

23.10.17

16 Deputy R.J. Ward of the Minister for Children and Education regarding teacher pay within the draft Government Plan (OQ.205/2023)

Would the Minister advise how much is put aside for teacher pay rises within the draft Government Plan 2024 - 2027 and how this relates to the £2.4 million value-for-money savings listed for her department on page 57 of the plan?

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

I thank the Deputy for his question so I can get clarification. The amount put aside for pay rises is for all pay groups. There is not a specific amount allocated to teachers; it is held centrally. We must also respect that any pay awards are negotiated and a confidential process, so I would not want to produce this negotiation. What is important to emphasise, there is no relation to the £2.4 million value-for-money savings from my department, as I have no intention of seeking or making any savings from the staff salaries.

4.16.1 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Given that one union has only taken shorter strike action because they are going to negotiate for the next few years, does the Minister have any concerns that the money may not be available and we may be in the position that we are in now, which is one group accepts, that is all any group is going to get and, consequently, there is no negotiation into the future?

Deputy I. Gardiner:

It is really important to emphasise there are 2 parts within the unions' demands, one is it is a specific number percentage added to the pay and the second one is around the workload of the teachers, the professional development and so on. We do have within our department extra funding for professional development. We have started Masters on Island. We are recruiting more staff, supporting teachers, if it is teaching assistants, if it is management staff and if it is teachers. We do have gross to support and this is why a working group sitting together and working around conditions but the pay percentage is very specific.

4.16.2 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

What representations did the Minister make when forming the Government Plan to ensure that as much as possible was put aside to enable a reasonable and decent pay offer for teachers so that they could have their concerns alleviated and not feel the need to take the industrial action that they are, which of course has an impact on society?

Deputy I. Gardiner:

I thank the Deputy for his question. Again, it is important to emphasise that I have gross within the department budget to work with unions, which I am going to meet, to address their conditions which will address some of the concerns. I will leave negotiation and allocations to the States Employment Board, who must balance competing claims for trade unions during negotiations, and that is the best place to understand the balance needed between awards to different groups. I would like to see that whole workforce within education receive a fair settlement.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Sir, with respect, that was not an answer to my question. I asked what representation she had made in the forming of the Government Plan to ensure as much as possible was put aside for pay offers.

The Bailiff:

That was the question, Minister, yes.

Deputy I. Gardiner:

We have a discussion around the Council of Ministers around the pays and it has been very clear that we need to make sure that our workforce are paid fairly. There are several groups and there are 4 unions of the staff within the school, that different unions have a different approach. This is why it is important not just to give one number and everything suits everyone because there are separate negotiations with 4 different unions.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Sir, we are still not any closer, that my question is about her representations, not what the unions are doing; it is about what she was involved in in these discussions. Was she an advocate for providing more funding to enable teachers to get a better pay offer or did she take the same line as the States Employment Board and not advocate for that? It is a very specific question about her actions.

The Bailiff:

I have permitted this question to be asked on more than one occasion simply because that is the thrust of the original question, Minister, and it is ...

Deputy I. Gardiner:

Okay, fair, I accept, Sir. I have made representations that the offers for all paid groups within education and Children's Services should be offered. We did not discuss specifically each group separately but we have discussed that I need to make sure that I have enough funds and I have enough gross within my department to make various arrangements to support teachers, teaching assistants, head teachers, with their terms and conditions.

4.16.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Can I ask the Minister whether she would accept the concept of gain-share in order to fund a greater pay award and, if so, how would she ensure that that does not affect the level of service provided, given that the department has been asked to make £2.4 million worth of savings at the same time?

Deputy I. Gardiner:

I think the gain-share was offered previously and this is something that we would need to discuss. What I do want to emphasise is that I do not have any savings to any of the front line. I know that the target of £2.4 million is a challenging target but our department has a budget in excess of £200 million; we are talking about 1 per cent. We need to look into our procurement, we need to look into our placement. There is no way, and I would like to commit to the Assembly, that it will be any reduction or from my perspective we will have to see a gross within that front line because this is what we need to do.