

**Leighton Andrews AC/AM**

**Y Gweinidog dros Blant, Addysg & Dysgu Gydol Oes  
Minister for Children, Education & Lifelong Learning**



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government

Ein cyf/Our ref  
SF/LA/0021/10

Gareth Jones AM  
Chair, Enterprise and Learning Committee,  
Cardiff Bay,  
Cardiff  
CF99 1NA

13 January 2010

*Dear Gareth,*

The meeting of the Enterprise and Learning Committee heard evidence on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2009 relating to the implementation of the Welsh Manufacturing Strategy.

Committee members asked for information related to the delivery of basic skills in schools, and officials committed to supply further information to that provided verbally at Committee.

Addressing the basic skills needs of all individuals is a priority for the Welsh Assembly Government and the Basic Skills Strategy has an aim to "increase the number of adults who have a literacy and numeracy level which allows them to function and progress at work and in society in general".

Although the Basic Skills Strategy is all age, there is clear recognition that the most effective form of intervention is made at the earliest stage possible. Consequently much of the support is targeted at the early years and schools sectors.

Skills development is at the heart of the Foundation Phase curriculum, which is designed to engage children to become lifelong learners. Early skills development, particularly in speaking and listening, sets a solid basis for reading, writing and mathematics.

Practitioners will be tracking children's progress throughout the Foundation Phase to help focus learning for each individual child. The Foundation Phase is being rolled out between 2008 and 2012. Teachers will undertake statutory end-of-phase assessments for the first time in summer 2012.

Early evidence from Estyn is very positive about standards of teaching and learning in the Foundation Phase. A full evaluation of the Foundation Phase, starting in 2010-11, will assess the impact and effectiveness of the policy on children, families and practitioners, together with value for money.

The revised school curriculum, introduced in 2008, leads on from the Foundation Phase with a stronger emphasis on skills across all subjects. We are also driving a shift in pedagogy through a national programme for developing thinking and assessment for learning, following the positive evaluation of a successful pilot phase. This pedagogy fully

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*Wedi'i argraffu ar bapur wedi'i ailgylchu (100%)*

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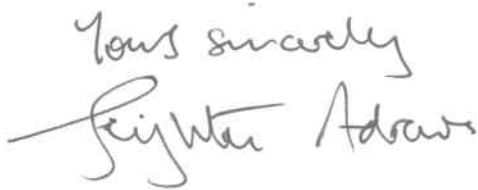
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engages learners, encourages them to be more active in their learning and improves their achievement and attainment. Schools are expected to assess and monitor children's progress throughout each key stage and to report nationally on their attainment at the end of the key stage.

Assessment for, and of, learning are both important. Wales needs the first because it targets teaching and learning more effectively and thus improves attainment. The second measures progress over time for individual children, classes and schools and thus provides key information about impact, for local and national use. Estyn reports also provide on-going evidence about impact.

Further detail on specific activity related to the National Basic skills strategy is attached for information.

Yours sincerely  


**Leighton Andrews AM/AC**

Minister for Children, Education & Lifelong Learning  
*Y Gweinidog dros Blant, Addysg a Dysgu Gydol Oes.*

## The Welsh Assembly Government National Basic Skills Strategy

### Background

1. The Welsh Assembly Government's decision to embark upon an **all-age strategy** in 2001 was a strategic response to the unacceptably high number of adults with low levels of literacy and numeracy. The second five year Basic Skills Strategy was launched in 2005.

The adult basic skills survey conducted in 1999 and repeated in 2004 indicated that about 440,000 adults (25% of those aged 16-65) do not have Level 1 literacy skills and 990,000 (53%) do not have Level 1 numeracy skills. This is equivalent to a D grade at GCSE.

2. The strategy aims for an "increase in the number of adults who have a literacy and numeracy level which allows them to function and progress at work and in society in general."

There are four distinct objectives:

- i) **to raise the profile of basic skills;**
- ii) **to build upon, complement and supplement existing initiatives and practice;**
- iii) **to influence policy, planning and delivery at all levels; and**
- iv) **to identify opportunities for intervention which would effect change.**

### Targeted Intervention

3. Although the strategy is all-age there is a recognition that early intervention is the most effective. Consequently most of the activity supported through the basic skills strategy is concentrated at the early years and schools sectors and on interventions which have an impact on learning in the short as well as long-term.

#### 4. Early Years

In the early years there are 3 initiatives that have been delivered

- i) Bookstart
- ii) Language and Play
- iii) Family Programmes

##### i) **Bookstart and Language and Play.**

The Bookstart programme is funded through the basic skills strategy and as a result all children receive a book bag and early years pack at 9 and 18 months respectively. The Language and Play programme is designed to support the parents of 0-3 year old children to develop the language and communication skills of their children. The emphasis is on learning through engagement in language rich play experiences. Bookstart and Language and Play contribute to the aims and ambitions of the Foundation Phase and are the stepping stones towards ensuring that more children are ready for learning when they enter fulltime education.

**Outputs and outcomes.** Baby packs were distributed to 90%-100% of eligible homes in 13 LEAs and between 80% and 89% of homes in a further 5 LEAs. Early Years Packs were distributed to 90%-100% of homes in 18 LEAs and 80%-90% of homes in a further 2 LEAs. In 2008-09 15,115 parents and 17,048 children took part in Language and Play programmes and 6,516 parents and 7014 children took part in Number and Play programmes.

Achievement rates have increased year on year and reflect a marked improvement in efficiency and effectiveness of delivery. On average 94% of the parents supported have been from the agreed target audience.

