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EDUCATION LIFELONG LEARNING AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

Date:	16 March 2006
Time:	9.00am
Venue:	
Title :	Minister's Report

This report updates the Committee on specific issues raised by members and on issues of current interest. Annex A sets out major engagements since the last report

(A) Implementation of the Children's Commissioner's recommendations to the Welsh Assembly Government in his Clywch Inquiry Report – Recommendation 21.5 Whistleblowing Policies for Schools

I reported to the Committee on 8 February progress on the implementation of the recommendations to the Welsh Assembly Government in the Clywch Inquiry report. I undertook to report further on how many whistleblowing policies are in place in schools at this meeting.

Recommendation 21.5 is that the Welsh Assembly Government should issue guidance to school governing bodies requiring them to have a whistleblowing policy in place and that all teaching and non-teaching staff should be made aware of its existence.

Whistleblowing is an employment matter and statutory responsibility for putting a whistleblowing policy in place for school staff rests with LEAs and school governing bodies. However in line with the Children's Commissioner's recommendation and to help ensure that all schools have such a policy in place, I intend issuing guidance to governing bodies with a model policy that they can adopt. My officials are currently working on such draft guidance for consultation in the spring.

In the interim, my officials have asked all local education authorities (LEAs) whether they have whistleblowing policies in place and whether these have been made available to school governing bodies. All 22 LEAs have a whistleblowing policy in place. 21 LEAs have self-contained whistleblowing policies. 1 LEA has a 'Confidential Reporting Code' within its Staff Code of Conduct. 9 LEAs have provided their policy to schools for adoption by the governing body in relation to school staff. 2 LEAs will be issuing their policies to their schools during 2006.

(B) Children's Commissioner for Wales Clywch Report – Recommendation 21.13 – Consultation on Guidance on Safeguarding Children and child Protection for Managers and Drama Teachers

Recommendation 21.13 of the Children's Commissioner's Clywch Report (a copy of the recommendation is at Annex B) identified nine areas where specific guidance should be provided in relation to the teaching of drama.

Draft guidance has been developed under the aegis of a steering group which included representatives from the education departments and regulatory authorities in Wales, Scotland, England and Northern Ireland and representatives of Estyn and the Social Services Inspectorate for Wales. The guidance issued for consultation on 10 February and closes on 7 April 2006. We are on course to issue guidance to schools, colleges and other learning providers in the summer.

This consultation has received considerable attention in the media. Unfortunately, much of it has been negative following an inaccurate article in the TES (Cymru), which claimed for instance that the proposed guidance will ban kissing in school drama productions. I can assure members that the draft guidance does not ban kissing. It does, however, reflect our stance that protecting children is a key priority for the Assembly Government.

The draft guidance encourages teachers to adopt a common sense approach, to be sensitive to learners' concerns about issues such as kissing and never to insist that any child or young person should kiss another. The guidance stresses that the safety of children and young people must always take priority over the integrity of artistic work and that "there should always be a clear rationale for the use of an explicit gesture or action, such as a kiss".

Whilst much of the London media coverage continued to give an inaccurate impression of the guidance, I was pleased to see the balanced coverage in the Western Mail and the BBC News website which emphasised that interpretation of the guidance would be a common sense issue for our teachers. I am grateful to Assembly Members, teacher union representatives and childrens organisations for robustly defending the child safety agenda. I very much hope that now that the inaccurate press coverage is out of

the way, respondents to the consultation will concentrate on the very important issues raised in the draft guidance.

Foundation Phase Implementation

In my report for our 11 January meeting I promised to keep you informed of progress with Foundation Phase. To this end you will wish to be aware that on 2 March the executive summary and recommendations from the evaluation and monitoring report on the first year of the Pilot, was published on Learning Wales/DysguCymru. A copy is attached at Annex C.

This final version of the Report confirms that there is overwhelming support for the Foundation Phase, the method of delivery and the broad and balanced curriculum that it provides.

