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Lynne Neagle AM,
Chair, Children, Young People and Education Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

19 April 2018

Dear Lynne,

RE: Children, Young People and Education Committee report on Flying Start Outreach

I am writing to express concern at several of the assertions made in the above inquiry report, particularly those relating to the limitations of data showing hard evidence of benefits to children and parents receiving support from the Flying Start programme.

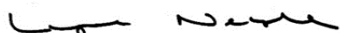
We understand that on this occasion, the short inquiry had a narrow focus. However, given that early language development is one of the four key components of the Flying Start programme with a speech and language therapist employed within every Flying Start project, we are concerned that evidence relating to speech and language therapy was regarded as additional evidence during the course of the inquiry. We would argue that as a core component of the service, it would have been helpful if evidence relating to progress in early language development had been considered when looking at key themes such as evaluation and impact.

Since the *National Evaluation of Flying Start: impact report* in December 2013, speech and language therapists, under the guise of the clinical excellent network for Flying Start, have been working closely with Welsh Government to consider how best to evidence the impact of the investment in early language development services. Proposals have been developed to screen children on arrival at nursery settings and at key stages to assess development against the outcome 'children leave Flying Start childcare at 3 years with age appropriate speech, language and communication skills'. A number of local authorities have trialled this approach and the evidence thus far is compelling. We included a number of examples within our written evidence but of particular note the Bridgend service won an NHS Wales award in 2015 for its work in reducing early language delay in 2 to 3 years. Out of over 600 children screened on starting nursery, **73%** were assessed as having significant language delay, which would impact on future learning development. After the interventions delivered by nursery staff which were planned and supported by the Flying Start speech and language therapists, this number had reduced to **32%** (Jones, 2015).

We understand that Welsh Government will now be using these outcome measures to measure progress in early language development as part of a suite of measures to evaluate the impact of the Flying Start programme. This will enable a Wales-wide picture of the impact of investment in early language development in Flying Start.

report will be published one week in advance of the debate. We will provide an update on the date of the debate to all those who gave evidence.

Yours sincerely,



Lynne Neagle AC / AM

Cadeirydd / Chair



Dr. Alison Stroud
Head of Wales Office
Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

3 May 2018

Dear Dr. Stroud,

Report on Flying Start: Outreach

Thank you for your letter of 19 April.

We note your concerns about the Committee's report, but would like to assure you that the written evidence you provided was considered carefully.

As you acknowledge in your letter, arrangements for the outreach element of the programme were the Committee's focus for this inquiry, rather than the detail of the four pillars on which the programme is built. Nevertheless, you will see that reference to speech and language therapy has been made in the body of the report, and your written evidence quoted.

A chapter of the report considered evaluation because we were told that little Welsh-Government-commissioned evaluation of the outreach element specifically had been undertaken. We are grateful for the information you have provided in your letter and in your written paper about wider evaluation activity, and would like to assure you that it will be considered alongside other relevant information when the Committee revisits this topic later in this Assembly. Our aim in making the recommendations we have made in relation to evaluation is to ensure that the reported benefits of Flying Start – which we acknowledge in paragraph 68 of our report – are demonstrated as clearly and robustly as possible.

This week's business statement and announcement shows that the Plenary debate on the report is scheduled for Wednesday 23 May. The Welsh Government's response to the



We would also concur with the viewpoint expressed by the Minister in paragraph **66** of the report that when considering the impact of the programme on educational outcomes of children living in Flying Start areas, achieving the same outcomes as children outside of areas of high deprivation may in itself be a measure of success. This may particularly be the case with regard to early language development where international evidence suggests that 50% of children in socially deprived areas may start school with impoverished speech, language and communication skills (Locke et al 2002).

We welcome the decision by the committee to revisit this inquiry in a year. We would ask that any future inquiry will take into account evidence on outcomes relating to early language development as a core component of the Flying Start programme.

We would be very happy to provide further information to the committee if this would be helpful.

Your sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'AS Stroud', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr Alison Stroud
Head of Wales Office



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Lynne Neagle AM,
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22 May 2018

Dear Lynne,

RE: Children, Young People and Education Committee report on Flying Start Outreach

Thank you for your letter of 3 May 2018.

I was pleased to read that the information provided in our letter on the outcomes of Flying Start investment in speech and language therapy was helpful to the committee and will be included in consideration when the committee revisits this topic later in the Assembly term. We would be very keen to engage with any subsequent inquiries on the topic and look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Your sincerely,

Dr Alison Stroud
Head of Wales Office

cc.Llinos Madeley, Clerk, Children, Young People and Education Committee