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Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Lynne Neagle AM
Chair of the Children, Young People and Education
Committee National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
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5 December 2018

Dear Lynne,

Developing the new curriculum for Wales

I would like to thank the Children, Young People and Education Committee for the opportunity to provide an update on progress with our programme of educational reforms and introduction of the new curriculum.

Since our last formal update in December 2017 we have made good progress. I am confident that we are in a positive place, with the main design phase of the curriculum on track to complete as planned in the New Year.

I believe the way we work in partnership across the sector with schools, Higher Education, Further Education, educational experts, Estyn, Qualifications Wales, Local Authorities and regional consortia, is a key strength. It allows us to keep schools at the heart of the development work, brings together practice, evidence and policy, promotes a sense of ownership in the reform and supports sustainable change.

A transformational curriculum is at the heart of our system wide reform to education. Supporting its delivery are four essential enabling objectives to drive system change:

- Developing a high-quality education profession;
- Inspirational leaders working collaboratively to raise standards;
- Strong and inclusive schools committed to excellence, equity and well-being; and
- Robust accountability and assessment arrangements supporting a self-improving school system.

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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.

This ambitious reform will touch nearly every part of the school system and this update to the Committee includes progress across our overarching and enabling objectives, within which I also address the Committee's consultation questions.

Lastly, I would like to thank Members for engaging with some of our Pioneer schools to see the good work they are doing. I understand some visits will take place after my written update. I hope those who have been able to visit our schools have had a useful opportunity to discuss the work they are doing directly with practitioners, and for the remainder I hope you will have the opportunity to experience this soon.

1. Governance

The long term aim of the Welsh Government is to build a Wales that is prosperous and secure, healthy and active, ambitious and learning, and united and connected, as set out in our key strategy, *Prosperity for All*.

Our plan of action for education, *Education in Wales: Our national mission*, sets out how the school system will move forward over the period to 2022 with a key goal to raise standards for all, reduce the attainment gap and to deliver an educational system that is a source of national pride.

In addition to our normal engagement and consultation with key stakeholders, we have a robust Governance Framework in place to support delivery of our programme of educational reforms under our national mission and decisions made by me as Cabinet Secretary for Education. For programme level decisions, the key elements are:

Change Board – provides strategic oversight of the programme with specific focus on three key areas of reform which are the curriculum; professional learning; and accountability. The Board is responsible for ratification of decisions in respect of our national mission prior to submission for my final decision. The Board provides assurance on key issues and decisions and on matters escalated from the Delivery Board. It normally meets bi-monthly, but meetings are held more frequently if required and if necessary, decisions are made out of committee. Membership of Change Board includes senior representation from the middle tier including Local Authorities, regional consortia, Estyn, Qualifications Wales and the Education Workforce Council.

Delivery Board – manages and progresses the programme's operational business, monitors delivery and performance, ensures robust processes are followed and makes recommendations in respect of decisions to be ratified by the Change Board. It is able to escalate matters to Change Board for additional assurance. The Board identifies programme risks and suggests mitigation measures to address them. Meeting monthly, its membership includes middle tier representatives at assistant director and equivalent level.

Independent Advisory Group – chaired by Professor Donaldson, the group provides independent expert advice to Change Board, technical feedback, and functions as a critical friend. The Group has an advisory function, engaging with Senior Responsible Officers and influencing decisions, linking in with the Delivery Board.

Strategic Stakeholder Group – provides advice to the Welsh Government, engages with Change Board and Delivery Board and supports the communication of key messages, including through its representative body members. Its Children and Young People sub group has recently been re-established and set up to specifically take account of the views of children and young people in the reform journey. The sub group membership includes

representatives from a range of organisations including, the Children's Commissioner Wales, Urdd Gobaith Cymru, Children in Wales, Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team Wales, and Sport Wales.

The Welsh Government has a Programme team directly supporting the governance and management of our priorities under our national mission.

Their work includes programme planning; identification and management of risks, issues and dependencies; servicing the Boards; and facilitating the collection, collation and flow of information between components.