The report also highlights the work that lies ahead if we are to get this right – much of that work is already in hand. Work has started on preparing a workforce plan that will detail the staffing, training and qualifications needed to deliver the Foundation Phase. ACCAC has an ongoing evaluation programme that looks at the refinements that it needs to make to the guidance and Foundation Phase Framework material available in the Pilot schools and settings. Extra funding (£220,000 this year) has been channelled to the LEAs to support training programmes. In addition, a total of £4.1 million has been made available next year for the training of early years and childcare workers and planning the introduction of Flying Start. The Early Years Capital budget is being increasingly used to develop the outdoors and prepare schools and settings for the requirements of the Foundation Phase. Indeed in January I reallocated £1.4 million capital grant, the bulk of which was being directed at preparation for the Foundation Phase.

I shall, of course, continue to keep you informed of progress.

Education of Looked After Children

In the last five years a lot has been done at national and local level to improve the education of looked after children.

Guidance on the Education of Children Looked After by Local Authorities: Circular 2/2001

We issued statutory guidance in 2001 on the education of children looked after by local authorities.

One of the main provisions of the guidance was that every looked after child had a Personal Education Plan which would ensure access to services and support, contribute to stability, minimise disruption and broken

schooling, signal particular and special needs, establish clear goals and act as a record of progress and achievement.

The PEP represents a very important source of continuity for the young people and their carers and focuses on action that is required for them to fulfil their potential.

The guidance also specified that head teachers should appoint a designated teacher to act as a resource and advocate for the looked after children and young people – accessing services and support, and ensuring that the school shares and supports high expectations for them.

Educational Attainment

At the time of the Utting report in the late 1990's, 75% of looked after children left care with no academic qualifications. Progressive improvements are being made.

The Assembly Government does not set national targets for tracking the attainment of looked after children in Wales. However, Welsh local authorities are the only ones in the UK which have to report their performance as regards the educational attainment of looked-after children each year. This is because we recognise the under-attainment of these children as a priority issue and wish to focus local attention on it. The inclusion of this measure in local authority policy agreements strengthens this.

Having said that, I accept that target-setting for this indicator is usually difficult. There are 2 reasons for this:

the low number of looked after children in each year cohort which means it is very hard to project performance on a general basis. For smaller authorities this can at best consist of assessments of the likely performance of individual children. That in turn may not be a fair reflection of the performance of the LEA in general.

The fact that the number of children in care can and does vary continuously over time. A target which reflected the set of LAC in a cohort at any point in time will be rendered less and less meaningful as children in that cohort enter and leave care.

As a result, in practice we would allow some latitude in the setting, monitoring and attainment of targets by individual local authorities. But that in no way diminishes the unique importance that I attach to this issue.

Within the policy agreement with local authorities in Wales there are indicators to promote the performance of individual children looked after at key stage SATS, GCSE and GNVQ, in particular the educational qualifications of children looked after by reference to the percentage of young people leaving care aged 16 or over:

with at least one GCSE at A* to G or General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ); and

with two or more GCSEs at A* to G or GNVQ.

Data collected from 2001-02 to 2003-04 shows that the attainment of looked after children has improved:

33% achieved at least 1 GCSE in 2001-02. This increased by 11% in 2002-03 with an achievement rate of 44%. In 2003-04 their attainment dipped slightly to 41%, however these rates will fluctuate due to the low numbers of pupils sitting examinations.

National Statistics First Release presented figures about children looked after by local authorities in Wales. Data covered the year 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004 or the position at 31 March 2004.

local authorities were in touch with 70% of care leavers who had been in care on 1 April 2001 and had their 19th birthday in the year ending 31 March 2004, and 55% of these young people were in education, training or employment.

These figures are encouraging, however, I accept that the educational achievement of looked after children as a group does remain unacceptably low.

Some 40% of young people in the care system enter care between 10 and 15 years old and research shows that the majority of these are already disadvantaged. These young people have already experienced difficulties at home with disrupted education which has an effect on self-esteem, peer relationships, social and life skills. This late entry into the care system

places a challenge on local authorities' ability to improve outcomes.

