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Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref MA-P/KW/1398/18

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Chair of Children, Young People and Education Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
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Dear Lynne

Thank you for your letter dated 14 March following the Committee's consideration of my February update regarding the support for minority ethnic, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learners.

You raise a number of specific questions which I have addressed below:

- **How does the Welsh Government plan to monitor and evaluate the outcomes from funding in the RSG to support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic learners?**

The publication of *Education in Wales: Our national mission* sets out how we will raise standards, reduce the attainment gap and deliver an education system that is a source of national pride and confidence. It is our action plan for school education for the period 2017-21.

Our national mission, as supported by regional consortia business plans, identifies the shared responsibility and clarifies roles for delivery of our national priorities across the three tier education system in Wales, including the Welsh Government, regional consortia, Local Authorities, Estyn and schools.

Local Authorities are responsible for schools funding as is set out in law and they must ensure appropriate education provision is available for all learners. That is why after 10 years of additional grant funding to try and to test systems and approaches, minority ethnic, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learner support is now a core provision.

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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.

Welsh Government has taken difficult decisions, including reducing the education budget in order to maximise the funding to Local Government to support front line schools delivery. The prioritisation of funding to Local Government has significantly improved the position of the Settlement from the original planning assumptions authorities were expecting, to a 0.2% increase overall in 2018-19. This is outlined in the Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services' letter to the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee in November. Local Government understands the change in position from planning assumptions to Draft and Final Budget and Settlement and I welcome the assurances from Local Government that Authorities will continue to prioritise support for these groups of learners.

Each Local Authority is subject to scrutiny and inspection and answerable to its electorate, to Estyn, and to the Wales Audit Office. I have regular meetings with the WLGA Leader and with ADEW through which I engage on my priorities for education.

Each year we collect and publish information on the educational performance of these groups of learners, many of whom outperform the Wales averages; we will continue to do this and I am confident the checks and balances are in the system and that we can continue to monitor progress moving forwards.

- **How will the Welsh Government act on the Committee's recommendations which you accepted, in terms of the impact and outcomes of the EIG on these groups of learners, now the funding sits outside the EIG?**

In my previous update to the Committee I recognised the evidence presented to the Committee was wide-ranging, varied and in parts contradictory. In this context, Estyn's evidence suggested little change in the delivery of these Local Authority services when the funding arrangements changed from the previous targeted grants to the EIG.

In publishing *Education in Wales: Our national mission*, and as outlined above, I am confident working in partnership with schools, regional consortia and Local Authorities, we can continue to monitor the progress of these groups of learners.

- **Can you provide the Committee with a copy of the Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) and Equality Impact Assessment, undertaken by the Welsh Government before making the decision to change the way funding for these groups of learners is provided?**

I confirmed in my update in February that the Welsh Government has been mindful during our budget process of the requirements on Welsh Ministers under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and to have due regard to the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child. A strategic integrated impact assessment was undertaken and published along with the Draft Budget. <http://gov.wales/funding/budget/draft-budget-2018-19/?lang=en> We suggested that Authorities would also wish to undertake assessments in the context of their own budget setting processes. In the Welsh Government's Draft Budget we clearly outline that:

“each Local Authority is an autonomous, democratically-elected body, which is accountable to its electorate for the decisions it makes. Authorities have a series of statutory duties and functions and powers to provide a range of other functions and services. Each Authority must ensure that it undertakes appropriate impact assessments of any policies it implements funded through the local government settlement”.

This is important as, along with the responsibilities in law to fund schools, it is the decisions at Local Authority level which directly influence how Authorities support schools and learners, recognising these are Local Authority support services. The assessment undertaken by my officials therefore must recognise that whilst overall budget decisions impact on our service providers and the way services are delivered, the statutory responsibility and final decision rests with our delivery partners, which in this case are our Local Authorities in Wales.

- **How did the Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) and Equality Impact Assessment influence the Welsh Government's decisions when taking this decision?**

The Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment undertaken as part of the Draft Budget considered the overall budget position and the constraints under which the Welsh Government's budget is influenced through the continued UK Government commitment to austerity. As part of the budget process we took a whole-Government approach to prioritise funding to Local Government for front line schools and social services delivery.

As part of the Draft Budget process, I outlined my priorities for schools to Local Government to seek to ensure our national priorities are embedded in their planning. I welcomed the assurances Local Government provided that they would continue to prioritise support for these groups of learners, prioritise front line schools delivery, and continue to support regional school improvement arrangements.

I was mindful in my decision to reduce the EIG budget to safeguard our investment in the Foundation Phase, which accounts for a majority element of the EIG, and to manage the changes across the other areas supported through the EIG.

In agreeing £22.2 million from the EIG to support the prioritisation for Local Government over the next two years, there will be challenges across both years for all areas outside of the Foundation Phase. I am however mitigating the impact on the support for minority ethnic achievement and the education of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learners in 2018-19 through an additional investment of £7.5 million.

