



Eich cyf/Your ref P-04-481
Ein cyf/Our ref LA/01456/13

William Powell AM

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12 June 2013

Dear William,

Thank you for your letter of 22 May bringing to my attention the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) Cymru's Petition.

The Welsh Government is committed to meeting the educational needs of all hearing impaired learners so that they reach their full potential. As Minister for Education and Skills, I am keen to ensure that our schools are best placed to meet the need of these learners, However Local Authorities have the legal responsibility to ensure that these learners receive the suitable educational provision that is required.

I have out below the steps that the Welsh Government is taking to address the issues you have brought to my attention:

Sufficient numbers of trained professionals to support the needs of Wales' young deaf population

A mandatory qualification for Teachers of the Deaf can be obtained from the University of South Wales. The Welsh Government has worked closely with the University of South Wales to ensure this course is made available to those wanting to work with learners with sensory impairments.

From 2006-2009, the Welsh Government provided additional funding of £192,000 to enrol 24 teachers onto this Postgraduate Diploma - 12 for Hearing Impairment and 12 for Visual Impairment.

I am aware of the continued demand for this provision, and my officials are currently considering workforce planning across all Special Educational Needs (SEN), which will of course include those providing specialist services for hearing impaired children.

The Welsh Government is developing the Masters in Educational Practice which will be made available to Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs). This qualification will be delivered regionally across Wales in alliance with Cardiff, Aberystwyth and Bangor Universities. Cardiff University however will have the accreditation of the Masters. The programme will include a module on additional learning needs (ALN).

The Impact of the Additional Learning Needs Reforms

Through our plans for SEN Reform, the Welsh Government is proposing to replace the statutory framework for the assessment and planning of provision for children and young people with SEN with a simpler, more person-centred system. This approach takes account of the fact that all children and young people, including those with hearing impairment, have individual needs.

A key proposal for SEN Reform is to introduce an Individual Development Plan (IDP) planning process to replace the existing assessment system that includes statementing. Our aim is to actively involve parents and the child/young persons in the process. The IDP should improve early prevention and intervention systems and extend the age range to cover all learners from birth to their 25th birthday.

Provision Pathways are proposed for SEN reform and will be part of the consultation response document which we hope to publish before the Autumn. Further discussions with key stakeholders to develop the proposals in more detail are ongoing. A further consultation is then planned for later in 2013.

The Welsh Government is developing proposals taking place to improve transition from school to college. This issue and others will be given careful consideration as we determine how best to monitor and safeguard learner interests. The Welsh Government is assisted by a Post-16 ALN Development and Implementation Group made up of key stakeholder representatives which includes the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS).

Ensuring that educational establishments comply with acoustic standards

Working with the NDCS Cymru, the Welsh Government included, for school capital projects, the requirement that there must be a pre-completion test to demonstrate that the building is compliant with the acoustic standards as set out in Building Bulletin 93 (BB93); this will continue to be a requirement of future contracts including the 21st Century Schools programme.

The encouragement and accessibility of BSL classes

The Welsh Government recognises the important role that both teachers and their fellow pupils play in the educational and social development of hearing impaired learners. The ability to communicate affectively with others is essential. I am aware of courses available to those wishing to learn signing such as British Sign Language (BSL).

As part of the workforce planning exercise across all SEN that I have referred to, we may require a more highly skilled workforce. We will also look for examples of best practice that can be used to encourage people to undertake the appropriate training, and we will work closely with third sector organisations including the NDCS Cymru to help inform this area of work.

Improving deaf awareness with both teachers and pupils

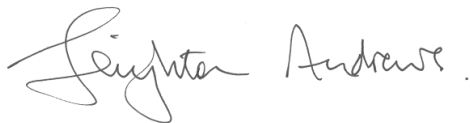
Through our proposals for SEN Reform and the wider agenda of improved professional development for teaching staff, we aim to raise awareness and understanding of SEN within the classroom. We recognise that good quality teaching will ensure that a range of teaching approaches are deployed to meet the diverse range of pupils' needs.

Another of the proposals in our consultation was to introduce training for school Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENco) in Wales. Through the SEN Reform Pilot Projects in Cardiff and Newport, work has been undertaken on defining the role of the SENco and developing an accredited course. Further discussions with key stakeholders, including the Headteacher Focus Group set up through the Pilot Projects, will develop future SENco training.

There is no specific basic deaf awareness training but all trainees and qualified teachers are aware of the legal requirements relating to SEN (ALN) and disability and the rationale for the inclusion of those with SEN and disabilities in mainstream education. This includes an understanding of the graduated framework of identification, assessment and intervention set out in the SEN Code of Practice for Wales; the kinds of provision that might be made through school action, school action plus, or through a statement of special educational needs; and the role of the class or subject teacher within this framework.

In order to seek advice, trainees and qualified teachers are aware of the role of the SENco, and how an Individual Education Plan (IEP) is used as a planning and teaching tool. They know how to access the advice they need to support the needs of learners with SEN and disabilities, and are aware of the sources of advice available to them outside school.

I hope this information is useful.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Leighton Andrews". The signature is written in a cursive style with a period at the end.

Leighton Andrews AC / AM
Y Gweinidog Addysg a Sgiliau
Minister for Education and Skills