

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



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref  
Ein cyf/Our ref MA-P/HL/1620/15

Ann Jones AM  
Chair – Children, Young People  
and Education Committee  
National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff CF99 1NA

13 January 2016

Dear Ann

### **Follow-up inquiry to adoption services in Wales**

Thank you for your letter of 14 December which follows up the earlier inquiry on adoption services in Wales.

I can confirm that the Welsh Government has no plans to extend the remit of the Looked After Children in Education (LACE) Coordinators. As you know, local authorities are required to designate a post which has a specific focus on the educational needs of looked after children and care leavers for whom the authority acts as the corporate parent. There is a specific statutory context to that role which focusses on the responsibilities of the corporate parent. I do not believe that it would be appropriate to extend this particular requirement to other learners who are not in the care of the local authority.

I am sure though you will appreciate that I do not under-estimate some of the challenges that face adopted children in education.

You are already aware of my decision to extend the terms and conditions of the Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) to also include support for adopted children. My officials have discussed the plans to target support for adopted children through the looked after children element of the PDG with a wide range of stakeholders. The new arrangements will allow the regional education consortia and partners – including local authorities, schools as well as adoptive parents and adopted children - to develop interventions which will have a beneficial impact on all children, but our expectation will be that they will have a greater benefit on children who are or were looked after and those who have been adopted from care.

The Committee has asked for some clarification of these arrangements. For clarity, I will deal with each of these as they were outlined in your letter:

- Allocations of PDG funding to education consortia are calculated on the basis of numbers of looked after children only within their area. However, a significant feature of the new grant arrangements is that consortia are in receipt of, and accountable for, a sufficient quantum of resource for them to commission services strategically to better support the needs of both looked after and adopted children, many of whom will experience similar challenges in education. In view of this more strategic approach the PDG funding, unlike that for e-FSM learners, will not be allocated to the school where they are being educated on the basis of £1,050 per learner (in 2015-16, £1,150 in 2016-17).
- Support for adopted children is targeted in the same way as looked after children and other vulnerable learners. Each consortium was asked to provide an outline spending plan for the use of the allocated funding. At the end of this financial year they will be required to demonstrate how they have used the grant to support both looked after and adopted children. They will also need to evidence how the funding has had a positive impact on the educational attainment of these learners.
- The consortia strategic spending plans are broadly similar but do reflect specific regional needs and priorities. The common features in the plans are:
  - An allocation of funding has been set aside for bespoke training such as emotional, behavioural and awareness training packages for schools including foster carers, adoptive parents and school governors.
  - There is funding for the sharing of good practice through school to school collaboration.
  - A proportion of funding has been earmarked as bursary support for specific children – this includes individual and group support packages such as services which are designed to increase learners' emotional and social skills which, as evidence shows, can make a positive impact on school achievement.
- As part of the end of financial year evaluation, we expect consortia to work with local authorities, schools and families to understand the impact the grant has had on the learners it is designed to support. Each consortium will collate information from each of the local authorities in their region and assess progress against comparable criteria which measure the effectiveness of the PDG spend on adopted children. This may include:
  - Details of school attendance.
  - Details of attainment – namely literacy and numeracy scores from national testing.
  - Softer information about the impact of the training delivered to schools obtained through feedback and discussions with school challenge advisors.
- The consortia will endeavour to target support for adopted children alongside those who are looked after, although knowledge about adoptive status is not always shared by parents. Where it is known then bespoke training on specific issues can be addressed at a local, cluster or regional level. Bespoke training may include attachment awareness, mental health awareness and positive classroom management. The funding set aside as bursaries can also be targeted for specific needs of groups or individuals as necessary.

From April 2016, the Welsh Government will introduce a rapid review process to evaluate the effectiveness of the first year of the new funding arrangements.

I am sure that you will also know that we have been working closely with Adoption UK (Wales) – and have had a number of discussions with the National Adoption Service - in the past year to try and understand better how adoptive families can be supported in schools. We have already produced a video for schools to try and raise awareness that moving on from looked after status and becoming adopted does not necessarily mean that the legacy of why the child needed to be adopted in the first place has been overcome.

We are presently working with Adoption UK (Wales) to develop a new bilingual electronic booklet on raising the achievement of adopted children in school. It will be based on two earlier successful, but now out of date, publications with new material added in where appropriate and will be aimed at schools. The new guidance will be available shortly and we will be considering further how we can raise awareness of the booklet, and the issues it covers, with education consortia, local authorities and schools across Wales.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Huw', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Huw Lewis AC / AM**

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