Movement of funding

- **Can you provide further clarity on whether the £13.1 million is being transferred to the RSG and the mechanism by which this is happening? (You state in your update that 'this' is not a grant transfer but can you confirm what 'this' means in this context?)**

I have been clear that the change in funding arrangements for minority ethnic, Gypsy Roma and Traveller learners is not a grant transfer. The budget information shows there is no formal grant transfer. The previous Minority Ethnic Achievement Grant and the Specific Grant for the Education of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learners ended in March 2015. The EIG budget has been reduced to release resources to support the prioritisation of funding for Local Government. The reduction to the EIG budget in 2018-19 is £13.1 million as part of the prioritisation to Local Government as I confirmed to the Committee during the Committee's scrutiny of the Draft Budget. In total, the Education MEG has contributed £33 million over 2018-19 and 2019-20 to the prioritisation to Local Government for front line schools and social care service delivery.

- **Can you confirm whether the £5 million you have allocated in 2018-19 for urban authorities is only available to Cardiff, Newport and Swansea and how it is being apportioned?**

Responding to calls from Local Authorities and the WLGA, I asked my officials to examine how Local Authorities were affected due to the changes of funding and the different ways the EIG and RSG are distributed, recognising there is no formal grant transfer. The WLGA did not submit a breakdown of how authorities believed they were affected. Welsh Government estimated figures showed there were particular challenges for Cardiff, Swansea and Newport.

I can therefore confirm that the £5 million will be distributed between Cardiff, Swansea and Newport.

- **What arrangements are in place to finance other local authorities' provision where they have Gypsy, Roma and Traveller or Minority Ethnic Learners? (*Whilst Cardiff, Newport and Swansea might have the largest concentrations of these groups of learners, other local authorities also provide services to these learners. It is arguably more challenging and proportionately costly to ensure quality services in areas without a 'critical mass' of learners.*)**

In prioritising funding to Local Government for front line schools and social care delivery, we must recognise the significant improvement between the original planning assumptions for the Local Government Settlement and the final overall 0.2% cash increase to the Settlement.

In terms of critical mass, in 2014 Welsh Government was clear that the then arrangements were not sustainable and that Local Authorities needed to work together to be able to manage the pressures, both financial and in any population increases, in future. This has been slow to develop, despite delivering the funding through the regional EIG arrangements. I have therefore made available an additional £2.5 million in 2018-19 to support the transition to a regional delivery approach for support services. We will work closely with Local Authorities and the Welsh Local Government Association to monitor the outcomes arising from this investment.

- **Can you provide details of how the £2.5 million allocated in 2018-19 to facilitate regional approaches will be apportioned between the four regions?**

We will direct the funding to Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham as the main demographic hub authorities for these groups of learners within each region. I expect these four authorities to work closely with all local authorities in their region regarding future arrangements to support these groups of learners. Discussions are currently underway with the four Local Authority Chief Executives concerning the proposed formula for distributing this funding and I intend to meet with the Chair of ADEW shortly to discuss this further.

- **Can you confirm that Wrexham will be the lead authority in the North Wales region (*and if it is not receiving part of the £5 million, the reasons for that decision*)?**

I intend to distribute the funding through the four largest urban authorities as the main demographic hubs for these groups of learners in each region, which, as stated above, includes Wrexham.

- **Are the £5 million and £2.5 million allocations in addition to the £13.1 million which the Welsh Government says has been made available within the RSG or does it actually constitute a £5.6 million reduction from the current level of funding? (*The Committee believes it is important to clarify this as you made a distinction during draft budget scrutiny between the £2 million 'reduction' to the EIG in 2018-19 and the 'removal' of the £13.1 million to be 'made available' in the RSG.*)**

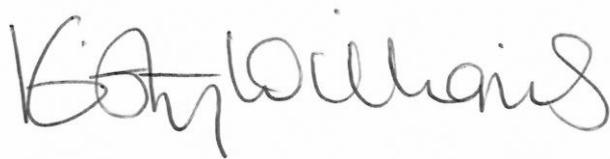
The £7.5 million in 2018-19 is additional. The Settlement is unencumbered and there is no formal grant transfer relating to the EIG. However, this is a significant improvement when comparing planning assumptions to Draft and Final Budget and Settlement. The EIG budget has contributed to this improved position, and our £7.5 million investment is in addition to the EIG budget and the Settlement agreed for 2018-19.

- **Are the £5 million and £2.5 million allocations a one-off in 2018-19? What support will be provided on a recurring basis to fund this area of provision?**

This investment is for 2018-19 only. I have written to the WLGA Leader confirming my intention to consider this as part of the budget process for 2019-20.

I hope this information reassures you that measures are in place to ensure that our Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic learners continue to receive the support they need to achieve their potential.

Yours sincerely



Kirsty Williams AC/AM

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Cabinet Secretary for Education