



Eich cyf/Your ref P-05-821
Ein cyf/Our ref KW/01878/18

David John Rowlands AM
Chair - Petitions committee.
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
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6 August 2018

Dear David

Thank you for your letter of 27 July, requesting further information about the petition received from UNISON Neath Port Talbot, regarding funding for ethnic minority, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learners.

My letter to you of 12 June emphasised my commitment to reducing inequalities and ensuring all learners are able to achieve their potential and thrive in a learning environment which supports their needs. The Welsh Government provides significant levels of grant funding for school improvement and raising standards through our Education budgets, but the vast majority of the funding we provide for schools is directed to local government through the Local Government Settlement and we have taken action to maximise this funding through our budget approach.

Formula allocation

The former Minority Ethnic and Gypsy Traveller grants were identified as part of a suite of grants with similar outcomes which could be rationalised, leading to the establishment of the Education Improvement Grant for Schools (EIG) in April 2015. The combined grant arrangements were intended to provide greater flexibility for schools, local authorities and regional consortia to more effectively direct grant funding to deliver our shared priorities. This formed part of our response to the concerns raised by the WLGA on behalf of local government over the need for greater flexibility to manage the financial challenges they were facing. It also served our aims to reduce bureaucracy (including the cost of administering grants), simplify arrangements and enable more funding to be directed to the front line.

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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.

Within the EIG there is no requirement on schools, consortia or local authorities to allocate a specific amount of grant funding against a service or programme. We believe, schools, regional consortia, and local authorities are best placed to know the needs of their learners and to respond to local needs. In the evidence provided by Estyn to the CYPE Committee as part of the Committee's inquiry into this area of support, Estyn outlined that they had not seen significant change in delivery of minority ethnic, Gypsy, Roma, Traveller services in the transition from the previous specific grants to the combined grant arrangements under the EIG.

Consultation and engagement

We have been mindful during this budget process of the requirements on Welsh Ministers under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and to have due regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Welsh Government has taken an integrated approach to our impact assessment and a Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment of the high-level spending decisions was undertaken and published as part of the outline draft budget 2018-19.

The Welsh Government's policy statement in 2014 highlighted that the then funding arrangements for minority ethnic achievement and the education of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learners were not sustainable and authorities needed to increase collaboration and partnership working in order to deliver services against growing need and pressured budgets in future.

In setting our budget for 2018-19 and 2019-20 we have prioritised funding to local government for schools and I have received assurances from the WLGA that local government will continue to prioritise support for vulnerable learners from an early age, including minority ethnic, Gypsy Roma and Traveller learners. I welcome these assurances and fully expect local government to stand by them. Minority ethnic and Gypsy Roma Traveller services are now represented on the Association of Directors in Wales (ADEW) Inclusion group and able to raise concerns with their authorities.

These are challenging times and I, in common with all Cabinet Secretaries, have had to make some difficult decisions. However, I have continued to listen to the concerns raised by various stakeholders about the impact of the changes to funding arrangements to support these groups of learners. As a consequence and, in recognition that transitioning services to new arrangements takes time, I have agreed a total of £8.7million in the 2018-19 financial year to support local authorities.

Transitional Arrangements

The expectation of the additional funding I have made available through the Local Authority Education Grant 2018-19 is to enable authorities to provide support for Minority Ethnic and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learners in line with previous expectations and assurances. The grant also includes a requirement to make progress, during 2018-19, to transition services to a sustainable model. Funding for 2019-2020 will be dependent on progress made during this financial year to transition the service. I have asked my officials to work closely with Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham local authorities (as the largest urban authorities in their regions) to support a move towards a sustainable model within their regions from April 2020,

Monitoring

Local Authorities are responsible for schools funding as is set out in law and they must ensure appropriate education provision is available for all learners. That is why after 10 years of additional grant funding to try and to test systems and approaches, minority ethnic, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learner support is now a core provision.

Each year we collect and publish information on the educational performance of these groups of learners, many of whom outperform the Wales averages; we will continue to do this to facilitate open and informed discussion on learner progress. I am confident the checks and balances are in the system and that we can continue to monitor progress moving forwards.

The financial position for 2019-20 will be reviewed as part of setting our firm plans in the autumn. It is however my intention to provide a further £8.7million to all 22 Local Authorities in 2019-20, to support the continuing development of a sustainable model from April 2020.

As I have indicated, this funding will be conditional on evidence of working progress towards more sustainable models of delivery. My officials wrote to all Chief Executives on Friday 18 May 2018 with their funding allocations for 2018-19.

In publishing *Education in Wales: Our national mission*, and as outlined above, I am confident working in partnership with schools, regional consortia, Local Authorities and the WLGA, we can continue to monitor the progress of these groups of learners.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Kirsty Williams'.

Kirsty Williams AC/AM

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education