

## **Children, Young People and Education Committee**

**From:** Welsh Government

**Date:** 28 June 2018

**Time:** 09:00 – 11:00

**Title:** Scrutiny session with the Cabinet Secretary for Education

### **Introduction**

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide the Committee with an update on :
  - i. Reducing infant class sizes;
  - ii. Review of current policy of surplus places with an emphasis on rural schools and taking account of the future growth trends;
  - iii. Prioritising access to super fast broadband.
  - iv. Latest position in respect of supply teaching;
  - v. Development of the new curriculum;
  - vi. Any implications for the Education MEG from the First Supplementary Budget 2018-19.

### **Reducing infant class sizes**

2. All 22 local authorities submitted business cases for the £16m revenue element of the £36m funding to reduce infant class sizes. These were assessed to ensure they met the fundamental aim of reducing infant class sizes in schools that meet the target criteria and all proposals have now been agreed. As a result schools across Wales will benefit from 80 new teachers initially. The new teachers will be appointed to schools which have the largest classes (29 or over) and also have high levels of deprivation, special educational needs and/or where teaching and learning need to improve. Local authorities have been asked to profile their expenditure over the lifetime of the grant. The number of additional teachers will increase as further schools are targeted over the four years of the funding.
3. I recently visited Awel y Mor Primary School in Port Talbot, just one of the schools that will benefit from an additional teacher for its reception year next September. The school is a prime candidate for the grant having both high levels of pupils eligible for free school meals and/or special educational needs. The head teacher has welcomed the new funding which will enable teachers to work more closely with individual children and boost pupil standards.
4. To date, 17 local authorities have submitted bids for the £20 million capital element of the funding, in order to provide additional classroom space where reducing infant class sizes is dependent on this. Consequently, additional classroom space will potentially be created in at least 37 schools across Wales to reduce infant class sizes. The capital element of the grant is currently at its final stages of scrutiny and approval.

**The impact of current policy on surplus school places is reviewed, with emphasis on rural schools, to better take account of future growth trends.**

5. Committee will be aware that we have consulted on revisions to the School Organisation Code. This included strengthening the Code in respect of a presumption against closure of rural schools.
6. In order to have a presumption against the closure of rural schools it is necessary to define a rural school for that specific purpose. The consultation therefore sought views on the schools that should be considered rural and sought consultees views, based on local knowledge, on any other schools that should be included.
7. I am pleased to say that there has been broad support for the general direction of the proposals; however a number of respondents made the case that the definition should be wider to encompass more schools. I am minded to agree with this and extend the designation and list of rural schools.
8. Before doing so I am seeking the views of local authorities and diocesan authorities on the practicability of including these additional schools. Whilst I believe this further engagement is necessary and will assist me in making a final decision, it means a lengthier process in the laying of the Code and its coming into force.
9. I expect to publish the full summary of consultation responses before summer recess. The Code will then be updated to reflect responses, before being laid before the National Assembly for 40 days (which must not include any period in which the Assembly is in recess for more than 4 days). On this basis I expect the revised Code to be published in the autumn and to come into force before the end of the year.

**Prioritising access to super fast broadband.**

10. LiDW is an ambitious programme to improve school internet connectivity, and to roll out a range of centrally funded digital tools and resources through the Hwb platform, to all schools in Wales. To help achieve this commitment and to enable the delivery of the next steps detailed in the published Evaluation of the LiDW Programme, I announced a budget of £5m would be made available over the 2017-18 and 2018-19 financial years to allow this work to take place.
11. We have initiated the LiDW Investment in the Broadband work programme, via the Public Sector Broadband Aggregation (PSBA) network, to ensure schools have access to resilient and symmetric super-fast broadband services. Engagement with local authority and Regional Education Consortia colleagues concluded 340 schools are set to benefit from the additional investment.
12. The LiDW Investment in Broadband programme is progressing well, with delivery currently ahead of schedule. To date, 240 circuits have been completed with schools benefitting from the improved connectivity, while fibre connections have been delivered to a further 23 schools with work to complete these orders expected in the next few weeks.

