

Huw Lewis AC / AM  
Y Gweinidog Addysg a Sgiliau  
Minister for Education and Skills



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-04-628  
Ein cyf/Our ref HL/00792/15

William Powell AM  
Chair - Petitions Committee

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6 May 2015

Dear William

Thank you for the letter of 23 April seeking further comments regarding the petition: *P-04-628 - To Improve Access to Education and Services in British Sign Language (BSL)*.

The Welsh Government is committed to meeting the educational needs of all learners. The responsibility however to provide suitable educational provision for all children rests with local authorities. This will include the provision of any language support required, such as BSL, to assist them in achieving their educational potential. The Welsh Government provides funding to local authorities via the revenue support grant (RSG) to allow them to meet their statutory duties to provide special educational needs (SEN) provision. The RSG allows local authorities the flexibility to deliver services to meet local needs and the discretion to fund specific support as required.

We acknowledge that the current system for SEN can sometimes be challenging for learners and their families. We also appreciate there is pressure on mainstream services to deliver educational provision across a range of learning needs. With this in mind the Welsh Government is reforming the current legislative framework for supporting learners with SEN. We believe that the new legislation will enable us to improve the planning and delivery of additional learning provision and ensure it is much more focused on a child's or young person's individual needs. We expect to introduce an Additional Learning Needs Bill before the summer recess.

With regard to Deffo's view on BSL in the National Curriculum, the Welsh Government has recently published a report into a fundamental review of curriculum and assessment arrangements from Foundation Phase to Key Stage 4. Whilst acknowledging the real strengths in Wales, it also identifies the shortcomings of the current curriculum arrangements and has made a series of recommendations to address these and improve how children in Welsh schools are taught and assessed. The Welsh Government is currently consulting on the recommendations of the report to seek the views on the

proposed vision and purposes for Welsh education. This report, entitled *Successful Futures*, can be found here:

<http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/curriculuminwales/curriculum-for-wales/?lang=en>

In relation to the matter of access to qualified support, I would like to draw your attention to the Welsh Government's recently published review into the skills of the general education workforce in Wales in relation to the provision of support for children and young people with SEN. In view of this report, we are working with local authorities, as the bodies responsible for providing suitable education for children in their areas, to consider what action we will be taking at a local level. The link to the report can be found here:

<http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/publications/reports/an-assessment-of-special-educational-needs-workforce-development-requirements/?lang=en>

I understand, as is highlighted in the Consortium for Research into Deaf Education (CRIDE) annual report, that there can sometimes be difficulties in accessing specialist or qualified teachers for those with hearing impairments. You may be interested to know that the Welsh Government is currently undertaking a study of Workforce Planning for SEN Specialist Services which includes qualified teachers of the deaf. The report is expected to be published this summer, at which point the Welsh Government will consider what actions need to be taken forward.

With regard to BSL provision for parents and siblings, I appreciate that the range of BSL courses and training may be varied across Wales and the reduction in funding to the adult sector may have had an impact on this. We allocate funds to Further Education colleges who have the authority to plan and deliver learning provision which they judge as appropriate to meet local needs and the Welsh Government's priorities. Each college is expected, therefore, to offer learning that is relevant to, and based on local need, and is within their budget allocation.

Furthermore, in delivering the Families First Programme which I referred to in my previous response, local authorities should use a Team Around the Family (TAF) model that oversees the interventions families receive. This TAF aims to pull together the right people from the right agencies to ensure that a family receives the right advice, help and support in a timely manner. It could be determined that support for BSL provision for the family is required and the local authority therefore should put in place the appropriate arrangements in place.

I trust that this information emphasises our commitment to creating an inclusive education system for all learners, regardless of their needs. We recognise that more can be done to help learners with hearing impairments to reach their full potential and we will continue to take the action required to ensure that this happens.

Yours sincerely



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