Members will need to be aware that this is complex problem of long standing and is not susceptible to simple remedies. It is important to emphasise that this government appreciate the particular importance of education for the looked after child. Educational attainment is the most reliable escape from disadvantage in later life. Involvement in school life provides more than educational qualifications and improved career prospects however.

I want to emphasise that there are examples of good practice:

in Swansea a study of a cohort of 11 young people sitting GCSE's in 2004, 82% (9) achieved 2 GCSE's grade A*-G. The authority attributed the success to creating the right environment by ensuring that children remain in the same school, have help with school work at home, maintaining sustainable placements with the same carer and improved networks and relationships between agencies developed by the looked after children education co-ordinator.

A number of our early years initiatives will also have a protective effect for children in need, especially those who are at risk of becoming looked after. It is widely recognised, for example, that learning to read fluently before the age of 8 has a marked effect on a child's capacity to benefit from school. Targeted, evidence-based programmes, such as Flying Start, as well as more broadly based initiatives supported by Cymorth will all have longer term indirect effects on the educational attainment of children who come to be looked after by the local authority. I am keen to ensure that children who become looked after very young have full access to the range of the Assembly Government's early years programmes and services. There is some evidence from research in England that looked after children sometimes miss out on access to universal provision for younger children

Welsh Assembly officials have also undertaken work, action and investment in a number of ways and across Ministerial portfolios to improve support for looked after children and care leavers:

the concept and practice of corporate parenting has been promoted in guidance and through conferences and workshops. Earlier in 2005, with the WLGA, we issued guidance on corporate parenting and jointly hosted an all

Wales Conference for elected members and senior officials of local authorities to raise the importance and understanding of children's services and to promote corporate parenting responsibilities.

within the last year, the Assembly Government in partnership with the WLGA, ADSS, Local Government Data Unit and CSIW has established a Children's Commissioning Support Resource (CCSR) within the WLGA. The CCSR will develop a national cross sector database of available placements to assist local authorities in placing children and to support development of commissioning skills and collaborative commissioning. It should help local authorities tackle some of the service quality issues identified in the Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales annual report.

In recognition of the continuing difficulties faced by some local authorities, we are supporting the WLGA improvement unit to assist those authorities and to strengthen children's services across Wales.

We are supporting the implementation of the WLGA's Improvement Agency to improve leadership, capacity and build sustainability within local government. £1.2m per annum for three years from 2006/8. Priorities for the agencies include:

enhancing the climate for strong leadership and changes

supporting councils to be learning organisations

greater awareness and translation of good practice into local circumstances

better commissioning particularly in children services and integrated service delivery in the NHS

improvement in professional practice, case and performance management

provide a central support to free up local resource and provide central solution for wholesale or local use

Developing local authorities' IT capacity, to support practice and performance management through the implementation of the Integrated Children's System (ICS). All local authorities should be ICS compliant by the end of 2006. For 2005/6 around £4m will be made available to local authorities to invest in their IT systems and improve performance management.

We have established a Children and Young People's Policy Group and appointed Professor Ian Butler as Cabinet Adviser on Children's issues.

This work will help ensure that children in care have improved stability in their educational placements and receive necessary support to improve attainment levels. This is not something that can be turned around over night but I can assure you this remains a priority.

Future Action

Children will often have had substantial educational problems before entering public care. The extra support that they need to compensate for early educational disadvantage is often made more difficult to access because of:

difficulties in obtaining school places

low expectations of teachers, carers, birth families and children themselves about a child's educational potential

relative low priority being given to educational needs in the context of sometimes chaotic and distressing personal circumstances

poor co-ordination around planning for individual children

confusion over missed educational opportunities and special learning needs

inadequate information exchange on the needs of looked after children

lack of continuity in placement and consequent disruption of schooling –

broken schooling and periods out of school can lower a child's motivation, self esteem and capacity to benefit from educational opportunities

I recognise the need to give this area even greater attention and a number of these concerns are being addressed through the provisions of the Children Act 2004.

