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Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

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Helen Mary Jones AM
Chair
Children and Young People's Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff
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December 2010

Dear Helen Mary

Thank you for inviting me to present to the Children and Young People's Committee on 16 November 2010.

I was pleased to inform the Committee of the progress that the Welsh Assembly Government has made in tackling child poverty and, more specifically, addressing its recommendations within the "Child Poverty: Eradication through Education" report.

Please find enclosed a response to the questions that we did not have time to cover in Committee and, as requested, an update on the School Effectiveness Framework in relation to tackling child poverty.

Best wishes

Huw Lewis AM/AC

Children and Young People's Committee
16 November 2010
"Child Poverty: Eradication Through Education"

Introduction

This paper provides the Children and Young People's Committee with:

- An update on how successful the School Effectiveness Framework has been in co-ordinating education policies towards eliminating child poverty.
- Responses to questions which were not covered during Committee.

School Effectiveness Framework and Child Poverty

The School Effectiveness Framework (SEF) is the overarching policy that seeks to transform educational standards and provision in our schools. It is underpinned by research into what makes schools effective and is based upon the concept of whole system reform. This means all levels of the education system working collaboratively, for the common good of all children and young people in all schools. It is the key policy for education reform in Wales. It is not an initiative but a framework on which all levels of the education system along with policies, programmes and grants will align to.

Its overarching aims are:

- Achieving better learning outcomes and wellbeing for all children and young people regardless of their socio economic background; and
- Reducing the variation in learning outcomes within and between classrooms, schools and local authorities

The SEF will have a relentless focus on three inter-related priorities:

- improved literacy levels;
- improved numeracy levels;
- reducing the impact of poverty on educational attainment

The Welsh Assembly Government, local authorities and schools are currently working together to decide how these priorities will be taken forward within the wider National Framework. Local authorities will determine local and regional delivery, guided by the overarching national policy direction.

There are 6 key drivers of change to move system wide change forward and support the national priorities. These are:

- robust use of data (including Estyn inspection data) to benchmark performance and to signal areas for development and improvement; strengthening teaching and learning through a coherent menu of opportunities for continuing professional development (CPD);
- strengthening distributed leadership within the schools and local authorities through customised and focused leadership development;
- establishing Professional Learning Communities within, between and across schools;
- clarifying accountability for schools, governors, local authorities and WAG; and
- building capacity at school, local and national level

We have provide developmental training to over 1600 schools in respect of professional learning communities - these are groups of schools and teachers coming together to promote methods of collective enquiry to improve evidence based teaching, leading to better outcomes and more effective teaching methods. All professional learning communities have a clear focus on improving learner outcomes linked to the three inter-related priorities I mentioned earlier. It is through working collaboratively and schools taking

on responsibility beyond their own boundaries that we will achieve improvement in standards and narrowing the attainment gap.

Measuring Outcomes: A small group has been established to work on aspirational outcomes for the education system in Wales – a baseline of where we are today and where we want to be in three years time. Officials are currently collating those milestones and targets which are already in place, including those for child poverty/education and expect to report to the Minister for CELLS early in the New Year.

Unasked questions

Question: You accepted recommendation 20 of the Committee's report to commission research to better understand the decline in a pupil's learning among poorer children as they move into secondary education. What have the preliminary findings shown?

Response: A significant amount of literature on the transition phase already exists, so there is a need to systematically draw together this existing evidence and re-frame it in the context of child-poverty and education policy with Wales to respond to the Committee's recommendations.

Therefore a Rapid Evidence Assessment was commissioned to focus on reasons for the drop in attainment as well as differences between pupils in different circumstances. The assessment will also look at existing evidence on interventions to address the problem, including those that aim to address socio-economic factors.

At present this research work is ongoing, and we expect to publish the report in early 2011. As soon as findings are available, policy officials will be made aware of these in order to respond appropriately.

Question: Can you confirm whether the guidance on School Organisation proposals is statutory and therefore enforceable?

Response: The committee asked for confirmation as to whether or not the school organisation guidance (Circular 21/2009) was statutory, and therefore enforceable. As you may be aware, guidance can be in effect statutory as a result of having been issued by the Welsh Ministers under the provisions of an Act, and this is the case with some elements of the school organisation guidance. However, even if guidance can be considered wholly or partly statutory it is not thereby rendered enforceable as it is not, in itself, legislation.

That said, officials of the Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills scrutinise all proposals which are referred to the Minister for determination very carefully, and there is no evidence that local authorities are not having regard to the revised guidance. Indeed, several local authorities have now prepared the required community impact assessments, and these are considered by Welsh Ministers when deciding proposals when it is necessary for them to do so.

Question: Are you satisfied that the current guidance issued to schools in relation to young carers is being adhered to and is helping to improve support for young carers in terms of their education?

Response: In September 2004, a training resource entitled Caring for Carers was developed to raise awareness of young carers' issues among schools, teachers and school staff in Wales. The resource was distributed to all schools in Wales and remains current.

In 2007 an opportunity to comment on the usefulness of this training pack was extended to schools, participation in this was voluntary. The purpose of this was to help the Welsh Assembly Government improve the quality and focus for distribution and awareness raising of this type of training resource.

Use of the training resource varied throughout Wales; where the resource pack was being used favourable comments were received. This feedback will help us to ensure that we better target this type of resource to the right contacts within schools in future."

Huw Lewis
Deputy Minister for Children
December 2010