

# ELL2-05-05(p.2) Annex D

## Statement on the Welsh Assembly Government's response to the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee's Report on Schools of the Future: 25 June 2003

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning (Jane Davidson): I begin by welcoming the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee's interim report on the school of the future and pay tribute to the Committee and its former Chair, Gareth Jones, for having the courage to look into the future and envisage the changes that our schools will face over the next 15 years. As Gareth said in the foreword to the report, this is an exciting project. The Committee received visionary contributions in taking oral and written evidence, including evidence from pupils. Our job is to shape our programme of work to deliver the vision of schools where every child has the opportunity to fulfil his or her potential.

At the outset, I confirm that the Assembly Government accepts the report recommendations relevant to its responsibilities. The first recommendation is that our vision for a community-focused school should provide the blueprint for the schools of the future. We share that vision. From 1 September, school governing bodies will have powers to deliver services, not just education services, to pupils, their families and the wider community. We issued a draft guidance document on 31 March. Responses to the consultation are being analysed, and final guidance will be issued in time for the start of the autumn term. It will take time for schools to develop a community focus, and the focus will vary depending on the needs of each community and the extent to which facilities and services are already provided locally. However, there are already schools working with, and for, their local community, and demonstrating that they can raise the status of learning and pupil outcomes, while acting as agents for community regeneration.

The second recommendation is that the Assembly Minister should report to the Committee in response to this report, setting out a programme for managing the substantial changes required over the next 15 years. I hope to present my report to the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee early in 2004. It will carry forward the agenda for schools, set out in 'The Learning Country'. I envisage that it will focus on the following: the extension of early years provision; the development of the foundation phase, three to seven years of age; the review of testing and assessment arrangements at the end of key stages 2 and 3; transition from primary to secondary education; tackling underperformance at key stage 3; a range of learning pathways for 14 to 19-year-olds provision with greater diversity of curriculum delivery; the Welsh baccalaureate; the commitments in 'Iaith Pawb'; the development of special educational needs provision, including regional provision; a policy for driving up attendance and securing more flexible provision for disaffected pupils; reducing teacher workloads and bureaucratic burdens on schools; the use of information technology for teaching and learning; support for the continuous professional development of teachers; action to narrow the gap between our best and least well-performing schools; giving pupils a voice in developing school provision; and creating schools for the future in terms of

buildings appropriate for the delivery of the curriculum, which are accessible to all and incorporate principles of sustainability.

The third recommendation concerns further areas of work, which the Committee might explore, and is not therefore a matter for the Assembly Government. The Committee, with advice from the reference group, should carry out further exploration of community-focused schools, curriculum and assessment, and evidence from overseas on enriching the learning experience. However, the Committee may wish to wait until it has read my report before deciding on what further work it wishes to undertake on the school of the future.

The final recommendation is that the Welsh Assembly Government recognises the importance of schools in countering social disadvantage. Schools can play a key part in driving community change in disadvantaged areas. However, schools' key responsibility is to give individual pupils the best possible basis for securing employment and making their way as adults. Educational achievement is a key determinant for the future of our young people. Statistical evidence shows that those with no qualifications are three times more likely to be permanently sick or disabled, and twice as likely to be economically inactive or have a lasting health problem. Persistent truants are two to three times more likely to be offenders. Through policies such as narrowing the gap, tackling disaffection and poor attendance, and securing improved progression from compulsory education to further and higher education, training and employment, we will seek to ensure that schools continue to counter social disadvantage by providing pupils with a high standard of education, tailored increasingly to the needs of individual pupils.