

Alun Davies AC/AM
Gweinidog y Gymraeg a Dysgu Gydol Oes
Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-04-628
Ein cyf/Our ref ARD/05578/16

Mike Hedges AM
Chair - Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Ty Hywel
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22 February 2017

Wne Mike,

Thank you for your letter of 21 December regarding the petition to improve access to education and services in British Sign Language (BSL).

I note the former Minister for Education and Skills, Huw Lewis, responded to this petition in March 2015 and also provided a further letter clarifying a number of points raised by DEFFO later that spring.

When taking on the role of Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language, I made it a priority to meet with organisations who support vulnerable learners. I was pleased to meet with DEFFO in September 2016 to hear first hand some of the issues hearing impaired children and their families' experience. As I assured attendees at this meeting, the Welsh Government is committed to creating an inclusive education system for all learners, regardless of their needs and background, to ensure all learners, including those with special educational needs (SEN), are able to access a high standard of education and reach their full potential.

I recognise the importance of sign language to the deaf community. BSL has been recognised by Welsh Government as a language in its own right since January 2004 and since then we have supported training to increase the number of qualified interpreters in Wales.

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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.

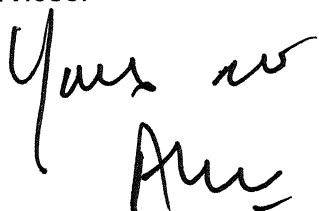
As with all educational provision, the responsibility to ensure BSL is available to a child whose needs have been identified as requiring such provision to enable them to access the curriculum rests with local authorities (LAs). Many LAs also provide training and make BSL courses available via adult learning centres. Many further education institutions also provide courses.

In response to a question in plenary on 17 January which called for supporting the creation of GCSE qualifications in British Sign Language (BSL) as a first language, the First Minister has agreed to raise the matter with Qualifications Wales. Although there is no requirement to teach BSL in schools, there are already a number of Level 1 and 2 Qualifications available for schools in Wales to deliver at Key Stage 4 and post 16, which are equivalent to GCSEs.

You will be aware that on 12 December 2016 I introduced to the National Assembly for Wales the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill. The Bill will deliver a new legislative system for supporting children and young people aged 0–25 who have additional learning needs (ALN). The new system will replace the existing legislation surrounding SEN and the assessment of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in post-16 education and training.

The proposed changes to the legislative structure are just one part of a much wider Additional Learning Needs Transformation Programme (ALN-TP). The ALN-TP aims to transform expectations, experiences and outcomes for children and young people with ALN. It is about transforming the whole system to ensure that all learners with ALN are supported to overcome barriers to learning and can achieve their full potential.

We have engaged with teachers of the deaf and are aware of pressure on LAs, including specialist teacher numbers. In partnership with the WLGA we are collecting data from Heads of Service on specialist workforce issues. This will provide us with the intelligence needed to understand the issues and actions required, including for bilingual specialist services.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yours as Alun', written in a cursive style.

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