The Welsh Government has its own corporate arrangements for decisions on internal matters. In addition to the transformational curriculum arrangements outlined below, at a programme level, the areas of accountability, professional learning and leadership also have specific arrangements in place to manage and support the work streams. The Curriculum and Assessment Group (CAG) and the Curriculum Coherence Group operate in this context.

Curriculum and Assessment Group (CAG) – The Group's role is to inform and assist with the design of the new curriculum and assessment framework; ensure that the new curriculum remains true to the principles set out in *Successful Futures*; and to support and test the practicability of models for reform as set out in *A curriculum for Wales: a curriculum for life*. Two of its key specific tasks are to ensure the interests and requirements of external stakeholders are taken into account through the design and development process, and to provide independent evidence and confident challenge and direction to the Pioneer Schools Network.

Curriculum Coherence Group – The purpose of the Coherence Group is to bring together the leadership of every Area of Learning and Experience group together with Estyn, Qualifications Wales, the Camau project and the Consortia to ensure the curriculum and assessment arrangements are developed in a coherent manner. Meeting monthly, the Group provides the primary forum for detailed scrutiny and quality enhancement of the work of the Areas of Learning and Experience groups and makes recommendations to the Delivery Board where specific issues for decision arise.

To support the decisions on the transformational curriculum that rest with me as Cabinet Secretary for Education, I can be assured that as an expert representative group, the Coherence Group provides critical input to policy, against which the Delivery Board ensures robust processes are followed, and Change Board ensures consideration and read across with our priorities and related educational reforms. I have also reformed my monthly Ministerial Policy Board so that external stakeholders are included, offering challenge and advice on a different area of policy reform at each meeting.

Communications strategy – The key focus of our communications strategy to date has been ensuring that all schools have the opportunity to be fully informed of the latest developments in curriculum reform, and that the process is completely transparent. Over the past year this has included regular updates via our growing range of *EducationWales* digital channels including Facebook, twitter, regular updates for the *Curriculum for Wales* blog and the launch of a new *EducationWales* podcast. The use of engaging digital content including video and contributions to the blog has resulted in a steady growth of visitors and interest in the curriculum. I also undertake regular live twitter Q&A sessions which result in good engagement; the November Q&A focused on the new curriculum.

Our engagement with head teachers is crucial to the co-production of the new curriculum and to prepare them for the changes being made. During 2018 the Welsh Government and consortia jointly held conferences for primary and secondary school heads to engage them in the development of a new accountability model to support the new curriculum, and head teacher conferences in the autumn focusing on the new approach to professional learning. Raising the status of the profession is a central part of our national mission and the Professional Teaching Awards in 2018 rewarded innovation and excellence in the profession in Wales. They also succeeded in attracting a 20% increase in nominations.

As part of its ongoing work, the Committee may wish to consider some of the information published to date under the Curriculum for Wales blog (<https://curriculumforwales.gov.wales/>) and under relevant sections of the Welsh Government website's education pages (<https://beta.gov.wales/education-skills>), including issues of the Dysg newsletter (<http://learning.gov.wales/dysg-newsletters/?lang=en>).

Update – Delivery of Our National Mission

2. Transformational curriculum

In September 2017 following feedback from the profession and looking at international best practice, we revised the timetable for developing and introducing the new curriculum and assessment framework. This decision was well-received. We are on track to publish the draft curriculum in April 2019 .. The information will be presented in a single, public-facing area of the Hwb website which will allow all users to access the new curriculum and provide feedback.

In line with *Successful Futures*, the Curriculum and its assessment arrangements will be built on progression. Areas of Learning and Experience will include Achievement Outcomes; setting expectations for learners, for curriculum planning and forming the basis for assessment.

Progression Steps will be described at five points in the learning continuum, relating broadly to expectations at ages 5, 8, 11, 14 and 16. For each of the Progression Steps we will set out Achievement Outcomes, which will detail the most important aspects of learning and experiences for learners to achieve in order to securely progress in their learning.

