

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM OIDEACHAS AGUS SCILEANNA

JOINT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Dé Máirt, 10 Iúil 2018

Tuesday, 10 July 2018

Tháinig an Comhchoiste le chéile ag 3.30 p.m.

The Joint Committee met at 3.30 p.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair/Members present:

Teachtaí Dála/Deputies	Seanadóirí/Senators
Thomas Byrne,	Maria Byrne,
Catherine Martin,	Robbie Gallagher,
Hildegarde Naughton,	Paul Gavan.
Jan O'Sullivan.	

Teachta/Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin sa Chathaoir/in the Chair.

Business of Joint Committee

Chairman: I remind members to switch off their mobile telephones when attending committee meetings. We have received apologies from Senator Ruane who is dealing with Seanad business. I propose that we go into private session to deal with housekeeping matters and correspondence.

The joint committee went into private session at 3.37 p.m. and resumed in public session at 4.04 p.m.

Teacher Recruitment: Discussion (Resumed)

Chairman: I remind members and witnesses to turn off their mobile phones as they can interfere with the sound system, can make it difficult for parliamentary reporters to report the meeting and can adversely affect the television coverage and web streaming,

This session will consider the apparent shortage of substitute teachers throughout the State and issues related to the recruitment and retention of teachers. We shall resume the engagement that the committee has had. On behalf of the committee I welcome from the Department of Education and Skills Ms Deirdre McDonnell, assistant secretary, Mr. Eddie Ward, principal officer, and Mr. Conor McCourt, assistant principal officer. I thank them for joining us today. We have had a number of engagements with different organisations on this matter, and I am sure the witnesses have followed the debate with interest, as we have.

I will invite Ms McDonnell to make a brief opening statement and we will then follow with engagement by the committee when members will have the opportunity to ask questions. The witnesses will have the opportunity to come back in then.

By virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of the evidence they give to the committee. However, if they are directed by the committee to cease giving evidence in relation to a particular matter and they continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to a qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. Witnesses are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any person or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. The opening statements made by witnesses will be available on the Oireachtas website following this meeting. Members are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the House or an official either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

I now invite Ms Deirdre McDonnell, assistant secretary at the Department of Education and Skills, to make her opening statement.

Ms Deirdre McDonnell: I thank the committee for the invitation to appear before it today to discuss the issue of teacher supply.

The committee will be aware that we are recruiting more teachers now than at any other period in the history of the State. Nearly 9,000 additional teaching posts have been created

since the 2012-13 academic year. This increase is driven by demographics and various policy initiatives.

The Department is aware that some schools report difficulties in recruiting substitute teachers at primary school level and in certain subjects at post-primary level. A number of short-term measures have been put in place to increase the supply of teachers. These include suspending the restrictions on substitute work that a teacher on career break can undertake and reminding all retiring teachers that they must remain on the Teaching Council register to be employed in substitute positions.

Earlier this year, the Minister for Education and Skills, Deputy Bruton, announced an expansion in the number of places on post-primary teacher education courses. Initial data indicate a rise in applications for these programmes in 2018 compared with 2017. It is the Department's intention to build on this progress for 2019 and onwards.

The Minister has established structures to plan for the State's teacher needs for the coming years. These structures include expertise from the universities, from agencies of the Department with responsibilities in the area and from school management. There is also an external independent expert involved in the work. The views of other stakeholders will be sought as the work progresses. The Teaching Council's report, *Final Report on Teacher Supply in Ireland: Striking the Balance*, informs this work.

A teacher supply steering group, chaired by the Secretary General of the Department, is overseeing the development and implementation of a programme of actions on teacher supply with clear timelines and outcomes and it is considering several issues. A number of working groups are reporting and making recommendations to the steering group in specific areas and the groups have met on a number of occasions in recent months.

At its most recent meeting, the steering group approved a number of actions to be pursued over the coming months. These actions include developing and conducting a campaign to promote the teaching profession and recruitment, planning for the provision of additional places on teacher education programmes and a review of the implementation of the school placement guidelines by the Teaching Council. It is also intended to explore proposals for flexible options that will facilitate access to and participation in professional masters in education programmes and to explore the development of programmes to upskill existing teachers in targeted subject areas.

The starting salary for a newly qualified teacher, at €35,958 rising to €37,692 in October 2020, is not unattractive in the context of graduate salaries generally. It has been argued, however, that new entrant pay is a deterrent to recruitment. The matter of new entrant pay relates to pay policy across the entire public sector and is being considered in that context. Discussions between the trade unions, including the education trade unions, and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on the matter of new entrant pay are ongoing currently.

Casualisation of employment has also been raised as an issue affecting retention in the profession. The Department has introduced measures to combat this, including accelerated access to permanency through contracts of indefinite duration and requiring schools to give preference to teachers on less than full hours as additional hours become available. The steering group will be considering whether additional measures in this area might be taken.

