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Y Gweinidog Addysg a Sgiliau
Minister for Education and Skills



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref MB/LA/2025/12

24 May 2012

Dear Cabinet Education Members,

Congratulations both to those taking up new posts and to those returning. I welcome the opportunity to work with you in the future.

Local government and the Welsh Government is a partnership and there must be strong accountability underpinning it. You will know that education, and improving school standards in particular, is a central priority of this Welsh Government and I look forward to working with you to deliver on this agenda. The Welsh Government has protected spending on schools, fulfilling the First Minister's commitment to ensure we spend 1% more per annum than we receive from the block grant from the UK Government. In these tough times, with shrinking budgets, you will appreciate that this is a serious commitment to support our joint ambitions for children and young people in Wales.

I know that you will be wasting no time in reviewing the plans for the future of education provision in your authority. I therefore want to take this early opportunity to raise a number of areas where urgent action is required and where early decisions will be to the benefit of learners in your authority. As you know, on 8 May Estyn published a report on surplus places. There is currently a higher than necessary level of school places across Wales resulting in a drain on resources which could be better used to improve the quality of education for all learners. As I have said before, every surplus place is a tax on the head of learners currently in the system. Although the WLGA and individual authorities have signed up to this view, too little progress has been made in recent years.

There are 10 local authorities with more than 20% surplus primary places, and 6 local authorities with similar levels of surplus places in secondary schools. This represents a substantial waste of resources, and suggests that little regard has been given to Welsh Government Guidance that local authorities should aim to retain no more than 10% surplus places overall.

Information provided to my department on capacity and numbers on roll, together with forward projections to 2016, has revealed a likely worsening in the position of every local authority in respect of the proportion of secondary school surplus. Although all local authorities are expected to see lower levels of primary surplus by that date as a result of the upturn in the birth rate, for some the improvement will be very marginal. The projections

enclosed with this letter do not take account of statutory proposals for school reorganisation already agreed, or those in the pipeline. They represent what the position will be if no action is taken to remove surplus by 2016.

I am setting a clear expectation that action must be taken now to avoid excessive surplus places, and to improve the balance of supply and demand across the board. I am of course aware that several local authorities have action in hand or under consideration that will impact on this scenario.

I am now requesting, from those local authorities that have more than 20% empty places in either sector, or are projected to have more than 20% empty places by 2016, statements setting out what plans are under consideration or are already underway to reduce the level of surplus to **below 15% at January 2015**, thus avoiding the scenarios projected for January 2016. I would like to see assurances from the 16 local authorities that fall into this category that this will be achieved, or failing that, a stretching target that can be achieved by that time. Statements need not refer to specific schools but should refer to areas within the local authority. The information should be presented separately for the primary and secondary sectors. Statements can refer to projects where Welsh Government funding has already been agreed in principle, but I am not expecting a resubmission of plans for funding for 21st Century schools, as these are not due to be funded within the relevant time frame.

From remaining local authorities I require a statement on how places will be managed to January 2015, with an estimate of what levels of surplus will remain in each sector at that time. I expect to see improvement in respect of those local authorities carrying more than 10 % surplus in either sector, and assurances from those with lower levels of surplus that provision will be sufficient and efficient between now and 2015. **These statements should be submitted by 29th June to Mary Davies, Schools Management and Effectiveness Division.**

You will be aware that we have introduced legislation in the National Assembly for Wales which would provide local authorities with a more streamlined framework for school organisation. The Bill also includes powers to reduce the capacity of certain schools that are full or almost full, which has the potential to achieve an alternative distribution of pupils across an area. I currently anticipate that if enacted, the powers will be in force by September 2013.

The second matter which requires early decision-making relates to catchment areas. The primary school population is beginning to increase in a number of areas. There is consequently an opportunity for many local authorities, through decisive action, to reduce substantially the proportion of primary school surplus so that the supply of places closely matches demand, whilst allowing for projected growth in the pupil population in areas where this is likely. I would like to see all local authorities with rising demand ensure that **current** school provision is used to the best possible effect, before consideration is given to the establishment of new schools or the expansion of popular ones. Changes to catchment areas of schools might be pursued to this end, provided such action will not lead to unsustainable additional transport costs. Action needs to be taken in the determination year 2012/13 which starts in September 2012 ending in the determination of new admission arrangements by no later than 15th April 2013. Such action, upon which parents should also be consulted, can make changes to catchment areas, or establish catchment areas, which can assist in the management of admissions to schools for September 2014. I want to see a reduction in the number of schools that are oversubscribed, which should lead to increasing numbers of pupils being admitted to schools where there are surplus places.

