

Kirsty Williams AC/AM
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref: MA-L/KW/0340/18

Lynne Neagle
Chair
Children, Young People and Education Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA.

29 June 2018

Dear Lynne

Thank you for your letter of 6 June on behalf of the Children, Young People and Education Committee raising concern that the draft School Organisation Code will not be laid before the National Assembly for Wales until the autumn rather than the summer as I originally expected. I explained the reasons for the delay to the Committee at its meeting on 28 June.

The Committee has asked for assurances of the steps I am taking to ensure that local authorities are adhering to the spirit of my policy in respect of a presumption against closure of rural schools and of the arrangements I will be putting in place to protect schools from long-term decisions being made while the Code is not finalised.

Firstly, it is important to emphasise once again that a presumption against the closure of rural schools does not mean that rural schools will never close - however, it does mean that the case for closure must be strong and not taken until all viable alternatives have been exhausted. It is also important to note that a presumption against closure will apply specifically to schools designated as rural for this purpose in the revised Code.

I have been very clear in respect of the direction of travel of this policy and my expectation that local authorities act in the spirit of the proposed changes. However, I have also pointed out on a number of occasions that the statutory Code is not retrospective and that any changes to the existing Code will not have effect until the second version of the Code comes into force. With that in mind, whilst I have made my expectations clear, there is no statutory requirement on local authorities and other proposers to comply with provisions in the second version of the Code until it comes into force.

The Welsh Ministers are unable to comment on any proposals which may subsequently be referred to them for determination. However, in accordance with the existing Code before

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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.

publishing a statutory notice on a school organisation proposal proposers must consult for at least 42 days, 20 of these being school days. The Code sets a high standard for consultation allowing all those with an interest to make their views known and for these to be taken into account. I would urge anyone with an interest in a closure proposal to make their views known through the consultation process and any objection period that may follow.

My priority now is to publish the summary of consultation responses before summer recess and make arrangements for the revised Code to be laid before the National Assembly for Wales. I am keen to ensure that there is no further delay which prevents the Code coming into force before the end of the year.

I will as agreed let the Committee have sight of the Code before it is laid before the Assembly.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kirsty Williams', written in a cursive style.

Kirsty Williams AC/AM

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Cabinet Secretary for Education