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Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Lynne Neagle AC / AM Cadeirydd / Chair
National Assembly for Wales
Children and Young People's Committee

22 November 2017

Dear Lynne

Changes to the curriculum in Wales

Thank you for inviting me to attend the Committee on 06 December. I welcome the opportunity to update you on the progress we are making in designing the new curriculum and assessment arrangements.

I launched Education in Wales: Our national mission in September, this is our new education improvement plan and it sets out how the school system will move forward over the period 2017-21 to secure implementation of the new curriculum supported by four key enabling objectives: developing a high-quality education profession; inspirational leaders working collaboratively to raise standards; strong and inclusive schools committed to excellence, equity and well-being; and robust assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements supporting a self-improving system.

It also sets out the new timelines for introducing the new curriculum, with it being available by April 2019 for feedback; a final version published in January 2020; and used throughout Wales by September 2022.

There is a high level of support from teachers for the new curriculum and assessment arrangements. However, there was concern about the pace of change for teachers and getting schools ready for the new curriculum. This new timeline gives me the greatest assurance for realising the new curriculum, whilst still maintaining momentum and enthusiasm for education reform. The Pioneer Schools continue to be at the heart of the development process and the work achieved in close collaboration with the regional consortia, Estyn, Qualifications Wales and other Welsh and international experts.

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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.

The process

Successful Futures was clear that independent evaluation of the approach to developing the new curriculum for Wales was required. We therefore appointed Arad Research to conduct formative evaluation of the Pioneer School Model. This provides us with real-time feedback on how the Pioneer Schools model was working in practice and to provide evidence on what improvements could be made. This process evaluation has looked at a number of key themes, including: working group activity; in-school activity; communication and coordination; facilitation and decision-making; and Pioneer School support. The latest publication from the Formative Evaluation of the Pioneer Schools model: 'Paper on Strand 1 and early Strand 2 activity' by Arad and ICF Research is being published on 30th November on the Welsh Government website.

Feedback from this ongoing evaluation, together with feedback from the last CYPE Committee has helped us shape and improve the process going forward and the following measures have been taken over the past 12 months:

- A core brief for the schools. This provided all schools with clarity on the tasks that were required at each phase of work; and clear expectations for pioneer practitioners and schools – including roles and responsibilities;
- Strengthening the role of regional consortia. This included appointing regional leads for each Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE) who work alongside Welsh Government officials to develop the curriculum. Regional teams have also been appointed to drive the implementation in each region, with both pioneer and partner schools. This shared ownership of developing the new curriculum enables us to make sure that all schools are supported at a national and regional level to design the new curriculum;
- Putting in place a comprehensive process for engaging with academic expertise to give challenge and support curriculum development. Pioneer schools in each AoLE have been supported with the latest national and international evidence and expertise. A needs analysis has resulted in each AoLE group commissioning specific expertise and inviting expert speakers to develop thinking. The Camau project (a partnership between University of Glasgow and Trinity St David) is supporting work on curricular progression and assessment in every AoLE. This ensures that our approach to aligning curriculum content and assessment with learning progress is evidence based. At key points in the development process all AoLEs groups have shared latest thinking with the following expert groups for feedback:
 - Curriculum and Assessment Group;
 - Independent Advisory Group (chaired by Professor Graham Donaldson);
 - Foundation Phase expert panel;
 - National Digital and Learning Council; and
 - Literacy and Numeracy Panel.

These groups provide us with assurance on the overarching quality of the development process.

- Implemented a governance model to deliver coherence and consistency across all AoLEs. All AoLE leads from Consortia and Welsh Government meet on a monthly basis to share progress and to ensure a consistent and coherent methodology to curriculum development. In the New Year, we will establish a formal Coherence Group to consider the new curriculum in a holistic manner – ensuring consistency between AoLEs. The group will also consider the size, scale and manageability of the curriculum as a whole.

Progress: January to July

The pioneer network has been organised into working groups for each of the Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs): Expressive Arts; Health and Well-being; Humanities; Languages, Literacy and communication; Mathematics and Numeracy; and Science and Technology.

Between January and July 2017, the six AoLE groups met monthly to develop their proposals for an early structure/skeleton for each AoLE. All reported against the following outputs:

- How each AoLE promotes the four purposes;
- Scope and boundary of each AoLE;
- How best to present the various component subjects and/or strands within the AoLE; and
- A commentary on the presumed levels of specificity throughout the AoLE and reasoning behind this.

During this phase of work, the AoLE working groups have:

- Considered a wide range of evidence and examples of international curricula and taken expert input and advice;
- Set out the scope and structure of their AoLE;
- Agreed a broad structure across all AoLEs;
- Begun to develop the Key Concepts central to the AoLE; and
- Considered curricular progression in their AoLE.

The Camau project is working with each AoLE group to develop a shared understanding of curricular progression. The project explores how progression might best be described and developed in relation to the AoLEs and to investigate how progression reference points might be most helpfully identified, described and used to support learning.

We published six executive summaries in July showing the latest thinking of each group.