13. Of the 340 schools, 81 are located in Vale of Glamorgan or Merthyr Tydfil who do not currently receive services through the PSBA network. As part of the programme, Merthyr Tydfil and Vale of Glamorgan secured approval from their respective cabinets to join the PSBA network and orders to progress their services have been placed. Once this work is complete, almost all schools across Wales will be connected to the PSBA network (there are a handful of schools who have decided to choose commercial broadband offers).
14. Eleven schools across Wales remain difficult to reach due to a lack of telecommunications infrastructure in the local area to support the delivery of adequate broadband services. Unfortunately the Superfast Cymru Programme did not reach these locations prior to the 31 December 2017 programme end date. Subsequently several teams across Welsh Government are working together with BT officers to determine what options are available to ensure these schools receive an appropriate broadband service. Orders for fibre have been placed at nine of the difficult to reach schools and discussions with BT are ongoing to explore options at the two remaining schools.
15. An agreement has been reached with the PSBA team to remove rate caps at all remaining schools. Although the vast majority of schools have adequate broadband infrastructure, this work will ensure they have access to uncontended broadband speeds to meet/exceed superfast expectations. The approach and timescales are currently being discussed to manage any impact to the PSBA network.
16. The LiDW programme has resulted in a dedicated fibre deployment to schools, meaning the infrastructure to the front door of the school is now adequate to support superfast speeds and will support the broadband targets for schools. Although the infrastructure to the school exists, the current intelligence suggests that approximately 20% of schools are without the necessary equipment e.g. router, to support the maximum bandwidth available via their connection. We are investigating a programme of work to enable these schools to reach the increased bandwidth available to them.
17. Over recent months, my officials have visited a number of schools and identified concerns regarding infrastructure in schools as well as the variance in support available to schools. Evidence would suggest the local area networks within schools are inappropriately configured, and / or ineffectively maintained to keep up with the latest technology requirements. This has resulted in schools in a position where problems are persisting in the classroom when accessing digital learning resources and services, despite having adequate broadband bandwidth and in some cases the latest classroom devices (i.e. laptops and tablets).
18. To gauge the issues and help substantiate the anecdotal evidence, we are conducting an assessment of approximately 200 school networks across Wales to provide a 'state of the nation' report on the current situation. The work is being conducted in conjunction with local authorities, given their responsibilities for managing and supporting schools. The work began in late January 2018 and is expected to be completed in July 2018 before the summer recess.

19. In December 2017 we published Education Digital Guidance for schools. The guidance will help raise awareness to schools of the importance of their local area networks, and what they need to consider prior to any financial investments in technology.

### **Supply teaching**

20. The Committee has previously undertaken an inquiry into supply teaching and I have provided regular updates. You will be aware the Supply Model Taskforce report published in February 2017 made a number of practical recommendations for supporting and developing supply teachers. Welsh Government continues to investigate with the sector alternative models for deploying and supporting a flexible workforce. The power to set teachers' pay and conditions is due to be formally transferred to Welsh Ministers in September 2018 with September 2019 being the earliest date by which a teachers' pay system would come into force in Wales. We are currently engaging with the sector on how these powers can provide opportunities to set teachers' pay to underpin our aspirations for the wider education system, to raise standards and support and develop the teaching profession including those who undertake temporary supply work.

21. Welsh Government doesn't employ teachers. Under local management of schools regulations, school governing bodies and local authorities are responsible for ensuring an effective workforce is deployed including meeting temporary cover needs. There is more work to be done in working with the sector, including employing authorities, schools and the National Procurement Service in developing a revised managed service framework for temporary workers, to develop new ways to support the effective delivery of temporary cover arrangements. £2.7m has been set aside to support a direct employment of supply teacher trial announced in October 2007. The pilot will see eighteen school based cluster projects being developed across fifteen local authority areas with the aim of trialling a more sustainable, collaborative model of working which supports the professional learning of our newly qualified teachers whilst benefitting schools and our learners. The aim of the pilot is to recruit up to fifty recently qualified teachers to work across clusters comprising over a hundred schools in Wales. The pilot will be evaluated to see if this approach offers employers a viable alternative model that could be rolled out more widely.

