bit more to be able to budget for their year.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I did ask the question about whether the Minister believed there should be a set headroom funding level and I got the same answer about spending in schools and the school funding review, which I believe is a school funding formula he is talking about. I just wonder whether we could ask in this Assembly for the points that we ask to be answered because it is getting increasingly difficult.

The Deputy Bailiff:

It is important the questions are answered.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Sir, it is increasingly difficult to get any answer. I just know that today's Susie Dent's word of the day is bloviation; just might want to look it up.

The Deputy Bailiff:

All right. Before you asked your supplementary but I did not see it, Deputy Alves did ask to ask a question in the chat. I am not going to offer you a chance to ask another final supplementary, Deputy Ward, but I am going to invite Deputy Alves to put her question to the Minister.

Deputy C.S. Alves of St. Helier:

It was a question around the funding formula and when it would be published and applied but I think Deputy Ward pretty much covered that in his question.