

Jeremy Miles MS

Minister for Education and Welsh Language

6 March 2024

Follow up from general scrutiny session

Dear Jeremy,

Thank you for giving evidence to us on 28 February 2024. At the meeting you agreed to:

- Provide further information on the attainment gap between pupils eligible for free school meals and other pupils, including why you believe the data published by the Welsh Government cannot be used to make comparisons between years;
- Look further at the Seren Network data in relation to those pupils who may not continue on the programme, to identify if there are any trends in relation to their subsequent performance and engagement with their learning;
- Provide further information on how take up of Welsh A-Level can be encouraged and increased, in particular in relation to the teaching and the content of the syllabus;
- Provide information on the research undertaken, and guidance issued, regarding how schools could provide digital, remote teaching and learning should the need for this arise again in the future;
- Confirm when you anticipate issuing the strengthened guidance on Learner Travel.
- Consider further how the work of the Attendance Taskforce can be reported back to the Senedd and / or Committee;
- Share the e-sgol participation data; and
- Share, when available, Public Health Wales' work on the whole-school approach.



You referred to the "granular detail" the Welsh Government has about performance of the school system in Wales and that you had decided to publish this on an annual basis. Could you confirm whether you were referring to the aggregated data you published in November on pupils' personalised assessments and that equivalent versions of this is what will be published annually?

As we have indicated, we are likely to do work looking at school standards in the future. The scrutiny session was helpful in starting to help shape our thinking on this potential strand of work. As part of this preparatory work, we have invited Professor Dylan E Jones to talk to us about his work as part of the ongoing review into roles and responsibilities of education partners in Wales and delivery of school improvement arrangements. He has confirmed he will be attending.

I am enclosing letters we have received from UCAC and Prospect, highlighting their concerns in particular on how the recent announcement was made regarding the next stage of Professor Jones' review.

Throughout all our recent work, there have been very clear messages from both schools and local authorities that they do not have capacity to take on any additional work. In this context, we would welcome your views on how any changes to current regional working will take into account these broader capacity and resourcing issues. Also, for those areas where regional working is the preference of schools and local authorities, will they be able to continue with arrangements, if they are shown to be working effectively?

It would be helpful if we could have your response before the session with Professor Jones, we would therefore appreciate your response no later than April 10. While acknowledging that this is less time than usual to respond, we feel it would be helpful to have this information ahead of the session with Professor Jones. If you envisage any issues with this timeframe, please let us know.

Yours sincerely,



Jayne Bryant MS
Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English

Enclosure: Letter from UCAC

Letter from Prospect

This document provides a translation of correspondence received from Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru (UCAC)



www.ucac.cymru

Jayne Bryant MS
Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee
Welsh Parliament

Via e-mail.

22 February 2024

Dear Jayne Bryant,

I am writing to you as the General Secretary of Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru (UCAC; the National Union of Teachers of Wales), a union that represents and supports not only teachers and school leaders, but also school improvement service officers.

As you know, the statement published on 31 January by Jeremy Miles, Minister for Education and the Welsh Language, refers to the new arrangements that will be implemented in relation to school improvement. As part of those arrangements, there is an expectation that local authorities will be expected to establish a partnership with at least one other authority, signifying a move away from the wider regional support model.

Those members who work for the consortia are extremely frustrated and disappointed, as there has been no formal consultation with them, as individuals, regarding any possible changes, any more than there has been with classroom teachers, which is also very surprising. Furthermore, our members were given no prior indication that such a far-reaching statement was going to be released publicly on the afternoon in question. Indeed, as many were working with schools that afternoon, they were informed of the intention to eliminate the consortia by teachers and school leaders. We feel that this is entirely unacceptable, and it has caused mental distress among several of our members.

Given that this is a fundamental change to the education system in Wales, we request that you call in and scrutinise the Ministerial Statement in order to:

- Establish that the review has complied with the requirements of the terms of reference.
- Understand the methodology and the accuracy of the evidence collected.
- Understand the rationale for changing the timelines of the review halfway through the process.
- Understand the implications of the recommendations.
- Establish how confident we can be that the proposed arrangements will provide better support for schools.
- Establish whether a change impact assessment process was undertaken to include areas such as the Welsh language, equality, workload, funding etc.
- Explore how much this significant change in policy will cost in a challenging budgetary period, as there is no financial information available. This should include costs associated with redundancies and shutting down existing local authority arrangements, and set-up costs related to any new arrangements. It should also include the financial cost of releasing school staff to address the first recommendation.
- Try to understand the difference between the opinions expressed in the findings of the Chief Inspector in this year's Annual Report, and those expressed in the findings of the Middle Tier Review, particularly regarding schools' ability to self-evaluate and plan effectively for improvement.
- Understand the available evidence base that could instil confidence in the committee that schools are in the best position to self-regulate their own improvement.
- Evaluate the additional workload on schools, and headteachers in particular, in terms of implementing the first recommendation regarding school-to-school collaboration and improvement;

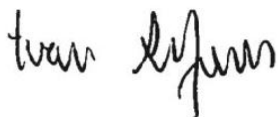
- Understand how local authorities will be able to fulfil their statutory responsibilities as the work of supporting school improvement is supported at a national level.