At primary level, enrolments are projected to peak this year and decline steadily thereafter.

In that context, the Department anticipates that the pressures on teacher supply in the primary sector will recede. At post-primary level, the student cohort continues to grow and is forecasted to increase until at least 2024.

The planning and governance structures now in place enable the Department to draw together relevant expertise and seek to address issues in a systemic way in order to meet the needs of our schools in the coming years. I thank committee members for their interest in this matter.

Chairman: I thank Ms McDonnell. Deputy Byrne must attend a meeting of the Sub-Committee on Dáil Reform.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: I am okay for the moment.

Chairman: I was about to give the Deputy the opportunity to contribute. I call Senator Gavan.

Senator Paul Gavan: I am relatively new to this committee, so I will just ask the witnesses some questions to help me better understand the situation. Certain subjects where there are challenges have been mentioned. What are they?

Chairman: Ms McDonnell may respond. We might have responses to each member's set of questions, given that there are only three witnesses. Was that the Senator's only question or does he have more? If he asks them together, we will then get a response.

Senator Paul Gavan: That would be great. I am aware of the issue of casualisation of employment. It has been raised with me by a number of unions. Will Ms McDonnell give us a picture of the number of teachers currently on temporary employment contracts and an idea of the growth or decrease in that number in recent years? It would be helpful.

Ms Deirdre McDonnell: I thank the Senator for his questions. A number of subjects have been identified in surveys carried out by the school management bodies, including home economics, French, Irish, several modern languages and the STEM subjects, for example, physics and chemistry.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: That is practically everything.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: What are the particular subjects?

Ms Deirdre McDonnell: They are the ones identified in the surveys. It is focused on those subjects.

Senator Paul Gavan: To take up Deputy Byrne's comment, is it broadly spread across those subjects or are one or two of them very challenging?

Ms Deirdre McDonnell: They are listed in order of difficulty in the survey by the management bodies. Home economics is one of the top subjects on that list, as is Irish.

Mr. Eddie Ward: It varied over time. Currently, the languages and sciences, particularly physics, face issues. There was some evidence of maths being a problem previously. We entered into an upskilling course for maths teachers. Some 1,000 teachers have undertaken it. We believe that has sorted the issue for now.

The main issue facing us is the population movement of students into post-primary. This will cause pressures across all subject areas. We will have to produce more teachers for them

all.

Deputy Jan O’Sullivan: I will make a comment first. The issue a few years ago was with schools rehiring retired teachers, given that there were so many young teachers who could not get work. The problem changed as time moved on. As mentioned in the submission, primary level is less of a problem than post-primary.

Is St. Angela’s College the only place where home economics is pursued?

Ms Deirdre McDonnell: Yes.

Deputy Jan O’Sullivan: Home economics is at the top of the list. Are there plans to expand that college or put on home economics courses in other higher education institutions?

I presume that the issue with STEM has to do with competition from other areas of work where people can be employed. Are specific measures being taken to encourage people into STEM teaching? The maths programme was effective. Will there be similar programmes for the other STEM subjects - physics was mentioned - to upskill teachers to the point where they can teach those subjects at all levels?

Ms Deirdre McDonnell: The Deputy is correct, in that we only have one home economics provider. We have increased numbers at that college in the past two years and have approved a further increase for the next academic year.

We will be considering options to increase the number of places in the priority subjects. We will consult higher education institutions in the next few months. We will also be considering options in respect of STEM subjects. The places provided this year in undergraduate and post-graduate programmes are targeted on those areas, and we have seen an increased uptake. We will not be able to confirm the figures until late in September when people have taken up their places, but at that time we will be able to see what progress has been made, particularly in the science subjects. From the kinds of student that are taking up those places, we can learn what programmes and so on to develop in order to meet their needs. The maths programme was about upskilling existing teachers.

Deputy Jan O’Sullivan: They were already maths teachers.

Ms Deirdre McDonnell: Well, teachers who did not have that qualification. We are considering how to run more courses like that one for different areas, given its success.

Deputy Hildegard Naughton: Regarding the shortage of subject teachers at secondary level, has the Department examined the possibility of encouraging first or final year arts degree students to take up those subjects? Many higher diploma teaching students opt for the subjects that they prefer or about which they are passionate, but teachers are normally flexible. If someone was into languages, he or she could think outside the box and do Spanish and German. Instead of leaving it to the teacher-to-be to choose a subject, the Department could go to the third level institutions and target arts students for maths, physics and science subjects. Arts degrees are more language oriented, but is targeting like that happening on the ground? English might be someone’s passion, but if that student is good at one language, he or she might be good at a number of languages. A more targeted approach needs to be taken if there is to be a turnaround within a short number of years. The Department should be going to teacher training colleges and giving certain incentives to higher diploma students to take up particular subjects. For example, someone with a maths degree could be incentivised to specialise in an area where there

is a need in our secondary school system. What is happening in that vein?

