



Ein cyf/Our ref MB/HL/1902/15

3 June 2015

Paul Davies AM

Dear Paul,

During Plenary Questions on 6 May, you raised the question of what additional resources the Welsh Government will be providing to students with a hearing impairment in the next academic year to ensure that they have the best possible support when studying their GCSEs.

The Welsh Government is committed to meeting the educational needs of all learners. The responsibility however to provide suitable educational provision for all children rests with local authorities (LAs).

Funding for statutory age education is provided mainly on a non-hypothecated basis through the local government settlement (Revenue Support Grant – RSG). LAs receive funding for SEN provision from the Welsh Government via the RSG. The RSG is not ring fenced as the Welsh Government considers that local authorities are best placed to judge local needs and circumstances and to fund SEN provision accordingly. Once the RSG is distributed, it is the responsibility of individual authorities to set budgets for their schools and the local provision that they support. This includes deciding upon whether additional resources are needed locally to support learners with a hearing impairment. This approach to funding is a key part of the Welsh Government's policy that local authorities are best placed to deliver services in line with the requirements and circumstances of their population, to which they are accountable for the decisions they make. In order to do this well, they need financial flexibility to judge local needs and circumstances and to decide how to allocate their resources.

Once funding is distributed it is for the headteacher and governing body of each school to decide how the school's budget should be spent, taking into account their individual needs and their circumstances.

The Welsh Government is committed to creating an inclusive education system for all learners and schools play a crucial role in today's society to ensure that this generation

and the next adopts an inclusive mind set. Our schools should accommodate for all children, regardless of their needs. My officials are in the process of updating and re-issuing guidance on "Planning to Increase Access to Schools for Disabled Pupils" which we plan to consult on in due course. This guidance highlights the statutory requirement for individual schools and Local Authorities to ensure that teaching and learning is fully accessible to all pupils, a requirement first established under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and continued under the Equality Act 2010.

The Welsh Government has also provided a grant to Constructing Excellence in Wales to review the delivery, procurement and design of schools in the 21st Century Schools and Education Programme. The work on design includes consideration on the impact of acoustics.

Wales is currently going through an ambitious education reform programme, aimed at raising standards across the board. As part of this we have recently introduced a 'new deal' to support teachers, leaders and support staff with their professional learning and this will include a focus on increasing the capability of teachers and schools to meet the learning requirement of all pupils, including those with a hearing impairment. To assist in this, I have recently published a report into the workforce development requirements for those in the general education workforce who provide support to learners with SEN. Following this, my officials have begun engaging with local authorities to identify how professional learning can be provided at a local level that will lead to improved support for learners with SEN. The report can be accessed at:

<http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/publications/reports/an-assessment-of-special-educational-needs-workforce-development-requirements/?lang=en>

As you will be aware I am seeking to introduce draft legislation on Additional Learning Needs to the National Assembly for Wales during the summer. As part of this I have been considering along with the Minister for Health and Social Services how to improve collaboration between the NHS and Local Authorities to ensure the needs of all learners, including those with hearing impairments, can be met.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Best Regards
Huw

Huw Lewis AC / AM
Y Gweinidog Addysg a Sgiliau
Minister for Education and Skills