The Children Act 2004 will require local education authorities to safeguard and protect the welfare of children and co-operate with their partners in promoting the educational achievement of looked after children. School governors will also have a key role to play in promoting the educational achievement of looked after children. The duty is designed to ensure that local authorities take particular account of the education implications of every decision they take regarding the welfare of every child they are responsible for looking after.

Assembly officials will need to consider further how we can use these provisions to make the step change we want to achieve in the education of looked after children and to strengthen the role of governors in the process. With this in mind Assembly Government officials are due to establish a task group made up of key internal and external stakeholders to inform the development of a programme of work designed to promote the educational achievement of look after children and care leavers. The work programme will be informed by existing developments in other parts of the UK and good practice going on within Wales and will focus on the following areas:

strengthening arrangements for the promotion of education of looked after children using powers under the Children Act 2004

support for foster carers and social workers to help them support the educational attainment of looked after children

widening access to further and higher education for care leavers.

Over the next year we will be developing guidance on education on looked after children for schools and LEAs, separate guidance specifically for school governors as well as more general guidance for local authorities on planning arrangements.

I am considering with the Minister for Health and Social Services a package

of measures to encourage more care leavers to take up higher education. This will be on top of an extra £2m which has been made available to widen access each year from 2002/03 onwards as part of Reaching Higher, our 10 year plan to widen access to higher education. This includes targeted support for care leavers.

In respect of FE, Education Maintenance Allowances (which apply to 16-19 year olds in colleges as well as those staying on in the sixth forms) should act as an incentive to any young people from a disadvantaged background to stay on in full-time education. FE colleges, like HE institutions, also have access to financial contingency funds to assist learners with particular personal difficulties to engage in learning on a case-by-case basis. There is also the Youth Guarantee operated by Careers Wales which aims to ensure that all young people in the 16-18 'guarantee group' age range are placed into education, vocational training or employment, so long as they are registered with Careers Wales.

Regarding the general issue of the numbers recorded as being not in education, employment or training we are undertaking research to find out more about these figures and the reasons why young people might at any one time be recorded in this category. The Assembly Government is taking a number of initiatives forward to tackle the issue, including specific funding to local authorities through the Cymorth scheme, Education Maintenance Allowances (as above) and also major reform to the 14-19 learning agenda ie from September 2006 pupils will have access to a wider range of programmes leading to a much greater choice of qualifications which should recognise different ways of learning and provide greater motivation.

National Counselling Strategy for Schools – Report on Scoping Exercise

The Children Commissioner in his Clywch inquiry recommended the following:

21.29 I recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government devise a national strategy for the provision of an independent children's counselling service for children and young people in education including provision of appropriate support to children during disciplinary child protection complaints and exclusion processes within 12 months of the publication of this report. This national strategy should also consider teachers' pastoral care skills training and support and the respective roles within pastoral care of teaching staff counsellors and educational welfare staff.

The Welsh Assembly Government undertook a scoping exercise from October to December 2005 to look at what counselling is currently in place, consider its effectiveness and ascertain the views of local authorities and other parties on future provision. The views of children and young people had previously been gathered as part of a wider exercise undertaken on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government earlier in 2005 by Red Kite Consultancy.

The Report (attached at Annex D) puts forward a number of recommendations on developing a national strategy. A key recommendation is the setting-up of a multi-agency working group which will oversee the development of the national strategy. This should include representatives from education, health, social services and a voluntary organisation associated with counselling. A representative from a professional body such as The British Association of Counselling of Psychotherapy will also be invited.

The Strategy Group will be invited to recommend how the funding which has been set aside for development may be best used. There will be £200,000 for the next 3 years from 2006-07 to take forward approaches on counselling in Wales. This will enable approaches to be thoroughly tested and evaluated before rolling them out on a wider-scale.