Mr. Eddie Ward: The focus of the structures that have been put in place has been on joining up the Department's interactions with the Higher Education Authority and the Teaching Council with higher education institutions on the ground. There will be a major focus on raising awareness and opening pathways into teaching at each level. For example, we will be informing post-primary and third level students about those pathways and considering options for encouraging people who are not currently teaching to undertake a pathway into teaching.

Our focus is on a joined-up approach and ensuring that the relevant decision makers and persons with responsibility are involved at an early stage so that we have a strategic response.

Deputy Hildegarde Naughton: The degree is three years and a postgraduate course could last 18 months, so there could be a quick turnaround in dealing with the supply shortage if it is managed properly and someone goes into our colleges to target students who are open to different careers. An incentive is the solution. That needs to happen right now.

Ms Deirdre McDonnell: The Deputy's point about languages was a good one, in that it is easier to give someone the skills required if he or she already has a language skill. That is something I found to be the case when I worked on the higher education side of the Springboard programmes. We will be examining this matter in more detail with the higher education institutions.

Deputy Hildegarde Naughton: It is a priority and could be done straight away. There are people out there who could do that today.

Senator Maria Byrne: Many graduates go abroad in order to get life experience and so on. Can any incentives be put in place to encourage them to stay? Is that being considered?

On STEM subjects, 640 primary schools were accredited recently to encourage people to study science at a young age. Is the Department looking at increasing the number of teachers in the STEM subjects? People are encouraged to take up maths. Has the Department any plans to do that in the other STEM subjects? This is an important area and there is such a shortage of teachers. I would like to hear the comments of the witnesses.

Ms Deirdre McDonnell: STEM is an important area across the whole system of education and training. We have a policy in place but, as part of our work, we will also be looking to increase the number of teachers within the STEM subjects. The priority at post-primary level is to target some of these subject areas where there are shortages and also problems in the context of increasing the number of graduates coming out. It is a priority for us to increase those numbers.

Mr. Eddie Ward: There is also an increasing emphasis on STEM in the curriculum. At primary level, aspects of coding and computational thinking will be introduced into the new mathematics curriculum as that takes shape. In the junior cycle at post-primary level, there are many options to increase the presence of STEM. From a teacher education perspective, a greater investment is being made in the upskilling of teachers on what we expect to be taught in schools. There are many options and flexibility for schools in respect of short courses in the area of STEM and the sciences generally. Computer science is a new subject being introduced at senior cycle. That will be an examinable subject for the first time next year. This introduces new challenges but it also introduces new opportunities for students. We like to think that will channel people into teaching down the road.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: Any criticism I make is of the Minister, not of the officials. This is a crisis that is not being dealt with at present with any sense of urgency or any sense of purpose by the Minister for Education and Skills. The officials should bring that message back to him. There are a number of easy things that the Minister could do. He could fight to restore pay equality. Young teachers have an excuse for not working in this country because they do not feel valued. They are not being paid on the same scale as their older colleagues and they are asking why should they work here. The Minister's number one priority should be to try to end that inequality, make matters right and remove an excuse for people not to teach in this country.

The Minister needs to be active in terms of the teaching diaspora. He needs to be out in Dubai encouraging, asking and pleading with teachers to come home and work in Ireland and, after he has achieved pay equality, showing them why they should do so. He needs to be out there bringing the members of that diaspora home. Many primary teachers who may be out there and who do not have permanent jobs back home or who are on career breaks should seriously consider returning as soon as possible, particularly in view of the reduction in pupil numbers at primary level. I would like Ms McDonnell to comment on this matter if possible.

With the reduction in pupil numbers at primary level, there is going to be an oversupply of primary teachers at some time in the next few years. That will make it difficult for people who want to have careers in this country because there may well be a teacher surplus at primary level at that point. That strikes me as an urgent reason the Minister should be encouraging people and giving them a reason to come back. When there is a political controversy about this, we hear great noises from the Minister but we have heard nothing on the shortage of teachers since the various teacher conferences took place. The primary teacher shortage is going to be acute this year before it gets better.

The situation at second level is disastrous. We have heard that it is only in a range of subjects but the truth is that, with the exception of a few, practically all subjects have been affected. STEM subjects, languages, home economics and Irish were mentioned. That is a wide range of subjects that are affected by acute shortages. There are also acute shortages in the Gaelcholáistí where people need to teach through the medium of Irish and it is becoming almost impossible to give people their constitutional right to an education via the national language.

A number of things have been recommended by Fianna Fáil in our policy document and by many of the organisations that have come before this committee. I refer to the reform of the professional master of education, PME, and ending the two-year programme because it is over the top and people are emerging overqualified. There must be much more urgency in respect of increasing the number of undergraduates. That was mentioned but it is badly needed. We need to let in more easily people who are on career breaks or retired teachers. The purpose of this would not be to supplant existing teachers but to fill gaps. Substitute panels at primary level would go a long way to dealing with the crisis there. The pupil-teacher ratio will be decreasing in September thanks to Fianna Fáil but that is going to lead to pinch points, to say the least, in respect of supply next year. We also recommended a national summit to highlight this. That could be done in conjunction with a serious campaign to bring teachers who are abroad home.