Curriculum - The past year has been a critical and busy period in the design and development of the new curriculum. The development of Areas of Learning and Experience has reached its most intense period, with a significant amount of highly technical work. Over the past year AoLE groups have:

- developed “What Matters” statements, which are the high level key concepts for each AoLE and ways of organising learning across the curriculum;
- engaged with discipline experts to challenge and support their design work
- engaged with national and international curriculum design experts to ensure independent evidence and challenge;
- outlined the essential knowledge, skills and experience needed to achieve the “What Matters” statements and the four purposes, and worked to ensure that the links and dependencies between each of the AoLEs are identified;
- produced achievement outcomes for each progression step;

- Pioneers have been working closely with researchers at the University of Wales, Trinity St David and Glasgow University who have provided an evidence based approach as part of the CAMAU project;
- developed guidance to support schools and settings in using the new curriculum to support learning and teaching, and worked with bilingual editors to ensure the curriculum is developed in both languages.

We have published a number of updates including a key update in June this year through a special edition of Dysg to update on progress in developing the new curriculum including the learner progression model. The update can be found at the following link:

<https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKWALES/bulletins/1f930de>

I also published a written statement later in June to update on progress. The update can be found at the following link:

<https://gov.wales/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/2018/newcurriculumandassessmentarrangements/?lang=en>

As the curriculum is being developed, Pioneer schools have a key role in engaging with education professional across the whole sector to share, test, develop and improve their thinking during this design phase. These roles have been set out in a core brief that was shared with Pioneers Schools. Pioneers are currently developing guidance on how assessment will support learning in the new curriculum.

Regional consortia also have a key role in sharing progress with all schools and supporting teachers in the realisation of the new curriculum as it develops. Professional learning pioneers have begun 'sense making' the content within their schools and clusters.

Latest checkpoint - The last checkpoint for the Curriculum and Assessment Group in this phase of work was held in early November. The Group provided positive feedback on the design and development work to date. They provided detailed comments and reflections on each Area of Learning and Experience, the curriculum as a whole, and the overarching guidance. The group also discussed the potential implications of curriculum development on wider reform elements as we move towards the feedback phase in April.

Assessment Working Group – Building on the existing work to establish assessment principles for the new curriculum, in October we established a working group, made up of a number of pioneers from each AoLE along with pioneers from the Strand One Assessment and Progression steering group, Estyn and Qualifications Wales, to focus on developing the new assessment arrangements. The overall aim of the Assessment Group is to inform and assist with the design and delivery of new assessment arrangements; ensuring that they support the purposes of education as set out in Successful Futures, and that they adhere to the principle that assessment should always be proportionate to its benefits.

Our future assessment arrangements will have a renewed emphasis on assessment for learning as an essential and integral feature of learning and teaching. The central focus of assessment in the future will be to ensure all learners understand how they are performing and what they need to do next in order to progress and realise their potential.

Online Personalised Assessment – Responding to the Successful Futures recommendation to develop innovative, interactive approaches to assessment, and in line with commitments in Our National Mission, work is proceeding to begin the phasing in of

adaptive personalised assessments to replace the paper-based reading and numeracy tests.

The new assessments adjust the difficulty level of questions to suit the learner being assessed which gives teachers and schools more targeted and detailed information on their learners' performance. They also reduce the time it takes to provide this high-quality feedback, allowing learners and teachers to plan the steps they need to take in order to move forward.

The procedural numeracy assessments went live on the 5 December, with reading following in 2019/20 and numerical reasoning in 2020/21.

Legislation - We are proposing the new curriculum will be underpinned by a Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill and the White Paper for the Bill and the draft Regulatory Impact Assessment are scheduled for publication in the New Year.

Welsh - Within Our National Mission and in tandem with the development of a transformational curriculum, the Welsh Government commits to developing a transformational approach to the learning, teaching and assessment of the Welsh language with the aim of ensuring all learners will be able to use the Welsh language when they leave school.

In line with the vision of *Cymraeg 2050* and Professor Sioned Davies' recommendation, the Languages, Literacy and Communication AoLE group is working on the basis of developing one continuum for learning Welsh, English and other languages. This will be available for feedback in April 2019. We have also published the Welsh in Education: Action Plan 2017-21 setting out our plans to achieve the vision of *Cymraeg 2050* to develop a transformational curriculum to enable learners to use the Welsh language when they leave school at 16.

