



Ein cyf/Our ref: MA-P/KW/7636/16

Lynne Neagle AM
Chair of Children, Young People and Education Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

6 December 2016

Dear Lynne

Further to my letter of 30 November which covered responses to the Committee's letter following the budget scrutiny session on 10 November, as requested, I have set out below further details on the exit strategy planning of the Schools Challenge Cymru (SCC) programme. Given that each Pathways to Success school has a bespoke improvement plan, with individual exit strategies in place, I have focused on the overarching process adopted in preparation for the third year of activity.

I have previously confirmed that SCC was developed as a time-limited intervention to accelerate improvement in our most challenged schools and that funding to support the third year of the programme was identified up to March 2017. The design of the programme for the 2016/17 academic year was therefore developed in this context, with planning and subsequent implementation taking place at several levels.

Development of Pathways to Success Schools' year 3 improvement plans

In terms of the development of Pathways to Success schools' proposals for the third year, this began formally in February 2016. Each school was issued with guidance and planning templates to support the development of proposals that were primarily focused on sustainable strategies for improving:

- the quality of leadership at all levels; and
- the quality of teaching and learning.

This was with the strict condition that funding to support SCC improvement activity would only be available to 31 March 2017 and that exit strategies post-funding should be embedded in their proposals.

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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.

There then followed an 11 week planning period available to schools, during which time they worked with their Schools Challenge Cymru Adviser (SCCA) to develop their school improvement strategies. At the same time, their SCCA worked with the Schools Challenge Cymru Champions Group who supported liaison with local authorities, regional education consortia and Welsh Government as appropriate. This was to ensure that plans for improvement made best use of the funding, resources and expertise available.

Finally, each school's proposals were discussed and agreed at their Accelerated Improvement Board meetings, whose membership includes the Headteacher, Chair of Governors, a representative of the Local Authority, a Headteacher of a cluster primary, and the SCC Adviser.

Additional scrutiny of Pathways to Success Schools' year 3 improvement plans

Having had assurance that due process had been followed, and that key stakeholders had been involved in the development of improvement plans, Welsh Government officials undertook additional scrutiny of proposals on a school-by-school basis. This included robust challenge to confirm that exit strategies were in place where SCC funding was being requested, particularly where this funding was being used to support the employment of additional staff. Proposals that did not include a clear articulation of exit strategies, including how activity would contribute towards sustainable improvement in the longer term, were not considered.

Final approval of funding to Pathways to Success schools was confirmed in the 2016 summer term and included the caveat that SCC funding could only be used to support activity up to March 2017.

Implementing improvement plans and transition planning

Each Pathways to Success school's Accelerated Improvement Board continues to meet monthly, the main task being to ensure that improvement plans and exit strategies are being implemented effectively. In addition to this, work to support the continued improvement of Pathways to Success schools post-SCC has continued and includes:

- regular discussions between Welsh Government, Schools Challenge Cymru Champions and regional education consortia, to ensure a smooth transition from the programme;
- the hosting of regular Schools Challenge Cymru Champion and Adviser meetings at regional education consortia offices to share best practice and lessons learned; and
- focused discussions on specific Pathways to Success schools with individual local authorities and their consortia.

In addition to this work, I have also been in discussion with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government regarding the availability of funding following the Autumn Statement. This is with a view towards considering further, time-limited funding building on lessons learnt from the programme and how we may continue to support schools in challenging circumstances. As set out in my previous correspondence with members of the Committee, I will keep you abreast of any developments as they emerge.

I also promised to provide you with the verified GCSE results of Pathways to Success schools which I will do in due course following their publication. I will also notify the Committee when the second report of the programme's evaluation is published next year.

Yours sincerely

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

Kirsty Williams AC/AM

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education