I am appealing to teachers in Dubai, once the pay equality situation is resolved - we hope that it will be and we want it to be - to seriously consider coming home to teach. They are badly needed and badly wanted. The future of our children, the personal development of our students and our educational, economic and social future depends on having teachers. Some element of a model system to predict supply trends must be introduced. The Minister has been far too slow in dealing with this crisis. There is no sense of urgency. If I were Minister for Education and

Skills, this would be priority number one.

We can have all the strategies for STEM subjects, in respect of which the Government has published one, and foreign languages, in respect of which it has not but Fianna Fáil has, we want, but they cannot be implemented if we do not have teachers. This is foundational in the Department of Education and Skills. Everything else in the Department builds from the ability to make sure we have enough teachers in our schools. We need urgency on this because everything else is press releases, trick-acting and media opportunities for the Minister while the system falls apart as a result of the fact that we do not have enough teachers.

Ms Deirdre McDonnell: I thank the Deputy. He covered a wide range of issues-----

Deputy Thomas Byrne: I take the point but I want Ms McDonnell to answer because it would be helpful if we knew the exact facts.

Ms Deirdre McDonnell: I outlined in my opening statement the process in place on new entrant pay. That is an issue across the public service. On the diaspora, I also mentioned in the opening statement that we will have a communications campaign and that will be targeted at the broadest public to create and generate interest. That is particularly important in the current labour market where there are other competing opportunities for graduates. We are competing with industry for people but we are still getting high interest in teacher education programmes. That is very welcome.

On oversupply, the Deputy will be pleased to know that I am leading on the data and research working group that is looking at modelling what we require in supply and demand over the next number of years. Policy impacts on how many teachers we need to have in the system so we will be looking at demographics. My colleague, Mr. Ward, mentioned some of the policy initiatives coming down the road in respect of matters such as the junior cycle. That is at post-primary level but different policy initiatives impact on the number of teachers required and teacher-pupil ratios, etc. All those things need to be fed into a model and we need to work out over a number of years the forecast we need in the system.

We can look at supply and demand issues across both primary and post-primary in that context. I did some work on forecasting in higher education when I worked in that system, and what is unique for the teachers is that the substitute requirement has to be built as well. Substitute issues do not have to be tackled when dealing with industry because the overall requirement is being dealt with. In the primary sector in particular, we have to build in that need and that issue has been addressed in the Striking the Balance report. Demographics is another issue at post-primary level. The Deputy is right that we have a shorter list of immediate concerns raised by the school management bodies but demographics will impact on all subjects. The shortages are not the same in every subject and that is why looking at subject level requirements is so important at post-primary level.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: On the demographics at primary level, does the Department see the teacher shortage coming to an end, unless we want to reduce the teacher-pupil ration more?

Ms Deirdre McDonnell: It depends-----

Deputy Thomas Byrne: That is what will happen.

Ms Deirdre McDonnell: There should be less pressure because the demographics-----

Deputy Thomas Byrne: That will allow for the pupil-teacher ratio to be reduced.

Ms Deirdre McDonnell: That is a policy matter. The Deputy has raised concerns and I have read the Fianna Fáil document on the PME. Obviously, that was increased to deal with quality issues and is not something that the Minister has indicated we need to look at more carefully. I am new to the area, but I have discussed it with colleagues and there has not been a fall-off.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: The Minister stated in the Dáil that he has sympathy for the view that it is too expensive.

Ms Deirdre McDonnell: We need to look at it more closely because there has not been a fall-off in respect of the primary version of the programme whereas there has in the context of the post-primary version. That may be due to people looking at other options in the labour market. We need to look at the issues relating to that more carefully.

I accept the concerns on the numbers. I was asked about career breaks and retirements. We have lifted restrictions on career breaks and communicated with retired teachers about staying on the Teaching Council register in order to allow them to take up substitute appointments. We can continue to ensure that those messages are out in the system. New Irish programmes have come on stream. There are extra places on an undergraduate programme and there are two new programmes coming on stream in 2018 and 2019 as part of the Gaeltacht policy implementation. We can provide the committee with the details of those. Supply panels were mentioned. There were supply panels in the past. They were reviewed and were not found to be a completely efficient use of resources or way to make substitution available. It is not an issue we will look at to see if it can be done in a different way. However, the steering group can consider the issue.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: When will the information campaign start?

Ms Deirdre McDonnell: The Teaching Council is leading on that. It will be in the autumn. That is the plan.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: It needs to do it now in order that people can be recruited for the autumn.

