



19 September 2024

Dear Colleague

In my six months as Cabinet Secretary for Education, I have been privileged to see the excellent work done in our schools and colleges. It is clear we all share the same priority, in always putting the interests of children and young people first in our decisions.

This is why giving teachers and lecturers the pay rise they deserve was so important. A professional education workforce is essential to improving educational attainment and embedding our programme of education reforms and I'm pleased that additional funding will be provided by Welsh Government to fund the pay rise.

The highlight of this month so far was a school visit to celebrate the milestone of free school meals being available in all our primary schools in Wales. We all know a healthy school meal can help with learner concentration and wellbeing, enabling them to achieve their full potential. That's why during this school year we will be reviewing the nutritional content of school meals.

It was a pleasure to speak with children and adults during the visit and to see the real difference our policy is making. Listening and talking to you is something I have really valued in ministerial roundtables, on visits, in meetings and at events. Last term this helped me in my decision not to press ahead with changing school term dates and to provide additional support for the curriculum. I will continue to listen to you as we proceed this term.

This month also marks the start of the final year of the phased implementation of the ALN system. I have witnessed real progress and commitment from the education workforce, and wonderful examples of schools, children and families putting the needs of every child first. ALNCO's play an important role in the change and I am providing £5 million of additional funding to support ALNCOs moving to the Leadership Pay Range as recommended by the Independent Welsh Pay Review Body.

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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.

However, I know from what you and parents are telling me that we also face challenges in implementing ALN reform, which is why I have taken action, including commissioning an examination of the legislative framework to ensure it is delivering for learners.

The transition from compulsory education is a priority for me. I am really pleased that Vikki Howells has been appointed Minister for Further and Higher Education. As a former secondary school teacher, she will bring her valuable insight on what life is like on the frontline. She will be working with Medr, the new commission for tertiary education and research, over the next year on how we can improve the post statutory education system through institutional collaboration and sustainability, improving learner pathways and learner voice. We look forward to receiving Medr's first strategic plan later this year.

And we are trialling inclusive, creative partnerships across our schools and colleges to help draw adults back into lifelong learning through pilots such as the Citizens' Curriculum.

Mental health and wellbeing are the foundations on which our reforms are built. Unfortunately, the return to school or college might have caused anxiety for some learners and staff following the impact of the tragic events in Southport this summer, and the disorder that followed.

I know that what happens in wider society has an impact on our schools and colleges, and I know you will be dealing with matters sensitively on a case-by-case basis. However, hate and racism have no place in our schools and colleges, whether that is anti-immigrant, antisemitism or islamophobia.

Police forces and Police and Crime Commissioners will be communicating with schools in their respective areas in terms of their engagement plans going forward from a policing perspective. Welsh Government Director of Education, Owain Lloyd, will follow up on this letter with more detailed information for schools.

I recognise the scale of reform to education in Wales. But I also see the opportunities. I have seen myself the difference the new curriculum, changes to ALN, and a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing are making when they are implemented well. Focusing on working with you to make our reforms work will be my priority.

We really are stronger together, and I will continue to listen and work with you over the year ahead.

Diolch



Lynne Neagle
Cabinet Secretary for Education