Foundation Phase - We have been working hard with stakeholders to ensure that the needs of our youngest learners in the current Foundation Phase curriculum are taken fully into account in the development of the new curriculum. While the new curriculum will remove artificial barriers, supporting transition through education, the developing curriculum needs to reflect the strengths that the Foundation Phase has brought to education in Wales, and reflect these through coherent and continuous education for all 3 – 16 year olds.

In recent months we have strengthened the work of the AoLEs through strong representation from the Foundation Phase, including representation from the maintained and non-maintained sector, consortia, non-maintained umbrella organisations, academia, and Pioneer schools.

We have also recruited independent expertise to review the progress of this work and to validate how well the Foundation Phase ethos, principles and pedagogy have been incorporated across the new curriculum. We are confident that we can strengthen our approach to early years education, and build on the strengths of the Foundation Phase through this work, to ensure the needs of our youngest learners are fully addressed in the new Curriculum.

Looking forward, we will begin working with partners in spring 2019 to consider how we can build on the current Foundation Phase Profile to ensure we can seamlessly align assessment arrangements in the early years with the new curriculum to support practice.

We will ensure this work is inclusive and considers the needs of our children in Flying Start settings and those with additional learning needs.

3. Developing a high-quality education profession

We believe the success of the new curriculum is dependent on our four enabling objectives. As we come to a key milestone in the design of the new curriculum the next phase of reform will focus heavily on action to ensure the teaching profession is confident and capable to deliver it.

Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership - We worked with consortium colleagues and other partners to develop the five professional standards for teaching and leadership – pedagogy, collaboration, innovation, professional learning and leadership. The new standards concentrate on the essential elements of every teacher's work. The standards are aligned with the four purposes of the curriculum and the national approach to professional learning. They contain descriptors which provide aspiration and a focus for exploration, reflection and career-long professional learning.

The standards were published in September 2017 and all new newly qualified teachers (NQTs) undertaking induction have been using these standards. Since September 2018 all teachers and leaders have been using the standards.

Welsh Government Education officials have also been working with the profession to co-construct a set of standards for all those who assist teaching, using the same model as the professional standards for teaching and leadership. The model, developed via practitioner workshops held across Wales, has been shared with consortia, Higher Level Teaching Assistant assessors, workforce unions and other stakeholders. It has also been trialled in a small number of primary, secondary and special schools and the feedback was used to arrive at the current draft standards. The draft standards were made available in the summer term and on 29 November I announced a formal consultation on the draft standards.

We have also been working closely with consortia induction leads to support the implementation of the new standards with NQTs. This has included taking a fresh look at the role of standards and mentoring in induction. The result has been a shift away from a 'checklist' approach to an emphasis on using the standards to reflect on professional experiences with the support of high quality mentoring. In order to pass induction, NQTs must demonstrate they meet all of the relevant descriptors in the standards.

We have also begun to work with consortia to increase the rigour and value of induction by formalising the induction standardisation and moderation process across Wales.

Another focus has centred on our new recruits into the teaching profession, which I acknowledge is an area identified as underperforming in the past with concerns around recruitment statistics, inspection findings and quality of graduates coming through the system. I have added rigour to the accreditation process by empowering the Education Workforce Council to accredit individual Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes. This exercise seeks to raise the standard of teacher training in line with the new professional standards and with the new national model for professional learning. Newly accredited ITE programmes will commence September 2019.

These new ITE partnerships represent the real step change required in the sector. They will design and deliver courses that support the four purposes of the new curriculum for Wales, and address the six Areas of Learning and Experience.

We are making good progress with the new part-time Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) which combines online study with tutorials and seminars, something that has the potential to make Wales a world-leader in this area. This will enable student teachers to maintain their current commitments whilst studying. In addition we are developing a new Employment Based Route, where student teachers can be employed by a school from the outset. This will be targeted to help address teaching shortages in schools across our regions and together with the new PGCE.

We require a partner of the highest quality that shares our high ambitions and vision for ITE in Wales to work with us to develop and deliver both the part-time PGCE and employment based routes. A procurement exercise is ongoing with the contract scheduled to be awarded February 2019. We expect to see the first students entering the programmes from academic year 2019/20.