Ms Deirdre McDonnell: It is planning how it will be done in terms of the steps to be taken and the pieces to be put in place. I can ask for a timeline on that.

Senator Robbie Gallagher: The second question I was going to ask has been answered in the response to Deputy Thomas Byrne. It related to the work to predict future demand by using demographics. As to how we arrived at this point, has that body of work been missing up to now? We now seem to have a crisis that has crept up on us. Could we not have predicted this bottleneck a bit further down the road and been in a position to do something about it before now?

As Deputy Thomas Byrne said, pay equality for teachers is vital. A campaign to attract them back to Ireland deserves attention, but things are a bit more complex than that. I know many young teachers who decided to go abroad because they could not get full-time positions. However, many of them left in order to try to save enough money that they might come back and buy homes. This issue goes beyond the Department of Education and Skills; it also relates to the cost of housing. There is a lot more involved. Based on the current pace, how long will it take to address the existing bottleneck?

Ms Deirdre McDonnell: The Teaching Council did some work in its Striking the Balance report. I am not sure whether members have seen that. It was advice the Department and the Minister sought on teacher supply a number of years ago. It sets out a fairly detailed forecast regarding primary level but it is less detailed about post-primary level. One of the priorities we are setting now is to look at those supply issues at post-primary level. The need to do that on a subject level makes it more complicated because there are different data sources. One of the jobs I have in the working group I am leading is to look at the different data sources we have and how we can use them to work out what we have in the system in terms of subject teachers and then look at policy issues and demographics and how they will impact in the coming years.

The Senator referred to the bottleneck. Demographics mean the population at second level will continue to rise until 2024 and 2025 and we need to manage it over that period. There are pinch points in particular subjects. As a result, we will be prioritising some, for example, STEM subjects and languages. However, we will have to take a broader look at supply issues over that period to meet the demographic demand.

Chairman: I wish to make a few comments. Ms McDonnell's opening statement was over optimistic in the view set out. She referred to the Department being aware that some schools report difficulties in recruiting substitute teachers at primary level and in certain subjects at post-primary level. I went back through some of the submissions last night from the stakeholders who have appeared before the committee. The INTO stated that 90% of its principals had experienced difficulties in getting substitutes. Of those principals, 83% said it was far more difficult in 2017 than it was in 2016. Big alarm bells are going off there. According to a survey carried out in September and October, substitutes were found in relation to only 66% of cover that could be covered by substitutes. Obviously, there is some cover that is not allowed but it is a significant issue. It meant that almost 6,000 school days were not covered. That has a significant impact on students within our schools.

A number of recommendations were made by the variety of stakeholders who appeared before the committee. Certainly, I feel those recommendations were very worthwhile, in particular the recommendation on supply teacher panels. I accept that it can be difficult to establish panels when we have a shortage of teachers, however, I have seen the frustration among teachers and principals at primary level. They have to make phone call after phone call over weekends and through the week to try to find substitute teachers and it is just not working. I refer to the four-year bachelor of education degree. The day one starts to learn about teaching is one's first day as a teacher in the classroom. I went through a three-year bachelor of education degree and it is now a four-year degree. We could look at changing the final year to a form of internship within a school. There was a blockage in 2015 which caused a great deal of the problem. There had not been forward thinking in that regard.

We must look at teachers who qualify in other jurisdictions if we cannot encourage our own to come home, albeit that is something we should also try. Teachers are living and working in Dubai because of the cost of rent and housing here, which is a huge problem for them. While one might say they start on an okay salary, trying to pay a mortgage or high rent is practically impossible. As such, there are attractive advantages to taking a job abroad with low tax, free accommodation and flights back home, in particular for couples. I agree with colleagues that we must do more to bring our teachers back. They are highly qualified and have gone through a really good education system here which we have paid for. As such, we should absolutely do more to retain teachers here.

Reforming the PME course is vital. The cost of it was one of the issues that arose, as was

the length of time it takes to complete. This is something to which serious consideration must be given. The Department's opening statement referred to the teacher supply steering group which is chaired by the Secretary General. Who else is on the steering group? The committee was told that a number of working groups are reporting and making recommendations. What are these other working groups and who do they represent? It is important to provide the committee with that type of information.

Colleagues have said that there may be a peak next year and that we may not have a need for teachers after that. However, what happened in the past may happen again and the country may run short of people with the necessary skills. We are approaching full employment. If we do not have enough people with skills, then many migrant workers may come here for work with their children and families, which will heap another layer of stress on the education system. For example, there is a reception centre for Syrian refugees in Monasterevin and the local schools were not given extra resources to provide help and support to Syrian students. We must take all of that into consideration.

As part of the committee's work programme, members have agreed to hold a kind of summer school and meet in August to discuss issues that have an impact on schools. As schools will reconvene in September, we will discuss capitation grants, school buildings and so on.

