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Y Gweinidog Addysg a Sgiliau  
Minister for Education and Skills



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref SF/HL/0112/14

Ann Jones AM  
Chair  
Children, Young People and Education Committee  
National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff

29 April 2014

Dear Ann,

### **Inquiry into Educational Outcomes of Children from Low-Income Households**

Thank you for your letter of 3 April 2014 in relation to the above inquiry.

I will respond to the points you raise in the order they appear in your correspondence.

#### *'Double disadvantage effect'*

It is the case that certain groups experience 'double disadvantage'. For example, free school meal entitlement for Gypsy, Traveller and black African children is well over three times the national average.

These pupils are eligible for support funded by the Pupil Deprivation Grant. Minority ethnic pupils are also eligible for support from the Minority Ethnic Achievement Grant (MEAG), while Gypsy and Traveller children are supported by the Grant for the Education of Gypsy and Traveller Children (GT grant). These two grants total £11.1million in 2014-15. I have ring fenced this funding to ensure it goes directly to these learner groups. Both the MEAG and the GT grants enable local authorities to reach out to some of the most disadvantaged and marginalised learners.

EU Roma children are recognised as having dual needs, English as an additional language and the support needs of being from travelling families, and as such are eligible for support funded by both the MEAG and GT grant. Asylum seekers are amongst those recognised as needing higher levels of support and they receive the highest weighting under the MEAG funding formula used to determine annual grant awards. It is possible, therefore, for some disadvantaged pupils to be supported by the PDG, the MEAG and the GT grant, reflecting their high level of need.

## *Parental engagement*

Research confirms that parents and carers have a vital role to play in supporting their child's education. I agree wholeheartedly with your conclusion that there is a pressing need for us to help schools devise and implement evidence based strategies to better engage all parents in their children's learning from the earliest possible age - in particular those in lower income groups who may be harder to reach.

With this in mind, we intend to publish specific guidance for schools on how to develop their own parental and community engagement strategies later this year. Alongside side that we will also be developing a resource pack for schools of programmes delivered by, or in partnership with, well respected community and third sector organisations, many of which focus on parental engagement. Both of these initiatives should be in place later this summer.

We are also developing a high profile media campaign aimed at parents in Wales to communicate the simple message that taking an interest counts. Beginning shortly, the campaign will use a range of communication channels to raise awareness of the message and illustrate how parents can get involved. The campaign will also develop information, suitable for a variety of communication vehicles, which can be used by schools, LAs and consortia which will ensure a consistent message across Wales. The campaign will complement existing parental campaign work currently being undertaken by my officials on literacy and numeracy.

I believe it is vitally important that we work closely with key third sector colleagues delivering in this field. With that in mind, we have commissioned Achievement for All to adapt its 3 As Schools Programme for use in Wales. This is a well evaluated programme with a strong track-record of improving outcomes for vulnerable pupils. One of its key themes is "Empowering and engaging parents in their children's learning to raise attainment".

Achievement for all Cymru will work in partnership with the recently established Wales Centre for Equity in Education as well as our four Education consortia. Their programme is being piloted in 14 schools in the central south consortium area and we are already receiving extremely positive feedback from the pilot schools

## *Education costs*

In England and Wales, in schools other than independent schools the education provided wholly or mainly during school hours is free. Schools may not charge for activities if the activity is required as part of the National Curriculum, or part of a syllabus for a prescribed public examination that the pupil is being prepared for at the school.

Although schools cannot charge for school time activities, there is nothing in law to prevent a school governing body or local authority asking parents and others to make voluntary contributions for the benefit of the school or to fund school activities. All requests to parents for voluntary contributions must make it clear that the contribution is voluntary; and that there is no obligation to make a contribution. The governing body or head teacher must also make it clear that children of parents who do not contribute will not be treated any differently.

A school may not charge parents for anything unless the governing body has adopted a charging policy. The policy will give details of the circumstances in which the school will charge parents and in what circumstances it may ask for voluntary contributions. The policy

should also explain any circumstances in which the school will wholly, or partially, waive the charge. This should be available from the school.

The Welsh Government's 'Guidance for Governing Bodies on Charging for School Activities' has been written to help head teachers and governing bodies to set out their policies on charges and remissions for school activities and school visits. It provides a policy view and interpretation of the relevant law from the Welsh Government. However, it is not legal advice, the guidance is non-statutory and therefore cannot be enforced, but the Welsh Government would encourage schools to have regard to the guidance when dealing with issues relating to charging and remission for school activities and school visits. The guidance can be accessed from:

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/guidance/chargingforschoolactivities/?lang=en>

### *2017 Foundation Phase target*

When the current target for reducing the attainment gap at Foundation Phase was set we did not have sufficient time series data to guide possible future improvements. This was because 2012 was the first year that the Foundation Phase was fully rolled out across the country, replacing Early Years (3-5 year olds) and Key Stage 1. We took a realistic approach, therefore, regarding what was thought to be achievable at that time. The target itself should not be seen as a ceiling or constraining factor for the attainment of pupils on free school meals in the Foundation Phase.

Early in 2015 there will be a three year time series of Foundation Phase primary school teacher assessments data for children eligible for free school meals. At this point we will have an opportunity to review the current target.

### *Schools Challenge Cymru*

Schools Challenge Cymru will inject up to £20 million funding, alongside proven expertise, to bring challenge and support to around 40 secondary schools and their cluster primaries that are challenged in terms of circumstance and delivery. In developing this programme, we are drawing on the knowledge and expertise of our stakeholders, and working with experts from across the UK, to construct a coherent package of support that aligns with, and drives forward delivery of, the national model.

We are working closely with Regional Education Consortia to identify the schools that will be a part of this programme. In line with the principles of the national model, we have used a range of performance data and local intelligence to inform this process. I will announce these schools in early May and this will be followed by a period of reflection and action planning with the schools and regional Education Consortia

While the focus will be on participant schools, we expect many more schools in Wales to realise benefits as we make full use of some Wales' finest and highest performing schools to share expertise and leadership directly into the classroom and to support teachers to achieve the improvements they seek.

I recently launched a UK wide recruitment campaign to identify Schools Challenge Cymru Advisers to work with Regional Consortia and schools and drive this important agenda forward. These will be high quality people who have a proven record in transforming education for children and young people.

Building on this, on 9 April, I announced Professor Mel Ainscow (CBE) as Schools Challenge Cymru Champion. As Chief Adviser for the Greater Manchester Challenge between 2007 and 2011, and with his understanding of the Welsh education landscape, Mel will be an excellent ambassador for the programme.

The Schools Challenge Cymru programme, which is still in development, will be rolled out from September 2014.

I hope this information is helpful.

*Best Regards*

*Huw*

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