

23.11.28.

**6 Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier Central of the Chair of the States Employment Board regarding the teachers' pay dispute (OQ.229/2023)**

Will the Chair advise what additional offer, if any, has been made to teachers to resolve the current pay dispute?

Deputy K.L. Moore of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter (Chair, States Employment Board):

To seek an end to the dispute for 2023 and reach a resolution, an offer of an additional £1,000 as a non-consolidated payment for teachers employed on 31st December of this year was made to the unions. This offer was on condition of the acceptance of an essential service agreement. However, as Members will have seen, the unions have rejected this offer.

3.2.1 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Can the Chair confirm whether the same £1,000 unconsolidated offers was offered to and rejected by headteachers previously?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

As our Members will know, discussions were had with the N.A.H.T. (National Association of Head Teachers) representing the headteachers, with the Minister for Children and Education and, in a separate agreement, that that decision was taken to offer a payment to headteachers, which is called the Education Reform Allowance. That is subject to a separate agreement, and it is a special payment under the Public Finances Manual.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

My question was really quite clear as to whether the same £1,000 offer was offered to teachers previously. I am quite aware of what they accepted but the question was, I think, very clear, Sir: was that same offer offered?

The Bailiff:

The question was had it been offered to headteachers previously?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Was it previously offered, the same offer they have now offered to teachers and then rejected by headteachers?

The Bailiff:

I am afraid I heard your question as headteachers, Deputy Ward. That you had asked if it had previously been offered to headteachers.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Yes, that is what I meant, sorry, Sir. So, the answer is yes or no, I think.

The Bailiff:

Are you able to provide clarification on that, Chief Minister?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

I do not recall. There have been so many discussions and various negotiations with unions. I can seek to confirm that for sure later this morning, and I will circulate that information to States Members. I am happy also to share that publicly. But I would not want to give an inaccurate answer and, therefore, I hope that the Deputy will allow me to double check.

3.2.2 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

When the offer of a £1,000 non-consolidated, was made, where was it intended ... what budget was it intended that that would come from?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

That is a matter for the Education Department.

3.2.3 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Does the Chief Minister believe that the Education Department has the funding that it needs to be able to offer a decent pay offer to teachers so that they can suspend their industrial action and end the disruption that the education service is facing?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

As I said in my previous answer, that is a matter for the Education Department. What we have to do, as the States Employment Board, is be fair to all members of the public service. We were criticised, if Members recall, when we made an offer to the public service of 7.9 per cent. We have to ensure that we are properly remunerating the people who dedicate their work to public service, and we are grateful to them all for doing that. Therefore, we have to treat everybody fairly. But we also are very mindful of the issue of inflation, something that we have to get under control as an Island and for Islanders who are currently struggling with the cost of living.

3.2.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

I am tempted to say that rents are also inflationary but the Government does not seem to want to do anything about controlling those, of course.

The Bailiff:

Deputy, you know you cannot make a political point which is not related to the question.

Deputy M. Tadier:

That is why I will not do that. The question is: did the Chief Minister and S.E.B. (States Employment Board) not have any consideration about the wider impact that taking these funds for the increased pay for headteachers out of Education's budget might have on the wider education programme and, more importantly, the outcome for pupils, not just those Pupil Premium but pupils more widely?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

If the Deputy wants focus on outcomes, the fact that children are missing out on their education and failing to receive a breakfast club at the moment due to action short of strike action is also hugely damaging for the provision of education to children. There is always a balance to strike, and I believe that this Government have sought to achieve the best balance to look after our staff and people who dedicate their lives to public service, but equally to look after children and offer them the best possible education that we can.

3.2.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

I do accept that the strike action is damaging our children. I blame the Government for not having resolved the strike earlier, as I am sure most of the public do. But the Chief Minister has not answered the question about why she has not ... she has taken the political choice rather than providing central funding for an uplift in all teachers to end the strike, to come to a compromise, and give them a compromised position like they have for the headteachers. But they have limited the hands of the Minister for Children and Education by saying: "You have to take this out of your own budget rather than making money available for you." Why did she make that choice?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

I think I gave my answer in the previous answer. Fairness is the name of the game here. We have offered 7.9 per cent, which was a generous offer to people working in our public service. It recognises their dedication and their hard work in these difficult times. But also has a balanced view with regards to not fuelling inflation. That is what we have to do in Government. We have to take balanced decisions and therefore we have done that.