Last week we held informal discussions with teaching principals. The lack of substitute teachers to relieve teaching principals is a huge problem, particularly when one considers the workload of the latter. I believe that such substitution work is under-reported because some principal teachers cannot find substitute teachers to take over their classes and, therefore, that is proof that more substitute teachers are needed. I do not wish to pre-empt the work that we will do as a committee, but we have been requested to consider recommending extra substitute days for teaching principals. I recall what was said by one of the teaching principals who attended our informal discussion. One teaching principal in a four-teacher school said that she must look after 23 staff and teach three classes. Such a situation is untenable and I am sure that it is very difficult for everyone involved.

Pay parity has an awful lot to do with this matter. Until we restore pay parity and posts of responsibilities within schools, we will be left fighting an uphill battle. I ask the witnesses to respond to my questions.

Ms Deirdre McDonnell: Would it be easier if I sent the committee the membership list for the steering group and working groups or would the Chairman prefer if I read the details into the record?

Chairman: No. Ms McDonnell can forward the information to the committee but give some background information now. Are they all civil servants? Does the membership reflect the various organisations and stakeholders with which the committee must deal?

Ms Deirdre McDonnell: We have representatives from the school management bodies, the Irish Universities Association and some universities. We have representatives from the Teaching Council of Ireland and Higher Education Authority because they are involved in the delivery and accreditation of programmes. There are also internal memberships. I am a member, as are some of my colleagues. I can forward the full list to the committee secretariat.

Chairman: Yes, please. It is useful to know who are members.

Ms Deirdre McDonnell: An external expert from the University of Glasgow is also in-

volved. There have been four working groups and I will forward the details to the committee. One group considers communications, another group considers higher education issues, my group considers data and the research that is required and, finally, the fourth group considers issues associated with terms and conditions.

Chairman: It is helpful to know the different areas.

Ms Deirdre McDonnell: The Chairman mentioned migration issues. Some of those issues will come through in the forecasting and modelling that we need to do because those trends are built into our projections for pupil numbers at both primary and post-primary levels. I accept her point that such things can come in left of field sometimes and dramatically increase, which is something that we need to consider. In general, models tend to get updated fairly regularly to take account of trends. One considers the model but one also takes in information from the people who work on the ground. That means one gets a sense of what is happening and different things happen in various parts of the country.

In terms of the four-year bachelor of education degree programme, students are allowed to work in substitute jobs when they have reached their final year of study.

Mr. Eddie Ward: Yes, that is correct, provided the students are registered with the Teaching Council of Ireland.

On the overall reconfigured initial teacher education programmes, they are being reviewed by the Teaching Council of Ireland. I suppose it will consider whether the changes have been satisfactory and had an impact. The year 2020 is the cut-off date and there is a bit of research under way which will inform the work of the Department as we make policy in this area into the future. The council will consider all aspects of the accreditation criteria, including placements.

Ms Deirdre McDonnell: The number of release days for principals has been increased and I will forward the exact details to the committee. Funding has been provided in the budget for an increase in management posts in schools. The total number is 2,600 management posts or 1,300 posts each for primary and post-primary schools.

In terms of supply panels, we can consider the matter in the future. I believe that the model needs to be considered differently in terms of how it might work. The issue has been ruled out but not in terms of the way it worked previously.

In terms of the availability of substitute teachers, it is one of the issues that we need to consider. Some management bodies are running good services for schools and I refer to a scheme called TextaSub and those kinds of services. That might be something that we need to consider in terms of how we can better support access to the jobs that are available and convey information to people.

I look after the payroll systems in the Department. Therefore, I know that all of the claims are submitted using my Department's online claims system, apart from Education and Training Boards Ireland, ETBI, schools. We will be able to analyse how many substitutable and non-substitutable days there are and assess how they are being administered in the school system. We will get more data on the issue that we can feed into the model.

Chairman: I wish to say to Deputy Catherine Martin that I normally leave my questions until last and that I stated at the start of this meeting that she was chairing another meeting. I am only calling her now to comment because I wanted to give her a few minutes of breathing space.

Deputy Catherine Martin: I thank the Chairman. I apologise for my absence but I had to attend another meeting. I read the submission in advance and I hope that I do not repeat anything that was said earlier.

Pay inequality is at the heart of these issues. We will not retain teachers or attract people to the profession as long as the injustice exists. It is simply not right to have two colleagues teaching side by side and classroom by classroom but insist that they are not paid the same because one joined the teaching profession in a certain year.

References are continually made to young teachers starting on a salary of around €36,000 or €35,959 and rising. One cannot survive on that salary if one lives in Dublin city because one simply will be unable to afford to rent a home. Let us not forget that a young teacher who starts working at the age of 25 or 26 will be in his or her 50s before they reach the top of the salary scale. That is a lengthy climb to reach the top of the salary scale and is a matter that needs to be addressed.

