

Lynne Neagle AS/MS
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

5 November 2024

Dear colleague,

I am writing to update you on my priorities for improving educational standards in Wales.

Since taking up this role I have seen much to celebrate about our education provision, and I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to you, your teachers and your support staff for the work you do to improve the lives and life chances of learners in Wales.

I know that schools are encountering challenges in learner attendance, attitudes to learning, and attainment which all remain weaker than before the pandemic. I also recognise that schools are at the forefront of dealing with societal changes and managing learners with increasingly complex needs. I know that you are proactively and capably addressing these challenges.

Over the past months I have heard regularly from teachers and from school staff. Reflecting on the messages you have told me I have [set out](#) today our sector wide improvement priorities that are my focus and which will underpin the improvements we all want to see. I hope that this clear set of priorities will help us to manage workload, prioritise resources and focus our collective efforts on enabling real improvements for young people.

Attendance at school will continue to be a key focus for me. We know there is a strong link between school attendance and attainment. We have seen an improvement in attendance, and there is good practice happening in schools. However, it would be wrong to suggest we are happy with where levels are now. Attendance remains below levels seen before the pandemic, and I have concerns about levels of attendance by learners from lower income households.

Literacy and **numeracy** are the building blocks of all learning. I have recognised the need for clearer expectations of learning, and I have been explicit about what action is needed. In my [Written Statement](#) of 4 October, I set out the additional action I am taking to support literacy under the Curriculum for Wales. I want to make sure that you and your staff are equipped to raise expectations for your learners, and I am committed to ensuring you have access to high quality professional support, tools and resources.

This week I have launched a consultation on minor clarifying amendments to the Curriculum for Wales Framework. This includes making clear the role of phonics in decoding words. It also clarifies the appropriate use of pictures to help learners understand the meaning of words. I would welcome thoughts on our proposals.

Work is already underway to review our Literacy and Numeracy Framework, to ensure it is clear, detailed and practical enough to support all practitioners to apply and develop literacy across the curriculum. We are working with our National Network Policy Group to gather evidence of their experience of what is useful in the Framework and what more can be provided in support.

We are also working with local authorities and other partners to ensure that all schools have access to the same high-quality training and support to teach literacy that you need. We are working closely with Local Authorities to ensure that high quality support is available nationally. As part of this, we will trial an assessment toolkit to help screen learners' reading and wider literacy skills at key transition points. If this helps schools to better understand what support learners need, particularly those who are struggling, we will roll this out more widely.

Finally, I want to make sure support is accessible. This week I have launched a [new area on Hwb](#) to bring together all supporting materials and resources on literacy. This includes new guides for [teachers](#), [parents and carers](#), signposting resources and case studies on some of the brilliant work already happening in many of our schools. As part of this, all schools have been made aware of new Microsoft tools which help learners develop literacy. This is still in its infancy and the area will develop over time, with new case studies and support being added in the coming months.

I am keen to ensure our support is firmly grounded in evidence. To support this, I have convened an expert panel bringing together a range of expertise and this group will meet for the first time next week.

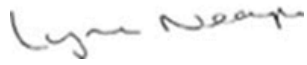
Today I have also announced a programme of targeted support to drive up attainment in literacy, maths and science, backed by an additional £1.1 million this year. This programme will bolster the existing good work in our schools. Alongside this, I have confirmed that the Welsh Government will explore how clearer age-related expectations in the updated literacy and numeracy framework can be supported by the personalised assessments framework, to help all teachers know where their learners are and how they can help them progress. I am also exploring the possible benefits of PIRLS and TIMSS to help us all understand our national progress and I have spoken to all Directors of Education about the importance of schools taking part in PISA in 2025. I believe information is important to help schools understand their learners and support self-evaluation and collaboration. However, I want to be clear that I do not wish to return to a performance and accountability-driven system through this work.

I have also been pleased to confirm today that in recognition of their dedication and hard work that teachers will receive a 5.5% pay rise backdated to September.

This Friday, I have invited all secondary headteachers in Wales to a conference where I want to listen to your views on how we improve behaviour and attendance, literacy and numeracy. I look forward to these discussions. I intend to host primary headteacher conferences in early Spring next year.

I look forward to working with you all on these priorities so that we can deliver the very best for our learners and together shape a brighter, stronger future for them.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in grey ink that reads "Lynne Neagle". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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Cabinet Secretary for Education