I'm sure that you realise that this is a difficult, uncertain and complicated time for our members who work within the regional services. It is therefore vital that we ensure fairness for them by considering all of the implications stemming from these changes.

As you can imagine, we are also keen for you to ensure that any new models that are established provide full support to all schools, whatever their language of education and wherever they are. And that support should be as good as, if not better than, what is being offered at the moment, especially in relation to the resilience and effectiveness of the support provided to schools, leaders and teachers, who provide services through the medium of Welsh.

I look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ioan Rhys Jones', written in a cursive style.

Ioan Rhys Jones,

General Secretary.

Copied for information: Members of the
Children, Young People and Education
Committee; Committee Clerk



04 March 2024

To: Jayne Bryant MS
Chair of Children, Young People and Education Committee
Jayne.Bryant@senedd.wales

Dear Jayne,

As you know, the statement issued by Jeremy Miles, Minister for Education and the Welsh Language, on the 31st of January, refers to new arrangements that are to be implemented in relation to school improvement. This statement was released into the public domain alongside the letter to the Minister from Professor Dylan Jones in order to “share these messages transparently with the sector”.

The Minister announced the next phase of the review which essentially requires exploration of how school to school collaboration and cross LA working may occur in a move away from the current wider regional model.

This is a far-reaching statement, the importance of which cannot be underestimated. The language and assertions made within Prof Dylan Jones letter are strong, making direct reference to “concerns about quality of support”. This represents a direct evaluation of the performance of our workforce in GwE, and it is not one that we accept, and it is also not one that we believe should have been placed in the public domain in this way.

Whilst members recognise that education and school improvement is necessarily an evolving process, indeed many of us have been through various cycles of change, this is not an example of positive change management by the Minister. We question both the motivations and methodology of the ‘Middle Tier’ review and the subsequent communication of its findings.

We believe that the statement from the Minister has left the system in disarray. Having had their work publicly judged, our members are left unsure about their future, made even worse given the current information vacuum.

Our members within the regional consortia are particularly frustrated and disappointed that there has been no formal consultation with stakeholders about the recommendations. In addition, there was no advance indication that such a far-reaching statement was to be released publicly on the afternoon in question. In fact, many of our members were working within schools that afternoon and they were informed of the intention to move away from the regional model through teachers and school leaders. This is completely unacceptable and extremely unprofessional and has caused severe distress to many of them.

Prospect – Doncaster Room 6 & 7 - 4th Floor, 19 South Mall, Frenchgate Shopping Centre, St Sepulchre Gate, Doncaster DN1 1LL

As a result, we are asking you to call in and scrutinise the Ministerial Statement to:

- Establish that the original Terms of Reference of the review have been adhered to.
- Understand the methodology and veracity of the evidence gathered.
- Understand the rationale for changing the timelines of the review mid-way through.
- Understand the implication of the recommendations.
- Investigate how confident we can be that proposed arrangements will provide better support for schools.
- Find out if an impact assessment has been undertaken to assess the potential impact of these changes on areas such as the Welsh Language, equality, work load, finance etc.
- Investigate how much this significant change in policy will cost in difficult budgetary times as there is no financial information available – this should include staff redundancy costs and closing down liabilities for current arrangements for LAs and set up costs for any new arrangements. This should also include the financial cost to release school staff to address the recommendations proposed.
- Seek to understand the contradictions in the Chief Inspector finding in this year’s Annual Report and findings of the Middle Tier Review, especially around schools’ ability to self-evaluate and effectively plan for improvement.
- Seek clarity on the rationale to accelerate the findings of this review which seems to date back to mid-December (rather than the March 2024 date initially agreed for publication).
- Evaluate the extra workload on schools and Headteachers in particular to implement the first recommendation regarding collaboration, joint working and school to school improvement.
- Understand how the third recommendation will allow Local Authorities to undertake their statutory responsibilities.
- Seek clarification and understand the veracity of the evidence base used to give the committee confidence that schools are best placed to self-regulate their own improvement.

Our members would like you to robustly scrutinise the evidence base so that you can be confident that any changes that are recommended will result in a sustainable school improvement model which will be cost efficient and improve on the current arrangements.

We can assure you that our workforce has the best interests of learners at its heart. We are committed to school improvement. We are committed to supporting schools and learners; working collaboratively and with compassion in support of the National Mission. We will not however have our professionalism, expertise, experience, and commitment cast aside in such a careless manner.

Yours Sincerely

Adam Flanders & Jane Lancaster
Prospect Officers Education & Childrens services.