

Leighton Andrews AC / AM
Y Gweinidog Addysg a Sgiliau
Minister for Education and Skills



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-04-442
Ein cyf/Our ref LA/07537/12

William Powell AM

committeebusiness@Wales.gsi.gov.uk

8 January 2013

Dear William,

Thank you for your letter of 14 December with regard to the on-going campaign by Scope Cymru to make services for disabled children available as locally as possible.

The Welsh Government is committed to meeting the needs of children who have additional learning needs. All children in Wales, regardless of their level of need, share the same rights. We recognise the importance that those with additional learning needs must have the appropriate access to a wide range of services to help their development and through a range of pro-active policies and legislation, we are committed to ensuring that these services are best placed to cater for their needs.

However, as you will know the duty to provide services rests at a local level. Local Authorities are responsible for providing local services and in education they have a statutory duty to ensure that appropriate educational provision is made available to children regardless of their level of need. They must, wherever possible and practical, endeavour to secure appropriate education provision close to home. In making such provision for children and young people with special educational needs (SEN), all Local Authorities in Wales must also have due regard to the SEN Code of Practice for Wales which provides practical advice to Local Authorities, maintained schools, early years settings and others on carrying out their statutory duties to identify, assess and make provision for children's SEN.

The Welsh Government, in developing policy and legislation, is committed to improving the life chances of all learners with a variance of need. The Welsh Government is proposing to replace the statutory framework for the assessment and planning of provision for children and young people with SEN with a simpler, more person centred system for children and young people with additional learning needs. Central to the proposals is the development of the Individual Development Plan (IDP). By adopting a wholly person-centred planning approach, the IDP facilitates more efficient multi-agency working thereby allowing the young person and their family to participate in an equal and open way. The process also cuts through the lengthy and more bureaucratic processes associated with the current statementing system.

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Included in our proposals is the extension of the Parent Partnership Service to all children and young people with Additional Needs and their parents/carers ("Family Partnership Services"). Our intention is to shift the emphasis towards the prevention of disagreement and disputes by ensuring there is a consistent approach to establishing empathetic partnership working with parents/carers, children and young people, and Family Partnership Services and other related voluntary sector organisations.

The Welsh Government has consulted on its proposals and the consultation period ended on 19 October. There is much to do to develop the Welsh Government's proposals further in light of the consultation responses received and views expressed at the consultation events and family focus groups that were held on the consultation proposals. The 206 responses received are currently being analysed and a document summarising them will issue in early 2013. All the responses to the consultation will help better shape our proposals which we believe will deliver improved systems at local level and allow local authorities to better meet the needs of children with additional needs and their families.

You will wish to note however that the SEN reforms will not be part of the Education (Wales) Bill 2013 but will be included in a piece of future legislation in this Assembly term. This provides the opportunity for the detail and the implications of the proposals to be worked through in more detail with key partners. We will consider the suggestions you have made during that process.

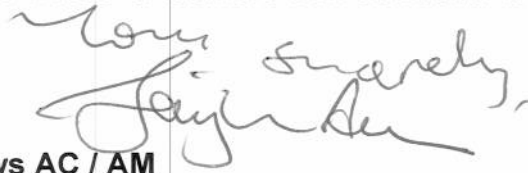
You will be interested to know of the Welsh Government's Families First Programme. Since guidance on this was issued in July 2011, each local authority has submitted an action plan detailing how they will deliver against Families First outcomes with a specific focus on supporting disability. Within the guidance, suggested areas of focus for disability include:

- Improved co-ordination and integration of services;
- Income maximisation and awareness of welfare rights;
- Improved access to employment, education and training;
- Supplementary provision of short breaks and respite;
- Training for specific childcare provision;
- Training and other support opportunities for parents and increased access to play and leisure, including pre-school play provision.

It will be Local Authorities' responsibility to determine what is required for the Families First programme in their area, we expect Local Authorities as part of their commissioning process to provide services that meet their locally identified needs and also the objectives of the Families First programme.

Other existing Welsh Government initiatives aimed at supporting learners with a wider range of needs include the Short Break programme that acts as a source of support for families with disabled children whilst also providing these children with valuable opportunities to spend time with a different adult or child of their own age. We have also provided funding to local authorities to develop projects in partnership with further education colleges, special schools and SEN units, which are aimed at sharing expertise and thereby improving the capacity of further education colleges to meet the needs of young people with complex needs. It is expected that this will help empower local further education colleges to meet the needs of many learners who would otherwise seek specialist provision outside of their local area. I announced earlier this year a total of £1m to support this initiative.

I hope this information highlights the strides that we are taking to improve existing services to better meet the needs of learners with additional learning needs and their families at a local level.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Leighton Andrews', written over the printed name.

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