



Eich cyf/Your ref: P-06-1342
Ein cyf/Our ref: JMEWL/00882/23

Jack Sargeant MS
Chair - Petitions committee
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9 June 2023

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter of 18 May regarding issues raised in a petition received by the Petitions Committee from Stevie Pyne.

Equity and inclusion are at the heart of the reforms the Welsh Government is making to the education system in Wales and we are committed to delivering a system where individual needs are identified early, addressed quickly and all learners are supported to reach their potential.

Our education reforms include changing the Curriculum in Wales and introducing a new system to support learners with Additional Learning Needs (ALN). The [Curriculum for Wales](#) has been designed to raise the aspirations for all learners, including those with ALN. It sees every learner as an individual with different strengths and areas for development, who may progress in different ways and at different paces. The 'Enabling Learning' section of the Curriculum for Wales guidance in particular supports practitioners working with learners with ALN. Key to this is guidance on the five development pathways which ensure learners are supported to make progress at their own pace and in their preferred learning environment.

Alongside Curriculum reform we are phasing in a new ALN system which is gradually replacing the special educational needs (SEN) system. Early identification, intervention and prevention is a key aim of the ALN system which changes both the legal framework, and practices to support children and young people so their needs are met in a more timely way. The ALN and Education Tribunal Act and ALN Code for Wales will help ensure that learners aged 0-25 who require additional support to meet an ALN have their support properly planned for and protected in a single statutory plan called an Individual Development Plan (IDP). The Act and Code also ensure the views, wishes and feelings of the child and their parents are heard.

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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.

To support implementation and delivery of the ALN system, we have developed training programmes and professional learning for teachers. This includes an online ALN professional learning programme for ALN Co-ordinators (ALNCos) in schools who have a strategic role and provide teachers with professional advice and support on ALN. [Guidance](#) on the new system and on parents' rights is also available for practitioners, parents, children and young people.

We have received positive feedback regarding the ALN system, particularly regarding the person-centred approach, and this year we have nearly doubled the funding available to schools and local authorities to support implementation of ALN reform. As well as monitoring how implementation is progressing, we are working closely with partners to help ensure all learners continue to have access to the support they need during the implementation phase.

Moving children and young people to the ALN system in a way that maximises the benefits is a significant undertaking. In March this year, we extended the implementation period of the ALN Act from three to four years to respond to workload pressures, create more flexibility, and protect quality of practice, plans and provision that meets the needs of learners.

We also recognise the increased workload placed on ALNCos during the implementation phase and have increased ALN funding to schools this year, to ensure schools can provide sufficient support to their ALNCos. Two task and finish groups have also been established to review and provide recommendations on ALNCo pay and non-contact time, and to look into issues relating to Teaching Assistants, including workload and responsibilities and a move towards common pay scales across Wales. Both groups will have reported by December 2023.

Regarding funding, the Welsh Government funds local authorities via the Revenue Support Grant, which is set out annually in the [Final Local Government Revenue and Capital Settlement. The settlement for 2023-24](#) (the Settlement) can be found [here](#). This funding is un-hypothecated and once distributed local authorities are responsible for setting budgets for their schools and the local provision they support. As part of their role in ensuring that needs are matched by appropriate provision, all local authorities are expected to ensure that their school funding arrangements are effective in supporting and raising the achievement of all learners with ALN.

In addition, over £62 million of revenue grant funding has been invested between 2020 and 2023 and we increased the ALN implementation grant by £5.4m across Wales for 2023-24. This additional grant is intended to increase the resources for schools to implement the ALN system and lead whole-school strategies to embed inclusive education.

Regarding ALN provision, local authorities have a duty to ensure suitable education provision for children and young people in their area, including those with ALN. Under the ALN and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act, they also have a duty to keep their arrangements for children and young people with ALN, and those of their maintained schools, under review. This review is a key part of local strategic planning and decision making and will enable local authorities to assess current and likely future needs and secure sufficient provision and services to meet those needs. Further information about this duty is available at Chapter 7 of the [ALN Code for Wales](#).

The Welsh Government makes a significant investment in the school estate across Wales and the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme represents the largest investment in our education estate since the 1960s. We are currently in our second wave of

funding, which started in 2019, and will see £2.3 billion investment. The Programme has played a major role in improving education infrastructure across Wales, including new special school and specialist resource base provision in some areas. It is taken forward in collaboration with delivery partners in local authorities and further education institutions. As local authorities have the best knowledge of what is needed in their area, they set the priorities for investment and the pace of delivery of those projects.

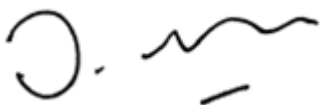
In addition to this programme, we made an additional £20 million available in 2022 to local authorities to support the improvement or creation of inclusive spaces and facilities to ensure all learners are taught in classrooms and spaces with the technologies and facilities they need.

We know that schools are facing an unprecedented on-going demand to cater for a much wider than usual range of need across all age groups, particularly in relation to social and emotional well-being of learners, and in some areas the current increased demand for specialist placements exceeds current capacity. We have been able to maintain a £9.1 million local authorities grant for 2023-2024 and 2024-25 to respond to additional pressures and social and emotional issues of ALN learners. However, we are of the view that the only sustainable way of responding to rising demand and the multifaceted nature of mental health support is to ensure prevention and early intervention, coupled with good universal support and good access to specialised services which is why we are adopting a whole system approach to service provision in Wales.

We have developed the [NYTH/NEST Framework](#) as a planning tool for Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs) to implement a Whole System Approach in their areas. We have recently appointed a NEST Implementation Lead who is working across Government, with RPB's and external stakeholders to embed NYTH/NEST in children and young people policy. This compliments our whole school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing and the statutory guidance we published in March 2021. We provided £12.2 million funding in 2022-23 to support schools to embed the guidance and develop a school ethos with wellbeing at its heart. Funding has been used to appoint implementation coordinators embedded within the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes; implement a range of universal and targeted wellbeing interventions in schools; train teachers and other school staff on wellbeing; and ensure all-Wales coverage of the CAMHS school in-reach service, which sees dedicated mental health practitioners in schools.

The reforms to the education system are challenging and will take time to embed, however, together with the sector, we are steadfast in our ambitions to deliver an inclusive education system where all children and young people can reach their full potential.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Miles', with a stylized flourish.

Jeremy Miles AS/MS

Gweinidog y Gymraeg ac Addysg
Minister for Education and Welsh Language