

Kirsty Williams AC/AM
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Our ref MA-P/KW/1398/18

Lynne Neagle AM
Chair of Children, Young People and Education Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
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11 May 2018

Dear Lynne

Thank you for your letter dated 13 April outlining your and the Committee's concerns around the ending of the School Uniform Grant.

I can reassure you that in making these challenging decisions, I have an unwavering focus on how we can collectively improve the support for disadvantaged learners and help them achieve their potential. That is why I have made clear my intention to introduce an improved scheme from September 2018, which is more flexible and relevant to the needs of disadvantaged learners. My officials are currently discussing the detail of the proposed new fund with local government and I expect to make an announcement during the coming weeks.

Your letter raised a number of specific questions which I have addressed below:

- **Whether the Welsh Government expects local authorities to continue operating a school uniform grant scheme**

In closing the School Uniform Grant, it will now be a matter for individual authorities to determine whether they wish to continue to provide school uniform support, and if so, what form that support takes. Some authorities operate broader discretionary schemes for example up to Year 11, and a number of authorities have confirmed that they will continue the Year 7 school uniform grant scheme or run similar schemes in 2018-19.

- **Whether the £700,000 annual funding has been moved to the local government Revenue Support Grant (RSG) or to central reserves (i.e. is it simply being cut?)**

The School Uniform Grant budget contributed to the prioritisation of funding to local government to support front line services such as schools. In respect of the process, a

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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.

reduction was made to hypothecated local government grants within the Education Main Expenditure Group (MEG), which included £700,000 for the School Uniform Grant. The funding was initially transferred to central reserves, and then, together with additional funding provided from reserves, allocated to the RSG to maintain the Welsh Government contribution to core local government education spend at 2017-18 levels. For presentational purposes, this would have shown as a reduction to the Education MEG, specifically the School Governance BEL, in the tables published for Draft Budget 2018-19.

- **That a Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) and Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken by the Welsh Government before deciding to end the School Uniform Grant, and how those assessments influenced the Welsh Government's decision.**

The Welsh Government has been mindful during our budget process of the requirements on Welsh Ministers to have due regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. As I set out in my letter to CYPE of 17 April 2018, 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. Whilst school uniform policy is appropriately the responsibility of school governing bodies, Welsh Government guidance is clear that costs considerations should be a priority for schools in setting their uniform and appearance policies.

- **Whether the Welsh Government expects local authorities to provide financial support from their RSG allocations to eligible families for purchasing school uniforms**

In closing the School Uniform Grant, it will now be a matter for individual authorities to determine whether they wish to continue to provide school uniform support, and if so, what form that support takes. However, school governing bodies are required to take account of Welsh Government guidance in reaching decisions on the management of their schools. Our guidance on school uniforms expects governing bodies to give high priority to the cost considerations and to consult fully with parents and pupils on any proposals to change or determine a school uniform.

No school uniform should be so expensive as to leave pupils or their families feeling unable to apply for admission or attend a particular school and our guidance provides advice on how to keep the cost of school uniform to a minimum.

- **Whether this constitutes a grant transfer (and, if so, why it is not documented as such in the 2018-19 Local Government Settlement)**

This does not constitute a grant transfer as the Budget information released with the Provisional Local Government Settlement shows.

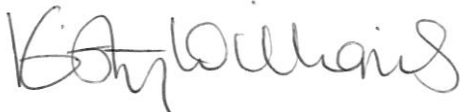
The Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services wrote to the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee in November to explain the process.

- **If the £700,000 funding for helping eligible families purchase school uniforms is now contained within the RSG, what mechanism exists to demonstrate the movement of the funding and subsequent monitoring of its use for this purpose**

I refer to the letter issued by the Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services to the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee in November, which shows the movement from the original planning assumptions to the Draft Budget position. Local Government understands the change in position from planning assumptions to Draft and Final Budget and Settlement, and the improvement must be expected to benefit all schools as Authorities draw on this improved Settlement in setting their budgets for schools.

I hope this information is helpful in addressing your and the Committee's concerns and in better understanding the process.

Yours sincerely

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

Kirsty Williams AC/AM

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Cabinet Secretary for Education

Cc Mark Drakeford AM, Cabinet Secretary for Finance