The Main Findings and Recommendations are contained on pages 5 to 7 of the report.

The Welsh Assembly Government will be setting up the working group as quickly as possible with a view to developing the strategy by summer 2006.

We should not underestimate the challenge of developing a counselling service across Wales. The Children's Commissioner recognises this and is content with the initial work undertaken so far.

Sex and Relationships Education – Teenage Pregnancies

I promised in my report to Committee on 11 January that I would report back to you on the work that the Assembly Government is doing to tackle teenage pregnancies and provide sexual health education to young people.

Statistics

Since 2000:

Under 18s' conceptions have reduced by 6% (18% reduction since 1998)

Under 16s' conceptions have reduced by 15% (31% reduction since 1998)

In Wales the 2000 under 18 teenage conception rate was 48 per 1000 women aged 15-17 (55 in 1998), and in 2004 the rate was just over 45 per 1000 women aged 15-17.

The 2000 under 16 teenage conception rate was just under 9 per 1000 women aged 13-15 (it was nearly 11 in 1998) and in 2004 the rate was 7.5 per 1000 women aged 13-15.

This is welcome news. One of the objectives set out in the Strategic framework for promoting sexual health in Wales is a reduction of teenage conception rates.

However, I do accept that this is still relatively high, and represents a major challenge to the Welsh education system. I can assure you that I recognise this challenge and I am committed to ensuring that young people receive the necessary education on sex and relationships.

PSE Curriculum

I reported to you in November 2004 on how sexual health education is being approached in schools through the Personal and Social Education curriculum.

The sexual aspect of PSE explores the many aspects of sexuality and promotes responsible and healthy personal relationships. It includes family life, marriage, sexual behaviours, parenthood and sensitive issues such as abortion, information about growth and development, the processes of human reproduction and sexually transmitted infections.

The emotional aspect is also important in ensuring that young people examine and explore their feelings, develop self-awareness and self-respect and improve their self-esteem.

In addition to the PSE Framework the Welsh Assembly also issued a guidance circular in July 2002 on Sex and Relationships Education in Schools. This guidance advises schools on how they should develop sex and relationships education policy, teach sex and relationships education, handle sensitive issues, and work with parents and the wider community.

Health portfolio

A strategic framework for promoting sexual health was launched by the

Assembly in 2000 to tackle the high rates of teenage conception and

increasing rates of sexually transmitted diseases.

The strategy highlighted the need to ensure that young people have access to

the appropriate information - education and sexual health advice services to allow them to make positive choices about their sexual health.

Over £3 million has been invested locally to support the development of sexual health initiatives.

It is important that the Health and Education Departments within the Assembly Government work together to ensure that young people receive the advice and education that they require and I can confirm that this is happening. For example Assembly officials from both Health and Education are working together to produce teaching materials for primary schools on sex and relationships education.

YPPs

I would like to draw your attention to the Welsh Assembly Government's flagship overarching policy for all young people, "Extending Entitlement" which is co-ordinated by 22 Young People's Partnerships (YPPs) across Wales. All of the YPPs are working to put in place arrangements for young people to access support, advice and learning opportunities they need as individuals.

The YPPs are expected to deliver 10 basic entitlements for young people and provide opportunities for our young people to develop holistically into confident adults - independent, able to make choices, able to participate in the democratic process. In 2004-05 and as part of this continuing agenda, we provided funding to YPPs through a Special Grant Scheme to take forward specific multi-agency projects. They were given the choice of looking at transport issues for young people or sexual health and ways of improving advice on sexual health and focusing on action to meet need in terms of sexual health advice.

YPPs have now produced a report setting out their activities and the impact and outcome of these activities. At least 10 YPPs chose to look at sexual health.

The YPPs undertook various projects and tackled this subject in a number of different ways. However, there were some common themes:

5 YPPs identified the training of staff in varying settings as a priority;

3 YPPs introduced a condom card scheme with another 2 focusing on improving access to condoms. These schemes aim to allow young people to access advice, information and condoms. In Blaenau Gwent 819 young people joined the C-Card scheme which was available from 17 centres.