My next question is on secondary level education. Are students and their parents surveyed during a management, leadership and learning, MLL, evaluation? Is one of the questions on whether teachers are available to teach certain subjects? Is there a lack of teachers in certain subjects? Has that situation had an affect on teachers and the education of children? Has research into the subject been undertaken? Have students in primary and secondary schools been surveyed about the impact on them due to a lack of teachers?

Yesterday it was announced in media reports that suicide intervention training will be provided in schools. We need to provide proper mental health supports to teachers as teachers are overworked and under-resourced. Although training in suicide prevention is crucial, it seems to be a new addition to the long list of duties for teachers.

Yesterday it was also announced that the National Educational Psychological Service, NEPS, will deliver training on how teachers can respond to an unexpected critical incident. On 27 June, officials from NEPS appeared before the Joint Committee on Future of Mental Health Care. They informed members that there is one psychologist for every 25 schools and that the service is very under-resourced and understaffed. In fact, the situation is so bad that if a psychologist who works for NEPS avails of maternity leave, there is no-one to replace her. It is incredible that NEPS has been asked to train teachers who are overworked and under-resourced in suicide prevention. We are finding out from our mental health committee that we need proper counsellors in our schools and that we must not add to teachers' workload. Suicide prevention is a huge responsibility to give to any teacher. There are far-reaching consequences. The mental health supports should be in place and they are crucial in our schools, but I do not know that burdening our teachers is the way to provide them. Then there is the National Educational Psychological Service, NEPS, which provides the training. There are under 200 NEPS schools in Ireland. How many schools do we have in total? It is nearly 4,000. Despite this, we are saying NEPS will train more teachers. This needs to be looked at.

We are trying to incentivise college graduates to take certain subjects. There is no denying the shortage of teachers in certain subjects, but it will remain an uphill battle for Government to attract students into the teaching profession, or even to hold on to them, since so many do not receive equal pay for equal work. It is this inequality which is leading to our teachers leaving our shores. There is no campaign that will bring them back home when they know that their quality of life will be less in their home country, and that is a very sad fact. We need to address this fundamental injustice. They are struggling to attain that quality of life, especially in our cit-

ies, with current market rental values. Our teachers have been devalued over successive years. They are highly skilled, specialised practitioners with far-reaching responsibilities. Apart from the job of educating our children, they act *in loco parentis*. To be effective, any measure to recruit and retain our teachers must address this fundamental injustice and we must ensure equal pay for equal work.

Chairman: Does Ms McDonnell wish to take the hot seat again?

Ms Deirdre McDonnell: I think we addressed some of those issues in the opening statement and in other answers I provided. There have been positive data on the uptake of additional teaching places that have been provided in the teacher training colleges this year. We are waiting to see the final uptake, but it looks like first preferences and other preferences are up for those courses. This is a very positive sign that people still want to get into the teaching profession, even though the labour market is very competitive at present.

I am sorry but I cannot answer the specific question about the survey questions for students, but I can check with the inspector the questions asked of students during those assessments.

Regarding the training, I do not have the figures on NEPS with me but I can get that information for the Deputy. I think the model is that we take a whole-school approach to these issues and this training. I think that is the way in which those programmes are rolled out. Again, I can get more information for the Deputy, if she requires it, on how those programmes will be rolled out.

Deputy Catherine Martin: It is putting more pressure-----

Chairman: Yes.

Deputy Catherine Martin: -----on teachers, who are so under-resourced and who are screaming for proper help for their students who are suffering from mental health difficulties. We are saying to those teachers that they have to take it on. I do not know that that is the right approach to take with teachers who are already so overburdened and under-resourced. Perhaps it is something the mental health committee needs to raise. I know the Minister, Deputy Harris, and the Minister of State, Deputy Jim Daly, are to come before the committee, and the Chairman is a member of the committee, as I am. Perhaps we could raise the matter tomorrow because I am not sure that that is the right way. It is certainly not what we recommended in the report the committee did. We looked at different resources but not a burdening of the teacher. I do not know if the Chairman agrees with that, but-----

Chairman: Absolutely. As a committee, we made 18 different recommendations to the Minister on the matter.

Mr. Eddie Ward: We do not expect teachers to be medical or psychological experts. Our desire is that we have quality teachers who can look after children, understand their emotional development, support them, identify children who have difficulties and work through the various services to support those children. I do not think anyone in the world expects teachers to be experts in suicide prevention, but there is a responsibility on the system that they receive appropriate training to be able to identify children who might have difficulty, work with children and perhaps even their parents where they identify issues, and direct children to appropriate support. Clearly, teachers, while they will be helpful and supportive, are not the experts one might need in cases of severe medical or psychological difficulty.

Chairman: Without being flippant, I think identifying the children who need help is the easy part. It is a matter of the steps that can be taken afterwards. I know we have all had experience of speaking to principals and teachers who have been crying out for help with the children and students whom they have identified at an early enough stage. They find they are not getting the supports after they have identified the problem.

Senator Gavan had indicated he wanted to come back in.