22. One of the enabling objectives within *Our National Mission* is "developing a high quality education profession". Key to this is the development of a national approach to career-long professional learning that builds capacity from ITE and is embedded in evidence-based research and effective collaboration. We recognise that professional learning is crucial to translating the intentions of curriculum reform into practice. When the draft curriculum is made available in April 2019, we need time to further develop our understanding of the professional learning challenges associated with implementation in schools. An initial national professional learning approach will be made available in 2018 that will stress the entitlement to professional learning for all practitioners in the system. The national approach will be fully implemented from April 2020.

23. A consultation with middle tier stakeholders on the emerging National Approach to Professional Learning is also currently underway to ensure that the approach is co-constructed and delivered in line with *Our National Mission* commitment. Our approach to monitoring the roll-out of the professional learning offer made available by the middle

tier will include ensuring that supply teachers have equality of access in relation to specific provision to support practitioners to consider the implications of the new curriculum for their future role as 'curriculum designers.'

24. Schools and agencies are responsible for the continuing professional learning of supply teachers. To support the professional development of supply teachers arrangements are in place for all supply teachers to be registered for personal access to Hwb. To date over two hundred teachers have signed up. The Hwb networking pages are also available to offer a platform for supply teachers to share resources. This is available alongside regional Consortia options to support the on-going professional learning and development to reflect Welsh education priorities. All teachers including those who work flexibly as supply or temporary teachers should be able to access support for their on-going professional development. All registered supply teachers have access to Professional Learning Passports.

### **Development of the new curriculum:**

25. At the Committee session on the new curriculum in December 2017, we gave evidence that the Pioneer network had, with the Curriculum and Assessment Group's (CAG) support, agreed on the approach to organising the knowledge, experiences and skills in the curriculum. This "What Matters" approach sets the scope and boundaries for each Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE), and Pioneers had developed draft "What Matters" statements with supporting rationales for each of the AoLEs.

26. Since January the Pioneer network has refined those "What Matters" statements based on comments from their colleagues and a wide range of expert input. They have also been working on the detail producing progression frameworks for each AoLE.

27. The new curriculum and its assessment arrangements – the Achievement Outcomes - will be built on progression; so it is important to get these right. This strand of development, therefore, is being delivered in collaboration with Camau, a partnership between Glasgow University and the University of Wales Trinity St David.

28. We have just reached the third checkpoint at which the CAG review progress on work to date and provide support for the working coming up. At the end of April/beginning of May, there was a detailed look at how the AoLEs were working on the progression frameworks, the approach to detail in each AoLE and the emerging curriculum structure. This took place over two days and was positive.

29. In line with the commitment to publish progress, updates following the last checkpoint were made available publically earlier this month.

30. The current phase of work over the summer term involves:

- Producing draft Achievement Outcomes - curriculum pioneers are using the progression framework to create these;
- Agreeing detail for the AoLEs – the curriculum pioneers are refining the essential knowledge, skills and experience needed to achieve the "What Matters" statements (and the four purposes). They are also working to ensure links and dependencies

between each of the AoLEs are identified and fed into the next stage of development; and

- Testing the “What Matters” and the progression frameworks with the digital and professional learning pioneers. They are now testing them in their schools and clusters and will feedback into the next stage of the process in early July.

31. In addition to the wide range of experts now being engaged by each AoLE, the output of this work will be further tested with the CAG over the summer period.

32. While AoLE work is now in its most intense period, we remain confident that we are on track to meet the timeframes circulated in the autumn and discussed in detail on 6 December 2017.

**Any implications for the Education MEG from the First Supplementary Budget 2018-19.**

33. You have requested details on any implications for the Education MEG from the First Supplementary Budget. Due to the timing of the First Supplementary Budget 2018-19, which is due to be published on 19 June, I am unable to provide information at this time.

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