3 YPPs saw educating boys and young men on sexual health and contraception as a priority. Swansea YPP aimed to build on their specialist sexual health and general health improvement advice and guidance and to set up 1-to-1 and face-to-face confidential advice and guidance. Newport provided training to professionals to enable them to promote positive sexual health in boys and young men – to increase knowledge, skills and awareness of contraception and reproductive healthcare including the prevention of unintended fatherhood; and

3 YPPs focused on widening access to advice and support by opening new health clinics for young people. In Pembrokeshire 9 new drop-in centres were opened. This included professional health input to provide sexual health information and dispense free condoms. In the Vale they increased access to sexual health advice by opening 11 centres which are now fully functional.

YPPs also carried out other activities:

72 young people in Blaenau Gwent tried the empathy belly and 245 agreed to take part in the 'Baby think it over' programme. These were delivered to raise young peoples awareness of the difficulties of pregnancy and the demands that a baby may bring;

workshops and conferences were run for professionals and young people in Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend, and Swansea; and

web-based and text-based sexual health information services were set up by Pembrokeshire.

The YPPs were committed to improving the sexual health education of young People. This could not have been achieved without the multi-agency working between education, health professionals and the young people themselves.

Support for teenage mums

Although our priority is to reduce the numbers of teenage conceptions in

Wales we also need to recognise that those young women who do become pregnant also need support.

The Assembly Government issued a consultation document in April 2005

called Inclusion and Pupil Support. The document covers the inclusion and support of learners of compulsory school age. It provides advice and sets out responsibilities for maintaining high levels of attendance and positive behaviour in schools and the need to support pupils with additional needs to ensure they receive suitable education and avoid becoming disengaged from education.

Annex A of this document (provided at Annex E) provides advice to schools and LEAs on ensuring that young parents – including the fathers – have access to education, training and employment, to reduce their risks of long-term social exclusion. It sets out the duties of the LEAs and schools, from when they first become aware that a pupil is pregnant until that pupil returns to school after a period of maternity leave. It also provides advice on working with other agencies, education outside the school setting, childcare, home-school transport and the need to recognise the needs of the school-age father.

There are also a number of examples of good practice across Wales of units set up specifically to support young mums.

‘Young mums are us’ which is based in Swansea and was opened in 2000;

Cyfle Young Mothers Unit in Wrexham;

The Way Forward Project for young parents in Bridgend; and

the YWCA in Llanelli.

Funding of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for Teachers

At the Committee meeting on 8 February I undertook to provide details of the CPD funding for teachers and to advise the Committee of the process involved in consulting with interested parties on distribution of funds to support Better Schools Fund activities.

CPD

I am pleased to inform members that in 2005-06, over £38.5 million is being made available by the Welsh Assembly Government to support a range of CPD activities.

Of this, some £25million is the Assembly's contribution (60%) to LEAs via the Better Schools Fund, which currently includes funding for teacher induction and EPD but that members will be aware will transfer to the General Teaching Council for Wales to administer from 2006-07. A further £2million is for the individually focussed CPD programme managed on our behalf by the GTCW, £2million is available to fund Welsh language sabbaticals for teachers and practitioners under the Iaith Pawb initiative and there is £2.1million for Head teacher training, including the NPQH, PHIP and the School Leadership Modules. Other initiatives included in the total are, for example, £745,000 which is being made available to support teacher placements in industry, £81,000 for PLASC training and £200,000 for developing 14-19 learning coaches under the Learning Pathways initiative.

This leaves over £5.5 million for other CPD that can be accessed by teachers for national, LEA or individual CPD activities.

In addition to Assembly funded CPD, LEAs also make resources available to support professional development. In 2005-06, the LEA contribution to the Better Schools Fund (40%) is 2005-06 is £17.1million.

