

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



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref MA(P)KW/2659/17

Lynne Neagle AM
Chair - Children, Young People and Education Committee
National Assembly for Wales

24th July 2017

Dear Lynne,

Thank you for your letter of 26 June about the Children, Young People and Education Committee's forward work programme, asking about the current position regarding community focused schools in Wales.

You asked in particular about the funding provided by Welsh Government to support local authorities in developing community focused approaches in their areas. An element of the previous community focused schools grant was transferred into the School Effectiveness Grant (SEG) as part of the wider grant rationalisation process. The SEG was intended to establish and reinforce the community dimension that is essential to school effectiveness. The SEG was subsequently transferred into the Education Improvement Grant (EIG). The EIG in turn supports improved outcomes for all learners across the key stages and the majority of the funding is delegated to schools to support our national priorities and regional and local priorities in line with each school's school development plan. Expenditure relating to community focused and school projects remain eligible under the EIG where it supports improved outcomes for learners.

In addition, the childcare element of the Community Focused Schools Grant was renamed as the Out of School Childcare Grant (OSCG) in 2011/12. Since then we have provided an annual allocation of £2.3 million to local authorities through the OSCG to support local authorities in addressing gaps in out of school childcare provision in their areas. The grant is used in a number of ways and varies across local authorities depending on local need, for example it is used to fund the provision of assisted places, sustainability grants, and staff training.

I note the evidence given by the HM Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales. In my school visits across Wales, I have seen many examples of where this good practice takes place on a daily basis. The Welsh Government has long encouraged schools to take a strategic approach to community partnership working -

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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.

which has been proven to support schools' family engagement work, enrich school life and contribute to 'social capital' in many other important ways. This has not changed. Research shows that families of community school pupils have greater communication with teachers and school involvement, and parents/carers demonstrate a greater sense of responsibility for their children's learning success.

Family and community engagement is a cornerstone of the Welsh Government's Rewriting the future programme - our strategy to raise the attainment of learners from deprived backgrounds. If schools can help families and the wider community provide better learning environments and opportunities then they will be far better placed to help children achieve their potential, whatever their background.

Published in June 2015, our Family and Community Engagement (FaCE) guidance contains a toolkit of 25 practical resources for schools, including one on developing community partnerships. Each is designed to encourage reflection and action planning and to provide examples of what other schools have done. The FaCE guidance and toolkit links closely with the Welsh Government's Education Begins at Home campaign which this year has a specific focus how parents and carers can support their child's wellbeing. We will continue to work with consortia, local authorities and schools to promote best practice and consistency of approach in terms of family and community engagement in schools across Wales.

One of Estyn's thematic reviews for this year will focus the preferred communication routes of parents and consider how schools are working to improve their existing lines of communication with parents. A key objective of the report will be to support schools and families to improve pupils' standards and wellbeing by reducing barriers to communication through family engagement. Estyn's review will also share effective practice from schools on effective methods of communication and parental engagement to improve standards and wellbeing.

I am pleased to inform you that Band A of the 21st Century Schools and Education Programme will see a £1.4 billion investment in the rebuild and refurbishment of over 150 schools and colleges across Wales over the five year period ending in 2019. During Band A, which runs between 2014 and 2019, local authorities and other delivery partners are encouraged to think innovatively about the provision of services in their area and achieve the best value for money, for example, the opportunity to co-locate services. My officials have also been encouraging local authorities to consider opportunities for community use of assets, for example use of sports facilities.

I am continuing to build on this work and in Band B of the Programme, which is currently under development and will run between 2019 and 2024, one of the two investment objectives is to optimise the use of infrastructure and resources, to deliver public services for our communities by 2024. This will include flexibility of our assets so that space and facilities available for our communities are maximised.

Our aspiration is for all facilities that receive investment commit to making assets available for community use if local demand exists.

In addition, a report 'Increasing the Use of School Facilities' was produced last year by the Public Policy Institute for Wales (PPIW) on how school facilities can be used more extensively by communities. My officials are working to take forward the report recommendations to promote the use of school facilities by communities.

I strongly support the wider community use of our assets, which will help us drive greater value from our investments. It is important that my officials continue to engage with colleagues across our portfolio departments, to ensure we do not overlook any interdependences or opportunities for joined up delivery of support and enabling effort.

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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