



Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref: WQ82605

Mike Hedges MS
Member of the Senedd for Swansea East

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25 June 2021

Dear Mike

Thank you for your recent Written Question asking whether a Ministerial inquiry will be established on referrals made by schools relating to identifying possible additional learning needs in pupils. I can confirm there is no intention to establish a Ministerial inquiry on referrals made by schools for learners who may have additional learning needs.

We do, however, recognise the importance of parents and their children receiving a timely diagnosis of conditions, including those related to neurodevelopment. In addition to targeting investment in improving the capacity of NHS neurodevelopment (ND) teams, we have continued to collect data against the waiting time target of 26 weeks from first referral to first face-to-face appointment. We are working with health boards to ensure the quality of the data collected and that this target is met. However, demand for support from ND teams has been higher than expected and we are aware that this has been challenging for a number of health boards.

The demand for assessment/diagnosis of neurodevelopmental conditions continues to increase. To fully understand what is affecting the ability to deliver timely and high-quality services, the Welsh Government has committed to undertaking a review of the demand, capacity, and design of ND services for children, young people and adults in Wales. This review will conclude in March 2022 and its findings will be published on the Welsh Government website.

Further, the statutory code of practice on the delivery of autism services which is due to commence in September 2021 will place duties on local authorities, health boards and NHS trusts. The code describes the arrangements for access to assessment and diagnosis services, the establishment of referral routes and assessment pathways, access to multidisciplinary/agency services and support for people referred for diagnostic assessment and their families and/or carers during this process.

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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 regards schools, local authorities have a legal responsibility to identify, assess and provide for learners with special educational needs (SEN). A medical diagnosis can help with this but it is not a pre-requisite for the provision of support for a learner with SEN. Whilst an assessment is progressing, a learner should continue to receive support for their additional learning needs. From September 2021, the SEN system will be replaced, on a phased basis, by a new Additional Learning Needs (ALN) system. The ALN system is founded on a holistic, person-centred, and needs-led approach that will put the focus on meeting the learner's needs rather than on the type of disability or learning difficulty they have.

In keeping with our aim to ensure schools across Wales are able to develop consistent plans to meet the emotional and mental health needs of their learners, we are developing professional learning modules on child development and mental health to ensure teachers are able to spot the early signs of developing problems in the classroom and know how and when to refer on to specialist services when required.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. E. Morgan'.

Eluned Morgan AS/MS

Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Minister for Health and Social Services