Schools can and do also use their delegated budgets to pay for staff training that they consider a priority over and above the development opportunities provided through the Assembly Government and LEAs.

Total local authority education budgets for 2005-06 (excluding ELWa for post 16 school provision) is £1.845 billion.

Better Schools Fund

The Better Schools Fund programme is drawn up in consultation with LEAs, Estyn and other stakeholders. Guidance on the use of grant including details of proposed Activity and Priority Areas is set out in an annual circular which is issued to the LEAs in draft in June. The Better Schools Fund team then holds a formal consultation meeting with all LEAs in July and, typically, LEAs are given an additional month in which to offer more detailed responses. We have also provided copies of the draft circulars to SWAP and the professional teacher associations. The final circular is issued in September.

Over the past two years, we have enhanced consultation arrangements on BSF including, in 2004, regional meetings with LEAs to discuss issues arising with the introduction of BSF and forward priorities and, in 2005, individual meetings with LEAs. We have also held separate discussions with Estyn and GTC Wales. For 2006, we will be continuing to hold one-to-one meetings with each LEA in order to provide detailed feedback on spending plans as well as to discuss future development of the programme.

Play Policy Implementation Plan

On 15 February I launched the Play Policy Implementation Plan. This builds on the Play Policy that was published in October 2002 and is the first such document published by a UK administration.

The plan was developed in partnership with the voluntary and statutory sectors, and in response to a public consultation. I should like to express my thanks to the many organisations that contributed to this work. It is founded on the right to play set out in article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and also on the recognition of the fundamental importance of access to play for children's social, emotional and physical development.

The plan sets out how our policy will be implemented. It:

- draws together existing support for play;

- sets out our future direction

- sets out a number of key actions and a timetable for delivery

- and highlights innovative practice.

The plan includes a commitment that in forthcoming statutory Children Act planning guidance, local authorities will be required to co-operate in addressing the play needs of local children and young people. This will include consideration of the need for staffed adventure play that provides children with a rich play environment to compensate for the loss of natural open space.

It examines the role of schools in creating play environments, and discusses how government can promote managed risk as an alternative to over-protection of our children.

The plan also considers how the policy contributes towards other complementary Assembly Government strategic plans.

Launch of Anti-Bullying Posters and Classroom Charters

As I'm sure you are aware, bullying takes place in all schools to some degree and there will always be a small number of young people who wish to victimise or bully another individual, for whatever reason.

Schools need to ensure that they address problems of bullying at an early stage and must have, by law, an anti-bullying policy that they follow. As you know the Assembly Government is actually assessing school anti-bullying policies to ensure that all schools have them in place. The Report, produced by Cardiff University will be issued this month.

We have to recognise that tackling bullying is not just about what schools can do to educate children and young people about respecting others and having strategies in place to tackle bullying incidents when they happen. It is also about making sure that children and young people have the information that they need, to make sure that they know what to do if they are being bullied or know of someone else who is being bullied and want to help.

That is why I launched the anti-bullying poster and classroom charter competition last October, at the beginning of our Respecting Others Week.

The competition was aimed at children and young people at primary school age and secondary school age, with separate categories run for these 2 age groups.

We were looking for posters that described - through pictures and words what bullying is and that it is wrong. This is not always easy to describe, as bullying can take many forms, it can be physical, verbal or indirect, it can be through hitting, kicking, taking belongings, name calling, insulting, or spreading nasty stories about someone – the list is not exhaustive.

The Classroom Charter needed to identify rules and/or types of behaviours that young people think that they as individuals and their peers should follow to ensure that everyone is treated with respect. It should reflect that as well as having rights they also have responsibilities to others.

I was thrilled to receive so many entries – there were 2321 posters and 141 classroom charters. In choosing the winning entries I wanted to make sure that children and young people were fully involved in the whole process. So the winning designs and runners-up were chosen by pupils and not officials. We had 3 primary schools and 2 secondary schools volunteer to set up a panel of judges - made up of pupils from the school.