3.2.6 Deputy L.V. Feltham of St. Helier Central:

Given the Chief Minister's answer or the Chair of the S.E.B.'s answer to the previous questions, can she confirm whether or not it is the intention to take the additional money out of schools' budgets?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

That is a matter for the Minister for Children and Education. What we have to do is find a way forward. We have offered teachers a binding arbitration process that has been on the table since June and something that they have consistently failed to agree to. We have very much tried our best. We have also for some months now been engaging in terms and conditions discussions with teachers. That was something that arose out of our regular meetings with union members and something that the previous Government failed to deliver upon and something that we have taken extremely seriously, and we are making good progress. Our commitment to looking after our staff and meeting their needs could not be clearer.

3.2.7 Deputy L.V. Feltham:

Given that we could not get assurance about threat to schools' budgets, could the Chair of the States Employment Board tell the Assembly whether the States Employment Board learned lessons from the last attempt at gain-sharing, and if so, what advice she has given the Minister for Children and Education in relation to that?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

Everybody works with the best intentions and, therefore, I believe that teachers also work with the best of intentions. Gain-sharing is a process. It is a useful process sometimes, and I believe that the Minister for Children and Education works closely with her team to deliver the best possible education, the best value for money, for the best outcomes. I fully support her in that work.

3.2.8 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier Central:

Does the Chief Minister not accept that this is indeed a revival of gain share, whereby teachers are asked to take, if they wish, a pay rise? It comes out of the budgets for these children in whose charge they are.

Deputy K.L. Moore:

I was having to consider what the question was there. This is a matter for those who manage education budgets. There is always a process to balance budgets. There is always a process of prioritisation, but I think that the Minister for Children and Education's focus has been clear throughout.

[10:00]

She is a Minister for Children and Education who has made investments in service, who has boosted inclusion, and she will continue to do so and take decisions in the best interests of the children whose education we are delivering.

3.2.9 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does the Chief Minister not accept that this change is affecting the quality of education that our students can receive?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

I do not.

3.2.10 Deputy C.S. Alves:

I have heard the Chief Minister talk about fairness and valuing education. Given that teachers are some of the most highly educated people in our workforce, does the Chief Minister not agree that it is important that they are therefore remunerated accordingly and competitively and not continue to have real term pay cuts? That that is a way to encourage our students to further their own education if they are to know that they will be remunerated accordingly and appropriately.

Deputy K.L. Moore:

Let us not forget that teaching assistants are part of the group that have accepted the 7.9 per cent pay offer. Teaching assistants have also been increased. The number of teaching assistants that we employ as part of our commitment to improving recruitment and retention and supporting teachers in the workplace, we have to find a balance, a fair way of not fuelling inflation but supporting everyone who works in the public service.

Deputy C.S. Alves:

I am sorry, Sir. My question was not answered. I asked if she could confirm what whether she agreed with what I was saying, and she did not. She went on to talk about teaching assistants.

The Bailiff:

I assumed the reference to teaching assistants was an example of why the Chief Minister did not agree with you. But if I have misunderstood that answer, Chief Minister, please clarify.

Deputy K.L. Moore:

I think my answers have sought to express the balance that we are trying to achieve.

3.2.11 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Can I say to the Chair of S.E.B., it is not simply the fact that what has happened here is that the headteachers have been paid off with an additional payment, having rejected £1,000? But that has then been offered to teachers. In refusing that, as headteachers would have done, they are now being demonised by this Government for their actions in standing up for their own rights in the sort of comments that were made today about the way in which they are damaging children's education.

The Bailiff:

I am not sure there was a question there, was there, Deputy?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Is it not the case that what has happened is that headteachers have been paid off?

The Bailiff:

I must have missed that part. I apologise. In which case, is that not the case then, Chief Minister?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

I made it clear earlier that the deal for headteachers is part of an Education Reform Agreement. That is about changing their terms and conditions and it is a separate agreement with the Education Department. The negotiations with unions on pay are a separate matter. We have made our best attempts to find a way forward with teaching unions and it is a matter of great disappointment that we are in this situation today where the education of children is being impacted.