To help head teachers manage their workload and focus a greater proportion of their time on teaching and learning, we are working with Local Government to provide £1.2 million over two academic years to reduce unnecessary burden through the appointment of school business managers.

Over 100 schools are being supported through the pilots. However recognising progress has been slower than desired, we also plan to launch a new workload reduction initiative in the coming months.

National Approach to Professional Learning - Our new curriculum cannot be delivered without a high-quality education workforce. That is why I have launched a National Approach to Professional Learning (NAPL) that builds capacity from initial teacher education and is embedded in evidence-based research and effective collaboration. We are expecting a profound transformation in the way our practitioners and leaders think about their professional learning in light of the new curriculum and we need to provide support to schools to enable them to make this step-change.

In November this year, I announced our single biggest investment in support for teachers as part of the NAPL. This will see £9 million in 2018-19 and £15 million in 2019-20 invested to support teachers to plan ahead for the new curriculum and minimise disruption to pupils' learning whilst prioritising the wellbeing of teachers in this significant period of change. Funding will be allocated to the frontline and will be targeted to create and release capacity at school and cluster level for structured, managed and resourced engagement with the professional learning for the new curriculum.

Our own "made in Wales" approach to professional learning is a key point in our reform journey. It pulls together our new professional standards, the *Schools as Learning Organisations* approach, and professional learning model, to create a vision fit for our evolving system. When the draft curriculum is launched in April 2019, we will further develop our understanding of the professional learning challenges associated with implementation in schools.

We are already investing in professional learning to ensure that the workforce can develop their Welsh language skills in accordance with the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership and in preparation to deliver the new curriculum. Through regional consortia, we will also encourage schools to strategically plan for improvements, to include

consideration of workforce planning, and developing a culture and ethos within schools to promote the Welsh language.

Welsh Government Education officials are currently working with the Knowledge and Analytical Services Division to implement appropriate mechanisms to monitor the impact of the emerging National Approach on the ground.

Supporting resources - The launch of the National Approach for Professional Learning during the autumn term education conferences was supported by a new animated explainer, clarifying links with wider curriculum reform, distinctive NAPL branding and an interactive Diamond 9 tool to encourage practitioners to consider immediate professional learning priorities aligned to the Approach in their own setting.

Additional bespoke resources developed to support the education conferences including 'talking heads' videos featuring lead experts and academics and Higher Education Institution research papers will be made more widely available on Hwb. Phased publication of the new resources will commence from January 2019.

Following a national pioneer event in the autumn, a series of vox pop videos were produced featuring professional learning pioneers, regional consortia professional learning leads and Higher Education partners to provide an update on the work of the pioneers and reinforce how the new Approach will support the new curriculum.

System readiness through professional learning - Immediate professional learning development needs will vary according to the school context and the specific needs of individual practitioners.

We are in the phase of the programme now where, through Critical Collaborative Professional Enquiry (CCPE) led by pioneers supported by Higher Education partners, we are drawing out the needs of practitioners, to ensure that professional learning offer in the regions is responsive to emerging requirements.

The regions will have a variety of ways of sharing the outcomes from the CCPE process as part of the Professional Learning offer, and Welsh Government Education officials will work with the regions to ensure that the relationship between pioneers (and other schools who have taken the lead) and the wider community of schools delivers for schools across the system.

The key areas of focus for the initial Professional Learning Programme will be based on what comes out of the AoLE development process, but will certainly include professional learning opportunities for all practitioners on:

- Purposes driven instead of coverage based curriculum – what changes about planning, realising and assessing learning?
- The six AoLE – moving to interdisciplinary models of teaching and learning, and exploring project based approaches;
- Moving from what matters to what we learn – realising the curriculum with local relevance and authenticity;
- The implications for practice of the pedagogic approaches proposed in Successful Futures – what changes in the classroom?
- Incorporating new content and new content relationships across all the AoLE;
- School-level curriculum making – new skills for the new approach;

- Re-thinking assessment and progression;
- Moving from big data to child-centred intelligence about pupil progress.