Senator Paul Gavan: I should have thanked Ms McDonnell for her presentation. I apologise. I asked a question, which has not yet been answered, about the extent of casualisation. I wish to quote from an ASTI document that was laid before the committee in, I think, January. I was not a member of the committee at the time. It states, “Surveys of teachers who have emigrated have underlined the difficulties of finding full-time work as the major *‘push’* factor to leave Ireland and seek work elsewhere as a teacher.” This strikes me as the elephant in the room. Clearly, we can drop the word “apparent” in this discussion. There is a shortage of teachers - we know that now - yet, at the same time, anyone graduating as a qualified teacher does not expect to get a full-time job. They can get one elsewhere. Is this not at the heart of the problem? Ms McDonnell talks about contracts of indefinite duration but, again, the ASTI indicates that they have not really fixed the problem. The ASTI quotes a RED C survey in which 34% of teachers were in permanent full-time posts. I know we cannot undo the past. There was a terrible short-termist view across both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael Governments that employment in these sectors should just be casualised to save costs. Surely now, though, given the shortage of teachers that is apparent and absolutely clear, graduates qualifying should be able to win full-time positions. Surely, until we achieve that, we will not fix the crisis, and it is not unfair to use the word “crisis”.

I wish to raise another issue the ASTI raises in the document, namely, the cost of the professional masters of education. The ASTI quotes a cost of between €10,000 and €15,000. This seems to me to be prohibitive. Again, what plans does the Department have to address this?

Finally, I will reiterate what my colleagues have said. The issue of pay equality must be tackled. I do not think teachers will take us seriously until we do so.

Chairman: Do either of the other members wish to comment?

Deputy Catherine Martin: I have one question I forgot to ask. Apart from subbing, what is the extent of the problem in special schools? It is not even a matter of substitute teachers but rather getting teachers in for full-year contracts. Is there a crisis in this regard in special schools?

Ms Deirdre McDonnell: No, but we will look at the needs of different types of schools as well as the mainstream primary schools. If there are issues affecting special schools or, say, Gaeltacht schools, those issues will be looked at separately as part of the work we are doing on the forecasting and modelling.

Deputy Catherine Martin: The witnesses are not aware of any problem finding teachers for year-long contracts in special schools.

Ms Deirdre McDonnell: No.

Chairman: I thank Ms McDonnell-----

Senator Paul Gavan: I have not got any responses to my questions yet.

Chairman: I beg the Senator's pardon.

Ms Deirdre McDonnell: I do not have with me the figures or the breakdown in terms of contracts, but we can provide the Senator with further information. There have been changes. Contracts of indefinite duration and asking schools to prioritise teachers who do not have full hours are two of the methods that have been used to support teachers in recent years. More full-time posts are being brought into the system, and this will continue to increase in terms of the demographics and-----

Senator Paul Gavan: I hear Ms McDonnell, but is the reality not that if I graduate as a qualified teacher, I have no prospect of moving directly into full-time employment?

Mr. Eddie Ward: I am not too sure that is the case. The feedback we are getting from management bodies is that they are looking for teachers who are available for full-time employment. It might depend on the subjects they are offering and perhaps on the area where they are located. Those with a qualification in languages or in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics, STEM, subjects would be able to walk into a job in most post-primary schools.

Senator Paul Gavan: That has not been the experience of the people leaving college to whom I have spoken.

Ms Deirdre McDonnell: It depends on the-----

Mr. Eddie Ward: There may have been an issue a number of years ago when there was-----

Senator Paul Gavan: I am talking about this year.

Mr. Eddie Ward: I am not aware of that.

Chairman: Part of the problem with the system is the way the hours are structured. Unfortunately some schools can fall short, even by half an hour, of the hours required to have a full-time teacher. That is definitely an area that needs to be addressed. The way in which the hours are accounted for is complex. We should try to offer permanent jobs. Teachers would then be invested in schools and the community and everybody - the parents, school and community - would benefit. That makes good sense.

I thank the Department officials, Ms Deirdre McDonnell, Mr. Eddie Ward and Mr. Conor McCourt, for attending. We appreciate the engagement with them. We will soon finalise our report and make recommendations to the Minister. The witnesses indicated there is some other information they will forward us. They might forward that to the clerk to the committee, Mr. Alan Guidon, and he will make sure we all get it.

The next time we will meet will be at our summer school. I look forward to that. In the meantime, I hope all members have an opportunity to take a good break. I thank them for all their help and support throughout the year. I also thank the clerk to the committee, Mr. Alan Guidon, and Mr. Ian D'Arcy, Ms Susan Moran, Ms Brenda McCauley, Ms Nuala Walsh, Mr. Ciaran Brennan, and all the staff we have helping and supporting our committees. Their work is very much appreciated. As there is no other business, I will adjourn the meeting.

The joint committee adjourned at 5.02 p.m. *sine die*.