

5. Implementation of the Foundation Phase

In January of last year I announced my plans for implementing the Foundation Phase which included pilot projects in schools and non maintained settings across Wales. That pilot – 41 in total – started in September 2004 and has just started its second full year.

Since the start of the pilot much has happened:

- The draft Framework for Children's Learning has been published;
- The guidance for six of the seven Areas of Learning has been provided to the pilots for them to work with and develop.
- The Assessment Outcomes have been developed for "Language, Literacy and Communication Skills", for "Mathematical Development" and for "Personal and Social Development and Well Being".
- The University of London and UWIC have started their evaluation of the pilots and offered some early recommendations. Their work will continue until the end of the current school year.

During the first year I have taken time to look afresh at what was a very ambitious timetable, to reflect on the lessons learned from the pilot settings and consider the early findings from the Monitoring and Evaluation Team – whose report will be published in January 2006.

Following very careful consideration I have decided to extend the timetable so that the statutory rollout of the Foundation Phase will start from September 2008. I believe this puts in place a realistic timeframe and also acknowledges the School Workload Advisory Panel's comment that extensive piloting is to be welcomed. But even this new timetable is a challenge; a similar development took 10 years to implement in New Zealand.

The adjusted timetable will provide time to:

- Refine further the Framework for Children's Learning to reflect the experiences of those in the pilots;
- Develop an assessment and learning continuum for all Areas of Learning;
- Make sure the guidance material and the supporting DVD is fit for purpose;

- Learn from the pilots and reflect those lessons in the statutory proposals, particularly the adult/pupil ratios we should be aiming to establish;
- Fully take on board the recommendations that emerge from the second year of the Monitoring and Evaluation Team;
- Put in place the training programmes needed to deliver the new curriculum to the required standards;
- Provide sufficient time for the consultation and legislative procedures and for the introduction of the Foundation Phase to fit better with ACCAC's National Curriculum review timetable.

During this extended pilot period I shall also be looking at bringing more schools and settings into the pilot. In particular I am very keen that we develop a synergy between the Flying Start Programme and the Foundation Phase and broaden coverage of the pilot to bring in some of the schools in the Flying Start catchment areas.