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Date/Dyddiad:

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10<sup>th</sup> December 2013

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WLGA • CLILC

Darren Millar AM  
Chair  
Public Accounts Committee  
National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff Bay  
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Dear Darren,

### Covering Teacher Absence

Thank you for your letter dated 8<sup>th</sup> November 2013 regarding the short inquiry that the Public Accounts Committee is undertaking following the Wales Audit Office report '*Covering Teacher Absence*'. I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the inquiry.

The WLGA and local authorities in Wales are committed to ensuring that all children and young people in Wales fulfil their potential and receive high quality education. The recently published Hill Review cited the quality teaching and teachers as the most important factor in improving education services in Wales and therefore, it is essential that the quality of all teaching, including teaching undertaken to cover absence, is of the highest standard.

The WLGA has considered the '*Covering Teacher Absence*' report and although local authorities are under no statutory obligation to formally respond to the report, the WLGA is working with Councils to look at the recommendations made in the report. As part of this work WLGA have met with Welsh Government officers to discuss the report recommendations. Following this meeting local authorities across Wales have been asked to comment on the recommendations and the information received from authorities has been shared with Welsh Government to inform their response to the report. Through this work the WLGA is seeking to identify good practice within Wales with regards to covering teacher absence, including strategies to manage the use of supply teachers from private sector agencies.

Broadly the WLGA supports the principles that underpin the recommendations and agree that schools and local authorities should work to ensure that the performance of pupils is not adversely impacted upon by the use of supply teachers, or other strategies for covering teacher absence. The effective management of cover arrangements is crucial to ensuring that this happens.

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The WLGA also agrees that those teachers working on a supply basis should be well trained and of a sufficient standard to ensure that the quality of teaching in schools is maintained during a period of cover. The report recommends that cover staff could be included in the regular cycle of training available for teachers within schools. Although in some circumstances, for example cover of a long term or planned absence, this approach would be beneficial, there are many cases where this will not always be the most cost effective method of ensuring that supply staff have access to timely and relevant training. Approaches such as involvement in virtual training and PLCs (professional learning communities) may be a more effective method of training teachers that are not employed regularly in one school. The WLGA will seek to discuss these types of strategies with the Education Workforce Council once it is fully operational.

A particularly important issue raised in the report is that local authorities and schools are confident that children and young people are safe whilst in school. Schools and authorities should have effective safeguarding procedures and practices in place which include due regard for instances when teacher absence is covered by a supply teacher, or a teacher that is not directly employed by the school or local authority. The WLGA is currently working with local authority HR directors on the issue of safeguarding and the WLGA is also working closely with Welsh Government officials on the drafting of the revised guidance circular for education safeguarding. Policies and procedures covered in these documents will cover all members of the workforce who come into contact with children and young people within an education setting.

These recommendations present a number of challenges and the WLGA and local authorities are keen to continue discussing these recommendations with Welsh Government. Local authority leaders in Wales have made education their number one priority and there is a renewed focus on improving the school system in Wales. Ensuring that standards are not adversely affected by teacher absence is an essential element of the drive to improve the education system as a whole.

If you require any further information then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

**Dr Chris Llewelyn**

*Director of Lifelong Learning, Leisure and Information  
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