

DP 1157 / 07 - 11

28344 - 1001

Y Gwir Anrh/Rt Hon Rhodri Morgan AC/AM
Prif Weinidog Cymru/First Minister for Wales



Ein cyf/Our ref MB-FM-686-08

Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

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10 November 2008

Dear Janet

I am writing in response to your supplementary question to Q01 Kirsty Williams OAQ(3)1350(FM) during the First Minister's Questions session of 14 October 2008. You suggest that within the next 10 years, Wales will face a shortfall of around 67 teachers who hold a mandatory qualification (MQ) to teach children who are deaf or have a hearing impairment. Further, you asked whether the Welsh Assembly Government would consider extending the current year funding for training of teachers of the deaf (ToD) to address this shortfall.

You will be aware that the Local Education Authority (LEA) are responsible for ensuring that appropriate provision for the continuing education and training of teachers is made available. Teachers who wish to specialise in teaching children and young people with visual, hearing or multi-sensory impairments are required by regulations to obtain a specialist qualification known as a MQ.

In 2003 and 2004 the Welsh Assembly Government conducted audits of educational provision for those with hearing impairment, visual impairment and multi-sensory impairment (deaf blindness). The results of the audit suggested that there was disparity across Wales with regard to policies for intervention and levels of support available to children and young people with sensory impairments.

As a result, in 2005, the Welsh Assembly Government published quality standards for educational services for children and young people with hearing, visual or multi-sensory impairment, which were developed specifically to aid consistency of approach. The standards are used as benchmarks against which services provided can be evaluated. The quality standards have been approved by Estyn, particularly as a self-evaluation tool for use by LEAs. It is proposed to externally evaluate the use of the standards later in 2009/2010.

Furthermore, as a result of the audit, we became aware, as you have also pointed out, that a large proportion of teachers who, at the time, were holding the MQ for teaching pupils with sensory impairment, would be of retirement age within the next ten years - hence the requirement to train additional teachers to meet pupils' needs. The Welsh Assembly Government recognised the need to help raise awareness of this issue and in 2005 published the 'Springboard to Specialism' leaflet. This leaflet aimed to explain the role of the specialist teacher for pupils with sensory impairment, how to train to become one and where to obtain further information. The Springboard to Specialism leaflet was

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distributed widely to all schools, LEA support services, higher education institutes and the voluntary sector.

In addition to this, the Welsh Assembly Government has worked in partnership with the University of Wales, Newport to ensure that new MQ courses are available for teachers of both the hearing impaired (HI) and the visually impaired (VI). As you highlighted to me on the 14 October, the Assembly has made money available for this training. In all, additional support totalling £192,000 has been allocated by the Assembly Government for the three academic years from September 2006. £48,000 for 2006/2007, £98,000 for 2007/2008 and £48,000 for 2008/2009.

We were particularly pleased that the HI mandatory qualification course was developed in collaboration with the Mary Hare Foundation in Berkshire, a world renowned Grammar School and centre of excellence for children and young people with hearing impairments.

Funding is also still available within the Better Schools Fund (BSF) Activity 4 to enable teachers to undertake this important specialist training.

In September 2006, 24 teachers enrolled on to the Postgraduate Diploma - 12 for HI and 12 for VI. When the current course ceases at the end of the academic year 2008/2009, it is expected that the training conducted by Newport will have boosted the workforce by 24 qualified staff.

LEAs must continue to ensure appropriate provision for training ToD is obtainable.

I trust that you find the above information useful.

Yours

Rhodri