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ST/NA/JD
26th September 2013
Steve Thomas
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WLGA • CLILC

Petition's Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

Dear William,

National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) Cymru Petition

Thank you for your letter date 10th July requesting evidence from the WLGA on the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) Cymru's Petition. The WLGA is pleased to be able to respond to the petition.

The outcomes, wellbeing and educational attainment of all children are of paramount importance to local government in Wales demonstrated by the commitment of local authority leaders to make education their number one priority. The WLGA is committed to working with Welsh Government and local authorities to ensure that educational outcomes for all children and young people continue to improve.

Local authorities work with schools to implement the policies of Welsh Government at a local level and to work towards ensuring the needs of all learners are met. Schools must work with their partners locally, regionally and nationally to achieve this.

The skill and expertise of professionals within a school setting is essential and strong leadership is imperative. Efforts to attract the best leaders and practitioners to support deaf children, and those with additional learning needs, should be thought through as part of any strategy or policy development to support improved outcomes for these learners.

The WLGA welcomes the Welsh Government's investment in 2006-2009 of additional funding to enrol 24 teachers onto the Postgraduate Diploma for hearing impairment and visual impairment. Continued investment in qualifications and training is welcomed to ensure that schools have the best teachers qualified to work with every child or young person and to meet the individual needs of deaf children and young people.

Steve Thomas CBE
Chief Executive
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It is also important for a school to promote an environment of inclusivity. The use of British Sign Language throughout a school can help to ensure that the child or young person with a hearing impairment feels an integral part of the school. The WLGA would advocate the use of BSL within a school, where appropriate, and would support a school who decided to encourage staff and pupils to learn.

The WLGA has been working closely with Welsh Government on the development of the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) reforms. The WLGA welcomes the direction of change to a more person centred approach, recognising the individual needs of every child. Local authorities across Wales have been involved in the piloting of the new approach, including the Individual Development Plan (IDP). Following the reforms parents and children should be more integral to the planning process and feel more confident in ensuring their voices are heard. The ALN reforms should have an impact on the educational outcomes of all children and young people including those with a hearing impairment.

Training for newly qualified teachers and training for all teachers includes awareness of additional learning needs, the role of the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENco) and the Individual Education Plan (IEP). It is important that ALN and specific needs of children and young people are part of all teachers training.

In addition the WLGA recognises the importance of ensuring school buildings support learning for all children and young people and are fit for purpose. The WLGA continues to support local authorities to improve the school building stock in Wales as part of the 21st Century Schools Programme. These changes include ensuring that where possible, buildings are compliant with recognised acoustic standards. This will not always be possible in older school buildings but the WLGA recognises that this is something that is important to learners with hearing impairments and, where possible, these changes should be made.

There are examples of local authorities working collectively to improve outcomes for children and young people with additional learning needs, including hearing impairment. The Gwent Hearing Impairment (HI) Service operates in Torfaen (lead authority), Caerphilly, Newport, Monmouthshire and Blaenau Gwent. The service assists all children and young people, with an identified hearing loss, to achieve their maximum potential and acquire skills for life. A child or young person may be referred via health or schools. After referral a member of the HI service team will visit the parents and the school to decide on appropriate support.

The service works directly with approximately 100 children or young people at any given time, either on a daily, weekly or termly basis, within the school. There are 14 members of staff working across the five local authorities' areas who also offer advice to schools on communication skills, language development and the management of hearing impaired children. The HI service also provides guidance and support to families.

The HI service provides deaf awareness training in schools for staff. The service can also provide radio aids and sound field amplification systems.

The WLGA supports joint working where it adds value. The skills that are needed to appropriately meet the needs of the children and young people with a hearing impairment are specialised making a regional solution, such as the Gwent HI, the most effective

approach. Services such as the Gwent HI service ensure that as many families as possible can receive the support of professionals and raise awareness within schools of the issues facing children and young people with a hearing impairment.

The Gwent HI service also collects data on children and young people with a hearing impairment. Although this can be very beneficial for the development of services, it can also be quite difficult to collect. The data collection is based on the children and young people who are supported by the services or access the services. Across the 5 local authorities this is approximately 1000 children and young people.

Furthermore, this work is underlined by a commitment to equality and a recognition of the statutory responsibilities placed on schools under the general and specific equality duties. WLGA is working with local authorities and their schools to support them in meeting these requirements which will help to develop and formalise the equality work being undertaken within a school setting. Progress on equality work should therefore help to make schools fairer and more inclusive environments where children and young people with protected characteristics are not disadvantaged.

The WLGA acknowledges that there are many challenges that deaf pupils face and that deaf pupils are currently not achieving as highly as their peers. The WLGA continues to support local authorities at a local and regional level to improve services within schools for all children and young people. Petitions such as these are vitally important in raising important issues that matter to children and young people themselves. It is important through partnership working and through reforms such as the ALN reforms that the voice of the child and young person is not lost and that the attainment gap is closed.

The WLGA would be happy to discuss this further if necessary.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Thomas', written in a cursive style.

Steve Thomas CBE
Chief Executive