### iii) **Family Learning Activity.**

Family Programmes is one of the longest established basic skills support programmes in Wales. There are three types of courses within the programme: workshops for parents and children - to engage parents in their children's learning; short courses to give parents the knowledge and confidence to support their children's learning; and longer courses which have a three strand approach – children withdrawn for additional help, parents developing their own basic skills, and joint sessions where parents and children work together. Distribution of funding is based on ward data from the 2004 basic skills needs survey, and the deprivation index.

**Outputs and Outcomes.** In 2008-09, 5718 parents and 5,976 children took part in programmes across Wales. 88% of the parents involved were reported as being from the target audience – parents with poor basic skills in Communities First or other areas of deprivation; 86% of children showed evidence of improved basic Skills following the completion of the course; and 89% of parents showed evidence of improved basic skills. 52% of parents achieved accreditation and 64% went on to further study or work.

## 5. **Schools**

The three main initiatives promoted in schools are:

- i) Strategic Intervention Grants to support catch-up programmes
- ii) The Read a Million Words Boys' Literacy programme - targeted at closing the gender gap
- iii) Teacher Training

### i) **The Strategic Intervention Grants**

The Strategic Intervention Grants programme is aimed at enabling under-attaining pupils to 'catch up' to the literacy and/or numeracy achievement levels expected of their age-group by providing them with intensive literacy and/or numeracy one-to-one support. The programme is aimed specifically at those children falling behind in their reading and maths

**Outputs and Outcomes.** During the academic year 2007-2008 6027 primary pupils from 603 school took part in literacy intervention programmes and 82% of these pupils were deemed to have 'caught up' to the expected level for their age group by the end of the programmes. 1245 pupils from 34 secondary schools took part in literacy intervention programmes and 84% of these pupils were deemed to have 'caught up to the expected level for their age group by the end of the programmes. 5381 primary pupils took part in numeracy intervention programmes and 85% of these pupils were deemed to have 'caught up to the expected level for their age group by the end of the programmes.' In addition 1293 secondary pupils took part in numeracy intervention programmes and 86% of these pupils were deemed to have 'caught up to the expected level for their age group by the end of the programmes.' As these programmes are increasingly embedded in the schools sector it will be possible to mainstream the funding for their delivery. This in turn will enable the increased targeting of the harder to reach groups wherever possible - the 15 to 20% who fail to catch up in school and become adults with poor literacy and numeracy.'

### ii) **Boys Literacy**

The Boys' Literacy initiative is a promotion campaign aimed at improving boys attitudes to and achievements in reading. It main focus is on boys aged 9-14 years who are reluctant and failing readers and builds upon an earlier campaign run by Basic Skills Cymru - Read a Million Words in Wales. This new campaign is in response to suggestions from LEAs and in acknowledgement of the evidence of the gender gap in performance highlighted by Estyn in its report in March 2008.\*

### **Outputs and Outcomes.**

BSC Grants to LEAs and library services for activities to improve boys' literacy have resulted in a range of events and activities at local level in all 22 LEAs including the funding of author visits to schools, drama workshops, celebration events for those who have improved their reading and the development of resources for learners. The National Conference attended by approximately 500 delegates included 10 workshops and a number of these were re-run in North, West and South Wales on. To date 9 workshops have been held and 420 teachers have attended. Two Publications have been produced and distributed to schools – "Me Read? No Way! A Practical Guide to Improving Boys' Literacy" (5710 distributed) and "Me Read? No Way! 13 strategies to improve boys' literacy" (abridged version of above) (12,200 copies distributed) as well as the "Helping your Son with Reading – leaflet for parents (55,000 copies ordered), Time Troop comic 1 and 2 (130,000 distributed), and bibliographies of recommended books and resources for boys aged 5-9, 9-11 and 12-14 years (total of 7700 copies distributed)

iii) **Teacher Training** – Improving the capacity and quality of teaching and learning is essential if those with poor basic skills levels are to be supported. Training programmes to support school teachers across the curriculum to meet the needs of those pupils with poor literacy and numeracy skills are complemented by similar programmes in the adult sector.

**Outputs and Outcomes** Recent figures collated for 08-09 indicate that 6,389 teachers and teaching assistants attended basic skills training in the academic year 07-08. Of those trained 2694 were primary teachers and 2319 of those trained were secondary teachers. In addition, 1376 teaching assistants received training. LEAs reported 94% staff improved practice;

In 09-10 basic skills CPD modules (developed in partnership with LEAs) are being delivered to key teachers in each LEA (target 1100 teachers). 525 teachers from 16 LEAs had completed these courses by April 2009. The modules require teachers to engage in basic skills development work in their schools, measure impact on pupil learning and share outcomes with other schools/LEAs (accreditation is available through the University of Wales).

## **5. Measuring Impact**

The National Basic Skills Strategy is subject to evaluation by an external agency. The evaluation places an emphasis on identifying what works and gathering evidence of impact. In addition to the external evaluation all programmes are monitored and some have are subject to internal reviews.

Where possible evidence of impact is quantified and evaluated on a value for money. A distinction needs to be made between those programmes that are directed at the learner and those that target the teaching or the production of resources to support the teaching and learning. With the former evidence is in the form of a clear learning outcome and with the latter the evidence is in the form of outputs

The Quality Standards (previously Quality Mark) initiative is targeted at all schools and post 16 providers and the output measured is the number of schools and adult providers which have achieved the QS. In order to achieve the QS the school or provider is assessed for the evidence that it identifies and provides support for learners who have poor basic skills.

Currently 92% of primary schools, 89% of secondary schools and 83% of post 16 providers hold the Quality Mark or Quality Standard. The strategic plan produced as part of the QS process is the framework within which specific basic skill teaching and learning takes place and is essential to ensuring that basic skills teaching and learning is embedded into practice. Catch-up programmes provide hard evidence of outcomes whilst teacher trainings

programmes improve teacher skills, the output, with the ultimate aim of improving the teaching and learning.