Consortia have a critical role in the provision of professional learning opportunities that schools can access, and which can prepare them for the realisation of the curriculum at a local and regional level. This includes the work currently being led by the curriculum and the professional learning pioneers, to the work of specialist advisers in regions and the work of challenge advisers.

Welsh Government Education officials are working closely with consortia Managing Directors and with the regional leads for professional learning to ensure that consortia adopt a consistent approach to professional learning; that they meet the quality imperatives; and that all schools have access to a consistent level of provision and support.

Engaging schools - Professional learning pioneer schools have undertaken detailed engagement work with cluster partners to consider initial professional learning implications of the new curriculum.

This work initially began during the Spring Term 2018, when the professional learning pioneers supported engagement cycles led by the CAMAU partnership to explore the emerging progression framework to support the new curriculum. Since the Autumn Term, professional learning pioneers have worked with Higher Education partners to deepen and enhance their intelligence of emerging professional learning needs through a series of enquiries. From the Spring Term, professional learning pioneers will extend their enquiry focus to work with cluster schools and the wider education network, to begin to provide the evidence basis to enhance the ongoing roll-out of the National Approach to Professional Learning.

To enable schools outside the pioneer network to actively engage in this process, enhanced cluster funding will be made available to incentivise and encourage cluster schools to become actively involved in professional learning enquiries led by the professional learning pioneers.

4. Inspirational leaders working collaboratively to raise standards

In 2014, the OECD reported that Wales should '*treat developing system leadership as a prime driver of education reform*'. We have responded positively, enhancing and developing our National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) and our new professional leadership standards for schools.

We launched the National Academy of Educational Leadership (NAEL) on 16 May this year. Now operational, the Academy is will secure, nurture and inspire leaders now and in the future. It is responsible for the development of leadership provision which includes quality assurance and supporting all leaders regardless of where they are in their careers path with a common access approach to leadership.

The Academy has already endorsed its first training programme that will benefit 150 new and acting head teachers in the first year and a further endorsement round currently on going with further plans to review and develop the endorsement process. The Academy is beginning to broaden its influence and focus, working with the wider sector including unions, Further Education and work based learning partnerships. It is also starting to look at innovative practice which can be developed.

5. Strong and inclusive schools committed to excellence, equity and well-being

We believe strongly that our learners must be supported to be emotionally and physically ready to learn in a safe and supportive environment.

In January this year, the Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal (Wales) Bill received Royal Assent, paving the way for a new approach that will drive improvement to standards and to support learners up to the age of 25 to meet their full potential. This is part of a much wider Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Transformation Programme, supported by a commitment of £20million from 2017-18 to 2020-21. These changes will not be in overnight, but through our ALN Transformation leads, we are supporting delivery partners to be ready for the new system and bring about the cultural change needed to fulfil the duties set out in the Act.

We have made good progress in helping schools address the needs of disadvantaged learners. Our independent evaluation of the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) supports this, also indicating that schools consider the funding to be invaluable. The PDG is currently at £95 million annually, rising to £97 million in 2019-20, including PDG Access. There is considerable evidence that investment which addresses barriers earlier in education has a beneficial impact on learners. We have more than doubled the Early Years PDG to the equivalent of £700 per eligible learner to reflect this.

I have announced £3 million over this year and next to support the development of a new national approach to identifying, supporting and inspiring our most able and talented learners, recognising we must do more to identify, support and stretch these groups of learners. This includes an extension of the Seren Project to inspire more learners from an early age.

In September this year the Cabinet Secretary for Health and I jointly established a Ministerial Task and Finish Group to consider how we embed a whole school approach to emotional and mental health within an integrated system approach.

The Group will have a challenging programme of work, building on progress to date and the recommendations of the Committee's *Mind Over Matter* report from April this year. In September 2017 we announced the mental health CAMHS in-reach to schools, demonstrating we are working across areas to ensure positive outcomes for learners.

Our school based Food and Fun / Bwyd a Hwyl programme was able to accommodate an offer of 2,300 places to learners across sixteen local authorities and all seven Local Health Boards, providing healthy meals, food and nutrition education, physical activity and enrichment sessions to children in areas of social deprivation during the summer holidays.

