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Date: 20 March 2014
Our ref: HVT/2107/fgb
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Dear Steve

PAC INQUIRY – COVERING TEACHERS' ABSENCE

Thank you for the letter of 10 March 2014 in which you expressed your concern about the additional information I provided in my letter of 11 February 2014 to the PAC Chair with regard to *'the inadequacy of HR advice provided to schools by local authorities, leading to the education consortia needing to set up their own HR advice service.'*

I think I should clarify that, although my report on Covering Teachers' Absence found that many schools would welcome more support in managing attendance, it did not draw any significant conclusions about the quality of HR advice and support provided to schools by local authorities. Nor did it refer in any way to the Hill report or to education consortia HR advice services. The wording in one of the headings in my letter of 11 February that has caused you concern (italicised in the paragraph above) arises from points raised by members of the Public Accounts Committee during the Committee's consideration of the evidence provided to them by the Welsh Government's Director General for Education and Skills on 21 January, and on which I promised to provide the PAC with additional information.

As recorded in my letter of 11 February, my report identified some concerns about the HR services provided by local authorities and described some of the variable arrangements for providing such services that exist. It noted that some head teachers had expressed concerns about the level of support they had received in handling long-term absence, but these concerns were balanced by a recognition that some head teachers had spoken favourably about the support that they received from local authority HR staff and occupational health services in managing staff with long-standing illness.

I believe that my report is clear is about the differing responsibilities of schools, Governors and local authorities in staffing matters. The references in your letter to some of the recommendations in my report seem to acknowledge this.

You should be interested to know that your letter of 10 March, which you copied to the PAC Chair, has been tabled as a paper for PAC to note next Tuesday, 25 March. As such it will be available as evidence for the Committee's inquiry.



HUW VAUGHAN THOMAS
AUDITOR GENERAL FOR WALES

cc Mr Darren Millar AM, Chair, PAC