Because of the sheer numbers of entries Assembly officials made an initial sift, but the finalists were judged by the school panels.

I launched the final winning posters and classroom charters on 8 March at Fitzalan High School.

The posters for primary and secondary schools have been distributed to all schools in Wales. However, we have also decided to distribute the posters much more widely than first planned. The posters will not only go to schools, they will also go to doctors surgeries, leisure centres and youth centres to ensure that as many young people see them as possible.

The classroom charters will be published on the Learning Wales website to allow schools to download and print the charters for display around their school. There will also be a template of the winning designs to allow schools to tailor the charter to the specific needs of their school.

School Teachers' Review Body

Teachers' Pay and Conditions

The 15th Report of the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) was published by the Department for Education and Skills on 5 December 2005. Following a consultation on proposals for teachers' pay increases, and further proposals for reform of teachers' pay and conditions, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills confirmed on 16 February that she would implement the recommendations of the STRB for a 2.5% pay rise for teachers in September 2006 and September 2007, and accepted proposals for further work on a number of pay-related matters.

The award covers school teachers in Wales and England who are subject to pay and conditions determined under the provisions of the Education Act 2002.

Teachers' pay and conditions of service is not a devolved area. The Department for Education and Skills is responsible for teachers' pay and conditions of service in both Wales and England.

The principal recommendations to be implemented are:

that salary levels for all teachers, including the leadership group, will increase by 2.5% from September 2006 with a further increase of 2.5% from September 2007;

that Teaching and Learning Responsibility payments (TLRs) will also increase by 2.5% in September 2006 and September 2007; and

that the Secretary of State will remit the STRB to look fundamentally at the leadership group and how its changing role and responsibilities should be reflected in its future pay structure.

In addition the Secretary of State has:

accepted the STRB recommendation on Teachers' Professional Development and Pay Progression (that the outcomes of teachers' CPD and, if appropriate, their contribution to others' development, be taken into account as part of a range of evidence when schools assess performance for pay progression purposes) and will take forward work on this

within the Rewards and Incentives Group (RIG);

confirmed spot rates for the Excellent Teacher Scheme as £35,874 from September 2006 and £36,771 from September 2007, moving to a salary range from September 2008; as well as uprating TLRs and Special Education Needs (SEN) allowances by 2.5% in 2006 and 2007 in line with the general pay award;

agreed that further work on SEN allowances taking account of specialist qualifications, unattached teachers' pay and conditions compared to other teachers, and issues in standardising part-time teachers pay should go ahead; and

accepted the STRB's recommendation on teachers' professional responsibilities and will provide preliminary advice to the STRB by the end of August, with a view to considering in detail thereafter how duties might need to change.

Membership

On 14 February the Secretary of State for Education and Skills confirmed the appointment of new members to the Board of the STRB. Two of the new members have experience of the Welsh education system:-

Dewi Jones: recently retired as Group Director of Education and Children's Services at Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council. Past Chair of the Association of Directors of Education in Wales. He has experience both at LEA level and as a primary, and secondary school teacher. He is currently working as a consultant.

Liz Kidd: until November 2005, Head of Inspection Division: Post-16 Education and Training in Estyn. Has also been a District Inspector of schools, a teacher and a local government officer. Currently involved in a range of projects concerned with improving quality in leadership and learning.

The appointments of both commenced in January 2006.

Launch of the St John Cymru – Wales Young Life Saver Scheme

On Tuesday, 7th March, I launched the St John Young Life Saver Scheme in the milling area of the Senedd.

St John Cymru – Wales have designed the Young Life Saver Scheme, which includes the Teachers'

Guides, a Website, and Visual Aids, to guide and support qualified teachers and youth workers to teach various life saving first aid skills to pupils aged 7 to 16 years.

At the launch 26 pupils from St Fagans primary school demonstrated their newly acquired first aid skills and confidently practised putting my arm in a sling. They were then awarded their Young Life Saver Certificates.