

Jeremy Miles AS/MS
Gweinidog y Gymraeg ac Addysg
Minister for Education and Welsh Language



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1168
Ein cyf/Our ref JMEWL/10854/21

Jack Sargeant MS
Chair - Petitions committee
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN
Government.Committee.Business@gov.wales

20 August 2021

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter dated of 04 August, on behalf of the Petitions Committee, regarding Petition P-06-1168 calling for the current academic year to be repeated for students across Wales in the event of a further national firebreak.

I fully appreciate how committed our educational workforce are, and how hard they have worked especially during the pandemic to support our learners and their well-being and to ensure in-school education or remote learning has been available to all. I also understand how challenging the past academic year has been for learners and their families. Let me assure you that as a Government we are determined to minimise the disruption to education, and that the progression of learners and their wellbeing is at the heart of the decisions we make, our reforms and the new curriculum.

As you will appreciate, we often need to respond to fast changing situations in relation to the transmission of the coronavirus, and we monitor the public health situation closely. It is vital that we consider and act upon the latest scientific and medical advice available to us, and the recommendations made by our Technical Advisory Group and so changes to national restrictions and school operations are considered as part of our 21-day review process. We also know the long term impact that missing school has on the well-being and development of our children and young people. It is for this reason that when firebreaks have been necessary in the past that they have been implemented during half-term breaks so as to minimise disruption to the education of pupils. Whilst I very much hope that a firebreak will not be needed in future, I cannot of course guarantee that.

On the 09 July I issued a [written statement](#) on our plan for schools and educational settings. I also wrote to head teachers and published updated [Operational Guidance](#) before the end of the summer term that provided further detail for September. We have introduced changes that are in line with the wider easing of restrictions in Wales, and we have recognised the

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Gohebiaeth.Jeremy.Miles@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Jeremy.Miles@gov.wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

need to move to a more localised approach that allows schools to be flexible and to react and respond to local circumstances and public health issues. It is our intention to publish an operational framework and supporting guidance at the start of September that enables schools and settings to tailor some of their intervention measures to reflect the level of risk identified locally and to escalate and de-escalate precautionary measures. When learners and school staff return to education establishments after the summer holiday period, schools and settings will be supported by public health officials and their local authorities to ensure they put in place COVID-19 measures that are appropriate to their own circumstances. Our approach will minimise any unnecessary future disruption to learning opportunities for pupils as far as possible.

Furthermore, the First Minister has also [announced](#) that, with effect from 7 August, all adults who have been fully-vaccinated will no longer have to self-isolate if they are identified as close contacts of someone with coronavirus. Children and young people under 18 will also be exempt from the need to self-isolate if they are also identified as close contacts of a positive case.

You will also be pleased to know that in June I published our [Renew and Reform Plan](#), this Government's response to the impacts of the pandemic on learning. The plan confirms our commitment to invest in the foundations of learning, including learner well-being; supporting learners to make the progress they need; and supporting teaching practitioners. It sets out how we will target £150m of agreed funding in the 2021-22 financial year to support learners and practitioners.

We will focus on providing support for all learners, with bespoke packages of support for those most affected by the disruptions of the pandemic to meet their different needs - that includes helping post-16 learners to progress to the next steps of their journey; providing the foundations that enable our most vulnerable and disadvantaged learners to achieve their potential; and supporting crucial development in early years learners. The distribution of these resources will remain dependent on local need with bespoke interventions too, and we are seeking to maximise their impact and recognise and respond to the wide variety of experiences learners have had over the pandemic period.

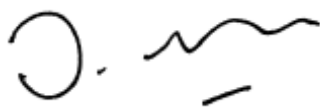
The Welsh Government has provided over £370m in support for schools, colleges and settings since the beginning of the pandemic. Furthermore, we have recruited over 1,800 full-time equivalent staff, increasing capacity to help meet the challenges of the last year through our Recruit, Recover and Raise Standards Programme. For post-16 learners, the funding allocated for catch-up learning in 2020/21 allowed for an additional 32 hours (or 5%) delivery per learner, although schools and colleges were given flexibility to focus that support on learners that needed it the most.

I have been clear that there will be a renewed focus on tackling the attainment gap and supporting young people's aspirations, as we cannot allow the pandemic to narrow their aspirations. By enabling schools to support the social, emotional, physical and mental well-being of all children and young people, we will, in turn, them to re-engage with learning and education and help them to reach their full potential. We also aim to build on the good work which provides extra experiences and activities that support learner well-being, increases their social and cultural capital and provides extra support for learning.

We continue to be in a very dynamic situation with the operation of schools; decisions need to be considered alongside wider Government discussions, such as the new rules on self-isolation and firebreaks. However, I assure you that we continue to work closely with our partners, and have put measures in place such as reduced administrative burdens on schools, a more individualised approach to supporting learners, and the postponement of Estyn inspections, to enable our schools to have the space, resources and the support they

need to look ahead. There is no plan to repeat the academic year - we need to move forward.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'J' followed by a series of wavy lines and a short horizontal stroke at the end.

Jeremy Miles AS/MS

Gweinidog y Gymraeg ac Addysg

Minister for Education and Welsh Language