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## Primary school teachers

### *A question of eligibility*

**T**HE council of advisers of the caretaker government has given a breathing space to 24,000 primary school teachers by allowing them one more year to qualify for inclusion in the Monthly Payment Order. MPO is the government contribution to the teachers' salaries.

These teachers will have to appear in an objective test to qualify. The lenient view, we believe, was taken in consideration of their having endured years of uncertainty. These primary school teachers were employed before 1st July 1996 and were required to prove their eligibility by 1st November 2006. That hurdle was crossed by 20,000 teachers while 24,000 failed to do so.

Properly manning the primary schools has never been the top priority with the successive governments though teachers at the primary level interact with and impart lessons to the children at the very formative stage of their life and thereby leave long-lasting impression on their minds. It is, therefore, essential that the primary school teachers have the required qualification and training and they are well paid.

On the question of recruitment, we oppose the idea of giving employment to teachers on the basis of their political identity rather than their merit and qualification. There are numerous examples of partisan teachers breaking disciplinary codes of the school committee and bringing down the quality of education. There are also reports about primary school teachers not taking classes regularly but, on the other hand, coming to collect salaries at the end of the month.

Whilst we hope the 24,000 teachers will make the best use of the new deadline to earn the eligibility to come under MPO, we would like to stress that eligibility has to be tested in substance and not in mere form. The relevant authorities will have to ensure that.