The challenges associated with the transfer to Universal Credit continue at a UK level. You will be aware that I recently issued a statement setting out that following a public consultation, I now plan to introduce an annualised net earned income threshold of £7,400 to assess the eligibility of UC claimants for Free School Meals in April 2019.

6. Robust accountability and assessment arrangements supporting a self-improving school system

Our new system must have strong accountability that drives excellence and a desire to improve. It is clear that with additional layers added over time, our current processes have become less coherent. We have committed to agree transitional evaluation arrangements

with schools and have worked across the three tiers to develop this work and share our progress.

In preparation and support of these new transitional arrangements we have introduced new interim and transitional performance measures for secondary schools; ceased publication of step one of National School Categorisation; and amended regulations to stop the publication of teacher assessment data and National Reading and Numeracy Tests data below the national level, to re-focus on assessment of the pupil.

I expect our evaluation and improvement arrangements and the first Welsh Government Education Report Card will be published soon. I am also considering the implications of the independent review of Estyn in context of our reforms.

These new evaluation and improvement arrangements will help to bring about the cultural change needed to support the implementation and realisation of the new curriculum. The arrangements are based on four key principles:

- Fair – they will promote equity, inclusion, choice, individual pathways to learning and never losing sight of the learner;
- Coherent – allowing each part of the system to work together without overlapping, with clear roles and responsibilities;
- Proportionate – ensuring that the implementation of the new system and process is manageable and makes a difference and subsidiarity allowing responsibility for accountability for schools to be local, led by self-aware schools;
- Transparent – recognising the breadth of learning experience across schools and the value added by teachers in class.

At the heart of the evaluation and improvement arrangements is robust and continuous self-evaluation for all tiers of the education system. This, along with professional dialogue will support learning and improvement, embed collaboration, build trust, drive self-improvement and raise standards for all our learners.

Evaluation and improvement arrangements will be based on self-evaluation, authentication, planning, publication of summary actions and implementation and validation. This will apply equally to schools, Local Authorities, regional consortia and Welsh Government.

Self-Evaluation – self-evaluation will drive improvement for all learners and cover their starting point, finishing point, progress, background context and potential and experiences. It will focus on the four purposes of the new curriculum; it will be a continuing process and not merely happen at a particular point in time.

Authentication – self-evaluation will need to be authenticated to ensure that it is a true and genuine reflection of strengths and areas for development.

Planning – The outcome of the self-evaluation and authentication will result in the identification of areas for improvement and the formulation of an improvement plan.

Publication of summary actions and implementation plan – A summary of the action plan will be published and implementation and support taken forward.

Validation – At all levels it will require an element of external perspective if it is to benefit from necessary challenge and not be compromised by the interests and experience of those most directly involved. Peer reviewers will provide an external perspective to support the exploration of areas for improvement. Estyn will have a role in validating a school's self-evaluation and local authority/consortia inspections will continue.

To support the self-evaluation process, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Estyn are working with practitioners to design a national self-evaluation toolkit, which will ensure coherence, criteria and a common language for self-evaluation across schools, local authorities, consortia, Estyn and the Welsh Government. This will be shared and piloted with schools in 2019.

The Welsh Government Education Report Card is based on self-evaluation of the Education Directorate and peer review from a number of systems from the Atlantic Rim Collaboratory.

We want to ensure that all children benefit from our educational reforms, which is why we have developed a national approach to small and rural schools within the self-improving school system. Our Rural Education Action Plan published in October brings together all of the actions for rural schools within our national mission into one coherent plan. This includes a new school organisation code which came into force on 1 November and introduces a presumption against the closure of rural schools. In addition we introduced a new small and rural schools grant of £2.5 million a year from 1 April 2017 to encourage innovation and support school to school working, addressing some of the key issues faced by small and rural schools.

I hope this update is useful for the Committee and look forward to discussing progress with you on in the Committee session on 10 January.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Kirsty Williams', written in a cursive style.

Kirsty Williams AC/AM

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education