Teacher Attrition & Adjunct Teachers

Name and Constituency of Member of Parliament

Mdm Ho Geok Choo, West Coast GRC

Dr. Tan Boon Wan, Ang Mo Kio GRC

Question 409

To ask the Minister for Education (a) what is the current shortfall of teachers; (b) how many teachers have either resigned or retired in 2005; (c) what are the reasons for teachers resigning; (d) how has the 5-day week impacted on the turnover in the teaching profession; and (e) how many relief teachers are there in service.

Question 410

To ask the Minister for Education (a) how many schools have benefited from the Adjunct Teachers Programme so far; (b) how many retired teachers have benefited from it; (c) what are its application and selection criteria; and (d) does the Ministry have any plans to encourage more schools to adopt it.

Response

1. Mdm Ho Geok Choo and Dr Tan Boon Wan asked questions related to teachers which I will address together.

2. MOE has been pro-actively recruiting teachers, not because there is a shortfall, but because we are expanding our teaching force. We are doing this as part of our efforts to provide more time and space for our teachers in schools, and to improve the quality of education we provide our students.

3. The size of the teaching service has increased from 23,900 in 2000 to 27,600 in 2005, a 16% increase. We aim to boost the teaching force by an additional 2,500, to 30,000 teachers by 2010. The plan is progressing smoothly as we have been able to recruit more teachers than the numbers who have left due to retirement and resignation. A typical primary school of 1,600 students now has 3 more teachers compared to 2004. Similarly, there are currently 3 more teachers in a typical secondary school of 1,400 students as compared to 2004. This will effectively mean a 15% improvement in student-to-teacher ratios in our schools.
4. MOE keeps a close watch on resignations. Fortunately, they have remained low, at 2%-3%, in the past few years. In addition, another less than 3% of the teacher population retires each year.

5. We have to take every resignation seriously, and in fact do so. From our surveys and exit interviews with teachers, teachers leave the Education Service for various reasons. Not all of them are “push” factors. There are also “pull” factors like the desire to try out a different challenge, and family commitments. Still, we take all feedback from teachers who leave the Service into account as we look for ways to improve the environment under which teachers work, and the way they are recognised and treated as professionals.

6. Mdm Ho wanted to know how the 5-day week has impacted the turnover in the teaching profession. As resignation rates have remained stable, we cannot say with any precision if the 5-day week has had an impact on turnover in the teaching profession. However, we know from feedback that many teachers have welcomed the 5-day work week and the added flexibility it brings.

7. MOE welcomes teachers who have left to return to MOE when they are ready. A significant number do so. Last year, we re-appointed around 1,000 ex-teachers[1], either as adjunct teachers or on the permanent establishment.

8. Dr Tan Boon Wan asked about adjunct teachers. Since the Adjunct Teachers Programme was introduced in October 2004, MOE has engaged about 1,100 Adjunct Teachers[2]. These teachers are deployed in almost 90% of our schools. About half of the Adjunct Teachers are retired teachers, while the rest are teachers who had previously resigned from the Education Service but have now decided to re-join the teaching service.

9. The selection criteria for Adjunct Teachers are closely aligned with the standards we use in appointment of teachers. We have to be confident of their ability to teach well and contribute to the school when they re-join the profession. Hence, their past performance as teachers is also taken into account.

10. The Ministry continues to encourage all our schools to engage more Adjunct Teachers. Currently, schools can engage up to 10 Adjunct Teachers and have their salaries charged to MOE. In addition to schools tapping on their own networks to recommend former trained teachers for appointment as Adjunct Teachers, the Ministry also proactively sends brochures to invite eligible retired and resigned teachers to apply for the Adjunct Teachers Programme.
11. Mdm Ho Geok Neo also asked about relief teachers. On any given day in a school, a few teachers may not be in school due to maternity leave, medical leave, or training. Schools either redeploy other trained teachers, or hire relief teachers to cover their duties for a few days or sometimes even a few months.

12. Currently, on average, a school would hire about 7 relief teachers per school term. Majority of these relief teachers only cover duties for a few days to 1 month.