

**P-05-821 Reintroduce educational support funding to MEAS and the TES to local authorities – Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Committee, 06.8.18**

**Neath Port Talbot Minority Ethnic Support (MEAS) Team Response to Kirsty Williams' letter to Welsh Government's Petition Committee dated 6.8.18**

In reference to the Welsh Government's *"commitment to reducing inequalities and ensuring all learners are able to achieve their potential and thrive in a learning environment which supports their needs. The Welsh Government provides significant levels of grant funding for school improvement and raising standards through our Education budgets, but the vast majority of the funding we provide for schools is directed to local government through the Local Government Settlement and we have taken action to maximise this funding through our budget approach"*

I have spent the last two years working with Consortium colleagues representing Neath Port Talbot Talbot Ethnic Minority/English as an Additional Language (EM/EAL learners) as suggested by Kirsty's letter, in the hope of creating a "more sustainable way" of supporting learners. This consortium approach has consisted of many meetings and many "workshops" in Carmarthen, taking us away from our jobs (including settling 32 Syrian children into our schools/nurseries and supporting their parents/siblings), trying to establish an agreed policy and procedures for supporting EM/EAL learners across the consortium. This working group was told by the Consortium administration that it could no longer officially meet as a recognised group over a year ago and all work previously undertaken was abandoned, whilst colleagues went off to try to maintain some support for their pupils in the wake of first the withdrawal of any grant funding for EM/EAL learners and then a drastic reduction in funding, which resulted in all NPTCBC specialist EM/EAL staff being put at risk of redundancy. It felt like the Consortium working had been a huge waste of everyone's time. Whilst we worked as a working party, the practicalities of the sheer distance travelled between authorities and within authorities and difference in our approaches to supporting our pupils were insurmountable, causing greater division rather than unity during that time. As specialist staff in our consortium authorities have left or been made redundant, there is little EM/EAL specialist capacity left for a consortium approach.

Our Local Authority approach to supporting EM/EAL learners in NPT is broad and diverse, to match the needs of over 1300 EM/EAL learners, over 500 new EM/EAL learners arriving in NPTCBC in the last 10 years. Our approach incorporates the best EM/EAL practice, based on research and experience and working with other Welsh authorities such as Newport and Denbighshire. We have a long and successful history of working with Newport, Cardiff, Denbighshire, Bridgend and Vale specialist colleagues in particular, on training and development of Good Practice, long before we were expected to develop working with consortium colleagues. We have had to be creative and resourceful as we have always received one of the lowest grants for our pupils, around £120k. We have remained sustainable because as a specialist service, we bid for grants from other funding sources outside of the council to provide the Bilingual support so desperately needed by our pupils to succeed and integrate. We even attract union funding for our own staff training (including stress management and wellbeing). Only 4 (3.4 FTE) specialist EM/EAL staff who were funded from the original MEAG grant remain since the start of this term. We have been successful as support team, because we work in partnership with Head teachers, school staff and families to ensure we meet the needs of our EM/EAL learners. Vacancies for specialist EM/EAL staff (as a consequence of being put at risk of redundancy), who can speak the same home languages as many of our learners may not be filled due to lack of funding. We put the children and schools' needs first, it is not just about our jobs. Kirsty is welcome to come and visit us any time as many others have and been overwhelmed by how much we do for so little WG funding. We are one of the few authorities to focus on the underachievement of black pupils also, especially boys, which the MEAG grant was supposed to be used for, not just EAL support, after the death of Stephen Lawrence and the recommendations of the McPherson Report. We also support our post 16 learners in transition to college ensuring they are on appropriate learning and career pathways (including university applications). At least 10 of our previously supported learners are at University or are graduating from University with degrees this Summer. We know these pupils by name, because we supported them over a number of years.

One of the main points in Kirsty's letter was a reference made to EM/EAL learners and mono-lingual children within the education system now doing as well as each other, and interventions having no real impact. The letter appears to presume that EM/EAL learners are able to attain this level of attainment and qualifications without

interventions. However, we can only test this presumption if the interventions were removed and then the learners tested. It is impossible to make such an assumption whilst interventions are still in place. If specialist EM/EAL support is removed and EM/EAL attainment declines, then the re-establishment of these services will be virtually impossible. There is no specialist EM/EAL training available in any Welsh University now. The Team Leader and Teacher Development Officers in NPT CBC have MEd and MA qualifications in teaching English as an Additional Language. Is this the risk our government wants to take on the next generation of EM/EAL learners? If we remove support/drastically reduce Local Authority support for these children, then we are in danger of losing the expertise and skills of those staff, and future generations of children will lose out, as is already the case in England.

From our experience many children from EM/EAL background do achieve outcomes which are better than their monolingual counterparts, but many of these learners have had intervention strategies put in place to achieve their successful outcomes in a much shorter time than it would take otherwise and at less cost to our Education system. For example NPTCBC have had great success with First Language GCSE, AS and A levels. **This Summer alone excellent MEAS support has ensured fantastic examination results for EM/EAL pupils such as a pupil achieving A\* in Mandarin and A\* Russian GCSE and a Polish pupil who came to us in Year 8 with no English, achieving an A in English Literature, A\* in Welsh, and A–A\* in many other GCSE subjects. Our new Syrian learners have already achieved 5 A–A\* grades at GCSE last year and two are already studying for A levels in Sciences and Mathematics. Similar results have been sustained for our MEAS supported EM/EAL learners over several years.**

**Has the WG consulted with the families and children from Ethnic Minority communities about the reduction of funding/support and made a full and thorough impact assessment?** Pupils who have received specialist EM/EAL provision would be best placed to judge the value and long term benefit of the support they have received and whether it greatly improved their academic success. As educators, we should be concerned with other aspects of achievement such as increased well-being, confidence, morale, self-belief and self-value, which are vastly improved whilst these interventions are in place.

Many learners entering the Welsh education system do not speak any English or are at risk of underachieving or becoming NEET. With our specialist intervention, we have evidence to suggest that they will be misplaced within our schools and not provided with good academic and social role models. A real danger is that we will see an increase in the number of EM/EAL pupils diagnosed with Additional Needs or becoming NEET.

Many teachers are not taught specialisms such as language development, or the skills and understanding to teach and support EM/EAL learners in their teacher training. They are often unaware of the resources to use and how to communicate and assess EM/EAL learners as a specialist would. Some Ethnic Minority Parent/Carers will not attend schools due to the fear of not being understood, therefore closing down the family-school links which are seen as such important factors, when their children are admitted into schools. Without EM/EAL specialist support and services, schools may fail many of these children. Our EM/EAL learners are often very bright and intelligent with English Language or academic language/concepts being the only barrier to their learning and achievement and yet they are often subjected to the same assessment tests as their monolingual peers, putting them at a distinct disadvantage. If EM/EAL learners are not adequately supported by excellent EM/EAL policy and practice, they will become demoralised, losing concentration and resulting in them not wishing to attend schools. They may exhibit behaviour issues in future. All of this can be prevented with maintaining practical specialist provision that we as teachers, know is the best possible chance for EM/EAL learners to succeed/attain and have equality in schools, further education, the work place and wider world. Please do not take this provision away. We are already living and working in a local authority that has considerable deprivation and must make some hard decisions about which support to prioritise over others for very vulnerable young people and their families. Please speak to the EM/EAL pupils themselves, parents and teachers, before it is too late. Wales has had EM/EAL provision to be proud of and where EM/EAL learners are proud to call themselves Welsh. We are already losing this provision but it is not too late to rethink. Thank you. **Jan Hoggan and the MEAS team, NPT CBC, on behalf of the EM/EAL learners and their families in NPTCBC**