

P-04-581 Opposition to Cuts in Provision for Learners of English as an Additional Language – Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Committee, 25.03.15

Dear Mr. Powell

I write in reply to your letter of the 30th September 2014 attached, (Ref P-04-581) seeking views on the petition from Helen Myers and 37 other signatories relating to cuts in the Welsh Government Grant funding (the Minority Ethnic Achievement Grant – MEAG) in 2014/15 for pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds acquiring English as an additional language (EAL) in schools. Please accept our sincere apologies for the delay in responding.

In your letter you quote that the petitioner Helen Myers refers to unprecedented numbers of pupils in schools requiring specialist support via the MEAG. Our pupil data confirms this to be the case in Swansea. The percentage of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds in Swansea schools has almost doubled in the last 4 – 5 years and continues to grow each year. Ethnic minority pupils now make up **12.5%+** of our school pupil population (Age 5 – 16 years) *PLASC Jan. 2015*.

Last school year a total of **3,121** identified ethnic minority pupils (aged 3 – 19 years) were in receipt of specialist MEAG funded support in **78** of our schools. Furthermore, the rate of new pupils being identified by schools as being at risk of underachieving due to lack of fluency in English, has been increasing year-on-year. This school year to date, **570** newly arrived ethnic minority pupils have been identified by schools and referred to our MEAG funded Ethnic Minority Language and Achievement specialist support Service to schools. This compares with **588** new referrals for the whole of last school year.

Many of the pupils in receipt of specialist support via the MEAG in Swansea come from local settled ethnic minority communities; others are the children of economic migrants, overseas students, health care workers asylum

seekers and refugees. Swansea is both a university city and a dispersal centre for asylum seekers. The numbers of children of overseas students and asylum seeker pupils arriving in our schools have been increasing steadily. For example **126** asylum seeker pupils were being supported via the MEAG in July 2014; this number rose by **48** to **174** in September 2014 and to **180** in October 2014 and to over **200** in January 2015. Swansea as an urban city has also been impacted in recent years by inward economic migration in particular from EU accession countries. There are increasing numbers of pupils from White European ethnic backgrounds from EU accession states in particular, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Romania in Swansea schools. The majority of these new arrivals are beginners in terms of acquiring English and need support via the MEAG.

There have been two consecutive reductions to the MEAG in 2014/15 as mentioned by Helen Myers. On 20th December 2013 the Council was first notified by the Welsh Government's Education Minister of a **4.76% £73,287** reduction in its MEAG allocation for 2014/15. Six months later in the summer of 2015 the Council was made aware of further unexpected in-year cuts to the MEAG of up to **15%** (Total proposed reductions of **20%** for **2014/15**). The Council adopted flexible arrangements to address the in-year claw back of funding to avoid major impact on support provision in place in schools for this group of pupils.

As **98%** of the Welsh Government's annual MEAG allocation is utilised in Swansea Council to fund the salaries of EMLAS specialist staff the only way of making reductions is to cut front-line posts. The following posts/ftes have been removed from EMLAS this year with the loss of expertise in this area.

Staff ftes lost	Posts/Ftes Removed	Posts/Ftes Removed from:–
0.5 fte	Specialist Teacher	27 th April 2014

2.3 fte	Specialist Teachers	1 st September 2014 and December 2014
1.2fte	Bilingual Teaching Assistants	1 st September 2014
0.5fte r	Specialist Teacher	January 2015
0.6fte	Admin & Org Assistant	1 st September 2014

2.8fte of the permanent specialist staff members listed above left on ER/VR at a cost of **£40K** to the local authority in redundancy payments.

In her petition Helen Myers refers to a lack of any consultation on reductions to the MEAG. I am not aware either of consultation being undertaken which would seem to be a requirement under the Equalities Act 2010 as these reductions impact on a group with protected characteristics.

The specialist support provided to this growing group of pupils in our schools is undoubtedly vital in order that they can be fully included in school, access a broad and balanced curriculum, learn English and achieve their individual academic potential. Where this support is not in place these pupils are at risk of underachieving, becoming disaffected/NEET and of not gaining the qualifications and skills they need to gain future employment. Pupil attainment data for Swansea shows the impact of MEAG specialist support on the standards being attained by this group of pupils. Whereas the attainment levels have traditionally been below all Swansea and all Wales pupils at age 7 years, by the end of Key Stage 4, at age 16 years, the majority of supported pupils have closed the attainment gap and the group has consistently performed ahead of all Swansea and all Wales pupils on the national Core Subject Indicator.

Any further reductions to the MEAG will potentially impact further on provision and standards for pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds in particular those learning EAL and could possibly also have wider consequences for standards generally for all pupils in Swansea.

