

Governor's Wales

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Evidence to the National Assembly for Wales Proposed Healthy Eating in Schools Measure Committee

1. Introduction

1.1. Governors Wales welcomes the opportunity to attend and present evidence to Committee on the proposed Healthy Eating in Schools (Wales) Measure.

1.2. The observations from Governors Wales will focus primarily on the questions noted by the Committee Chair, in addition to the comments submitted by Governors Wales on the initial consultation proposals in February 2008. (Appendix 1)

2. Summary

2.1 Governors Wales supports the need for a clear, concise policy which promotes a holistic approach towards healthy eating in maintained schools which nurtures an understanding of the importance of healthy eating. (Question 1). Governors Wales recognises however, that much is currently being undertaken to promote this approach e.g. "Appetite for Life Action Plan", which brings together and promotes a range of policies to support healthy eating for children and young people.

2.2 Governors Wales is supportive of the four changes made to the proposed Measure arising from the public consultation - (i) greater consultation, (ii) consultations prior to making Regulations, (iii) drinking water in schools and (iv) the reporting requirements on governing bodies and headteachers. Governors Wales notes that the change on the reporting requirements picks up a point made in the response from Governors Wales to the consultation. Governing bodies will be required to report on the steps taken to promote healthy eating and to comment on outcomes in their annual report to parents.

2.3 Governors Wales generally supports the duties as outlined for Welsh Ministers, headteachers, governing bodies and local education authorities to promote healthy eating in schools and the other key provisions as noted (question 2), but would like to emphasise the need to be mindful of not creating additional workload and increased bureaucratic processes. This needs to be balanced carefully.

2.4 Governors Wales agrees with the protection of the identity of pupils receiving free school meals and hopes that the introduction of an electronic system to assist with the eligibility for free school meals will encourage the take up of entitlement and will reduce bureaucracy for schools. There is anecdotal evidence that a number of children that qualify for free school meals do not do so, because of the perceived stigma. Anything that introduces anonymity to the process would be welcomed.

2.5 As far as practical implications are concerned (question 3), Governors Wales would like to see clarification on whether the activities of PTAs in selling confectionary, snacks, and drinks would be affected by the Measure. Some of these items may be "unhealthy", but they are generally sold at events outside school hours such as discos, bingo sessions, concerts, and fetes. Also they are sold to adults as well as pupils. The key point is that these sales generate revenue that is then used for the benefit of pupils in funding for school equipment etc, thereby supplementing pressured school budgets. It is not clear from clauses 1 and 7 of the Measure whether PTA activities are covered, and this needs to be considered.

2.6 It is clear from section 8 of the Explanatory Memorandum that the requirement for higher nutritional standards will increase the costs of school meals. Although the cost increase will be incremental in line with the approach being proposed for the introduction of regulations, such higher costs must be reflected in the funding provided by Welsh Assembly Government to Local Authorities, and hence to schools, where school meals funding is delegated. (Question 3)

2.7 In Governors Wales' response to the initial consultation, Governors Wales suggested that, to help ensure that progress is made on improving healthy eating in schools, it might be appropriate to require that schools produce a food policy incorporating the principles of healthy eating. This point was not taken up in the changes made to the proposed Measure. Governors Wales asks that this be reconsidered, believing that it would be helpful without being a significant additional burden on schools. Some schools already have in place a healthy eating or healthy lifestyle policy which is seen as good practice.

3. Conclusion

3.1 Governors Wales generally endorses the overall purpose and aim of the proposed Assembly Measure, in particular the holistic all school approach to healthy eating. Governors Wales, however, is mindful of the importance of guidance, support materials and additional financial resources for all parties to exercise these functions effectively.

3.2 Governors Wales looks forward to further discussion on the draft proposals in due course. The proposed Measure will build upon the examples of good practice already in place throughout Wales, bringing together existing legislation, and will assist in securing the further improvement of nutritional standards whilst at the same time providing the capacity to monitor and evaluate progress, not least to provide children and young people with the best start in life.

Appendix 1

Consultation:

Proposals for Healthy Eating in Schools Measure

Governors Wales welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposals for Healthy Eating in Schools Measure and submits the following comments:-

1. Do you think that the proposed Measure will promote a holistic "all school" approach to healthy eating? Are there any additional powers that could be included in the Measure to further promote this approach in schools?

Governors Wales endorses the concept of a holistic approach to healthy eating both in primary and secondary schools and in nurseries, as set out in the proposals.

2. The proposed Measure provides for Regulations which will specify nutritional standards to be introduced by Welsh Ministers. Do you think that this incremental approach will ensure that children, young people and parents are not alienated by the speed of the reforms?

Governors Wales supports an incremental approach; lessons do need to be learnt from the experience in England.

3. Are there any additional powers which should be added to the proposed Measure that would further improve healthy eating in schools?

The activities of PTAs selling confectionery and fizzy drinks when putting on events such as discos need to be covered. It may be that this is part of the intention of clause 7(7)(b) of the Measure.

4. Does the proposed Measure promote satisfactorily the principles of sustainable development in the provision of healthy school food?

Reference in the Measure to the principles of sustainable development appears to be rather scant.

5. Do you agree with the duties, responsibilities and reporting requirements proposed in the Measure for head teachers and governors? Will these requirements ensure that progress is made on improving healthy eating in schools?

The regulations to be produced on the duty of schools to report will need to take account of the fact that it is the governing body, not the headteacher, that is required to produce an annual report to parents on the general activities of the school, and steps to promote healthy eating should be part of that report. It may be appropriate in addition to require that schools produce a food policy incorporating the principles of healthy eating.

6. Do you think that the duties, responsibilities and reporting requirements proposed for Assembly Ministers, Local Education Authorities and the Chief Inspector of Schools are sufficient to have a positive impact on the implementation and monitoring of healthy eating in schools?

Yes, provided of course that they are conscientiously acted on!

7. There will be a financial cost as a result of the proposals in the Measure on the Welsh Assembly Government, Local Education Authorities, schools and to a lesser extent on Estyn. Will these proposals result in your organisation incurring financial costs, and if yes, what will these costs be? (please quantify).

Governors Wales will need to take account of this Measure in the advice that is formulated for governors in any publications that Governors Wales produces and in responses to issues raised by governors, but it is not feasible to anticipate the financial costs of this.