

Jane Davidson AM

Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning
Gweinidog dros Addysg a Dysgu Gydol-Oes

Cardiff Bay / Bae Caerdydd
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Our ref: MB/JD/0906/05

Your ref:

Sue Essex
Minister for Finance, Local Government and Public Services
Welsh Assembly Government
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

12 August 2005

Dear Sue,

In the light of the recent BPR settlement I have met officials in my Department to discuss its implications for my portfolio, including the implementation of the Foundation Phase. As you are aware the introduction of the Foundation Phase for 3 to 7-year-olds is a key commitment in the Learning Country. In 2003 a consultation on the policy proposals indicated virtually unanimous support from the key stakeholders. The policy is currently being piloted in each LEA in Wales.

The Foundation Phase is absolutely key to our drive to raise standards, to equip children with the skills to learn and to encouraging children and young people to continue learning and developing throughout life. The Foundation Phase will truly set the foundations for lifelong learning. You will know from papers that we have received at Cabinet and that have gone to Cabinet Committees, that there is compelling international research evidence that money spent on early years education saves up to seven times its value later on, through reducing the need for remedial action by the education, health, social service and justice systems.

I have recently been considering with officials the proposed rollout timetable for the implementation of the Foundation Phase in all schools and non-maintained settings in Wales. This will of course be heavily dependent on the resources required to deliver an effective and distinctive Foundation Phase.

Exempt under Section 36

Table 1

Sept 2004	Sept 2005	Sept 2006	Sept 2007	Sept 2008
3-5 pilot settings/schools only (staff/pupil ratio 1:8)	3-5 pilot settings/schools only (staff/pupil ratio 1:8)	Statutory in all 3-5 funded and maintained settings (ratio 1:8)	Statutory in all 3-5 funded and maintained settings (ratio 1:8)	Statutory in all 3-5 funded and maintained settings (ratio 1:8)
	Year 1 Pilot classes only (ratio 1:13)	Year 1 Pilot classes only (ratio 1:13)	Statutory in all Year 1 classes (ratio 1:13)	Statutory in all Year 1 classes (ratio 1:13)
		Year 2 pilot classes only (ratio 1:13)	Year 2 pilot classes only (ratio 1:13)	Statutory in all Year 2 classes (ratio 1:13)

When I initially announced this proposed implementation timetable, I made it clear that the speed with which we would be able to move to statutory implementation would be dependent on a full evaluation of the Pilot and the availability of resources to support its implementation.

Exempt under Section 36 I have now reconsidered this proposed timetable. I suggest that we move it forward by one year. **Exempt under Section 36**

- The evaluation of the Foundation Pilot which is being undertaken by a research team based at the University of London Institute of Education and UWIC;
- ACCAC's review of the National Curriculum, which will see a new curriculum introduced from September 2008;
- the underpinning legislative procedures, which would require a full consultation exercise starting in January 2007.

The following, therefore, is the revised timetable that I propose we adopt.

Table 2

Sept 2004	Sept 2005	Sept 2006	Sept 2007	Sept 2008	Sept 2009
3-5 pilot settings/schools only (staff/pupil ratio 1:8)	3-5 pilot settings/schools only (staff/pupil ratio 1:8)	3-5 pilot settings/schools only (staff/pupil ratio 1:8)	Pilot in all 3-5 funded and maintained settings (ratio 1:8)	Statutory in all 3-5 funded and maintained settings (ratio 1:8)	Statutory in all 3-5 funded and maintained settings (ratio 1:8)
	Year 1 Pilot classes only (ratio 1:13)	Year 1 Pilot classes only (ratio 1:13)	Year 1 Pilot classes only (ratio 1:13)	Statutory in all Year 1 classes (ratio 1:15)	Statutory in all Year 1 classes (ratio 1:15)
		Year 2 pilot classes only (ratio 1:15)	Year 2 pilot classes only (ratio 1:15)	Year 2 pilot classes only (ratio 1:15)	Statutory in all Year 1 classes (ratio 1:15)

This revised timetable will also fit very well with the 0 to 3-year-olds Flying Start Programme, which the Cabinet has already approved. Indeed it is crucial that the two elements dovetail to provide a continuum of support and provision for the 0 to 7 age

group. Flying Start will rollout from September 2006 and it is the children benefiting from that initiative that will move into the Foundation Phase from September 2007. It is imperative, therefore, that these children have access to provision that builds on Flying Start and offers the best opportunities for their further development.

The biggest change that the Foundation Phase will bring to schools, apart from a new philosophy, is greater emphasis on learning through play and practical activities. Such an approach brings with it the need for more adults in the classroom and, of course, a consequential price tag. However, without the right number of adults the Foundation Phase will not work. The Foundation Phase is not simply introducing a new curriculum; this is a fundamental change in philosophy, mode of delivery and response to children and their learning opportunities. We cannot deliver this in a piecemeal and fragmented manner: the appropriate number of suitably qualified staff must be available to support the children's learning. It is, however, extremely difficult to quantify the optimum adult/pupil ratio. Drawing upon best practice used in other countries that have introduced this type of curriculum, or the Pilot we have adopted 1:8 for the 3 to 5-year-olds and 1:13 for the 6 to 7-year-olds.

The Final Evaluation Report on the pilot is not due until Autumn 2006 and we should, therefore, be cautious in drawing firm conclusions about these ratios until then. Nevertheless, in view of the current situation we find ourselves in, I have looked at the degree of flexibility available to us in respect of the ratios.

The area where, because of existing legislation and policy commitments, there is the least amount of flexibility is the 3 to 5 age range. Here the Care Standards in Wales threshold of 1:8 which applies to the non-maintained sector is a firmly established-statutory requirement. I would not wish, nor could I objectively justify, introducing anything less in the maintained sector. To do so would fundamentally cut across our unambiguous policy of creating a mixed economy of provision for this age group. Adopting a different ratio – say 1:10 – for the maintained sector would undoubtedly erode the position of the non-maintained sector as there is a very real danger that LEAs may well concentrate provision in the “cheaper” maintained schools. However, the success of the Foundation Phase is very much reliant on there being a strong and adequately funded non-maintained sector that meets parents needs and delivers the Foundation Phase. This is particularly the case with delivery through the Welsh medium where the pace of delivery of the supporting practitioners has cross cutting implications for our Iaith Pawb initiative. My estimate of the resources required which are set out in the attached are, therefore, based on a 1:8 ratio for the 3 to 5-year-olds.

Turning to the 6 to 7-year-olds. As I mentioned earlier the current Pilot is “testing” the 1:13 ratio, but we will not have firm findings from the evaluation until Autumn 2006. Nevertheless there is some merit in taking an early decision to increase the ratio to 1:15. Such a shift would not diminish the benefits of moving from the current staffing levels and neither would it undermine our commitment to put more adults in the classroom. Moreover such a change would bring with it some savings (see Annex ***Exempt under Section 36***) and would ensure that the Foundation Phase ties in with the current class size threshold of 30 pupils. In the first year of rollout (2007/08) the changes outlined above, plus savings ***Exempt under Section 36***

Exempt under Section 36

I am copying this to the First Minister.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane Davidson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

Jane Davidson AM
Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning

Annex

Exempt under Section 36