<http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/curriculuminwales/curriculum-for-wales-curriculum-for-life/?lang=en>

Progress: September – November

The six AoLE groups are continuing to meet monthly and they are working on the following objectives for the autumn term. Each AoLE will:

- Develop initial 'What Matters' key concepts for each AoLE; and
- Develop an example narrative of progression for one of the key concepts.
- Work undertaken by Camau will included:
- Researching and sharing key messages from international models of progression with AoLE groups; and
- Preliminary work with learners to gather evidence about their experiences and conceptual understanding of progression.

Personalised Assessments:

- Responding to the Successful Futures recommendation to develop innovative, interactive approaches to assessment, and in line with commitments in Education in Wales: Our national mission, work is proceeding to plan to begin the phasing in of adaptive personalised assessments to replace the paper-based reading and numeracy tests;
- The procedural numeracy assessments will be the first to go live in academic year 2018/19, with reading following in 2019/20 and numerical reasoning in 2020/21. Over 300 schools have volunteered and participated in the first stage of the trialling; and
- These assessments will provide detailed information on the reading and numeracy skills of individual learners and whole classes which teachers can use to plan next steps in teaching and learning. By moving online, we can take advantage of the latest technology to provide an individual assessment experience with the level of challenge tailored for each learner.

Communication and Engagement

We have an ambitious programme of reform and are conscious that we don't want to bombard the workforce with information, while at the same time needing to keep them updated on progress so that they don't feel in the dark. It is worth noting that we are still developing the new curriculum, we are in the middle of a process and there will be times when there is not much to say.

However, there has been consistent and regular communications about progress, including the roll-out of the Digital Competence Framework, through Welsh Government communications, as well as the regional consortia communication channels. The Welsh Government's channels include:

- A curriculum reform newsletter, distributed to all stakeholder groups at least once per term;
- The Curriculum for Wales Blog, which features updates, progress reports and school perspectives, usually at the rate of one new post per week. Already this year the blog has had over 16,000 visitors who have viewed over 24,000 pages; and
- The Dysg newsletter to schools, which carries the stakeholder newsletter and features links to blog items so that the wider school audience is encouraged to view progress.

These are supported by core content on the Welsh Government website and extensive social media activity.

This is complemented by conferences at least annually for Head Teachers and Deputy Heads, with content including curriculum and wider education reform. We are currently holding a round of regionally focused conferences run jointly with consortia which will focus on development and preparation for the new curriculum.

Engagement activity takes place primarily through regional consortia and the Pioneer school network, both of whom have a remit to share updates and developments within their regions and locality and to engage their partner schools in the curriculum design process.

Estyn also play a key role - for example they have run a myth busting campaign on the Digital Competence Framework.

Development of the mental health agenda in the curriculum and alignment with the T4C&Y Programme

One of the four purposes of the new curriculum is to support children and young people to become healthy, confident individuals. The four purposes are at the heart of the new curriculum and the starting point for all decisions on the development. The mental and emotional well-being of learners is therefore being considered across all the AoLEs.

The Health and Well-being AoLE will draw on subjects and themes from mental, physical and emotional well-being. To inform and support the curriculum development process, pioneers have received evidence from a range of experts across the AoLE. These have included: Public Health Wales; the Welsh Network of Healthy Schools; the Schools Health Research Network and Emma Renold, Professor of Childhood Studies at Cardiff University. As development of the AoLE progresses, the pioneers will consider evidence in psychology and neuroscience to support the development of the AoLE in respect of mental health. The pioneers very much recognise the importance of developing an AoLE which supports learners in engaging with their own mental and emotional well-being, as well as understanding the broader influences on health and well-being and the issues these raise in the context of individuals and society as a whole.

Within Welsh Government, officials have established a mechanism for engagement that spans the range of interests across health and social care. I, along with the Minister for Children and Social Care and the Minister for Social Services and Public Health, will continue to work together to maximise opportunities to improve the health and well-being of children through the development of the new curriculum.

Pioneers will also consider how the school environment supports children and young people's social, emotional, spiritual and physical health and well-being. While the new curriculum will be instrumental, developing positive health and well-being in learners is a wider issue, which is highly dependent on a whole-school approach. As such, part of the Pioneers' work in the Health and Well-being AoLE will be to identify the implications of the AoLE and wider health and well-being issues on the school as a whole.

Welsh Government officials are co-ordinating to ensure that the Pioneers are aware of the Together 4 Children and Young People Programme and how this may support and inform the development of the AoLE.

A key enabling objective within Education in Wales: Our national mission is 'strong inclusive schools committed to excellence, equity and well-being'. This enabling objective sets out how we will ensure:

- All children and young people are supported to be physically and emotionally ready to learn and have a safe environment in which to do so;
- The three tiers of the system take account of and respond to the unique challenges that individuals or groups of learners face; and
- Strengthened partnership working to improve the early childhood experiences of children and ensure a widespread understanding of the importance of the first thousand days in a child's life.

Yours sincerely

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