Secondary populations will continue to decline for a number of years before starting to recover in the next decade. I expect local authorities to use this breathing space to ensure

that they have the best possible pattern of secondary schools to deliver, in partnership with other providers, the top quality education and training that learners require. Where reorganisation is not a feasible or economic action, I expect local authorities to use surplus capacity in either the primary or secondary sector for other purposes that increase the efficiency and effectiveness of their education service or contribute to similar outcomes in respect of other public services. My officials are working with stakeholders on a guide to the utilisation of surplus places which you will find useful in this regard.

Local authorities were asked to profile the reduction of surplus places that would result from their plans under the 21st Century school buildings programme. Investment under the main programme is not due to commence until 2014, but I am asking local authorities to take early actions to reduce surplus which do not depend on substantial investment, but which can reflect the prudent and imaginative use of resources.

The third area relates to the effective planning of Welsh-medium education. We are legislating to place Welsh in Education Plans on a statutory basis. We expect local authorities to assess carefully and accurately parental demand for Welsh-medium places. Planning for future provision for Welsh-medium education should sit naturally alongside plans to review surplus places and catchment areas, and I would expect local authorities to give due regard to this issue in advance of the legislation that has been introduced.

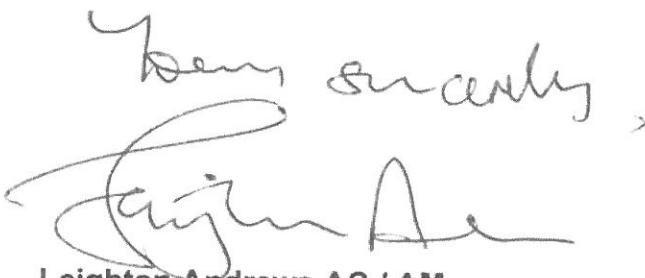
Fourthly, you will be aware of the commitments given by local authorities to delegate 80% of education funding to schools by September 2012 and 85% by September 2014. At present, my understanding from the WLGA is that these plans are well-advanced.

The driving up of schools standards is a central element of our Programme for Government, and I know that you will share our ambition for swift and sustainable improvements in our children's education. I would like to remind you that Welsh Ministers have powers under Schedule 7 to the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 to direct local authorities to make proposals for school organisation where they consider that the provision for primary or secondary education in maintained schools is either excessive or insufficient. Given the historic lack of progress on the issues raised above, I am giving active consideration to whether I should exercise these powers, either shortly or in 2015, and whether other penalties will apply if local authorities do not reach the position set out in their submitted statements.

The statements now requested will inform my considerations.

Finally, I would be grateful if you would personally review urgently with your Director of Education the role and responsibilities of the Education Service in your authority in relation to the safeguarding of children, taking particular care to ensure that all mandatory practices are being effectively completed.

I look forward to working with you in the coming years and I am confident that together we can improve standards and give Wales's children the best start in life.



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2011 Data for Primary Schools - Numbers on Roll and Projections to 2016

Local Authority Data - Primary Schools

Local Authority	Position at January 2011				Pupil Projections 2012 - 2016 as at January							Percentage of total capacity which is unfilled		
	Total number of schools	Total capacity of schools (a)	Number of unfilled places (b)	Percentage of total capacity which is unfilled	2011 Numbers on Roll Actuals (c)	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Trend 2011-2016 %		variance	Number of unfilled places at 2016
Anglesey	50	6,516	1,802	27.7	4,737	4,747	4,809	4,809	4,853	4,895	158	3.3	1,621	24.9%
Blaenau Gwent	27	6,873	1,834	26.7	5,081	5,084	5,317	5,479	5,671	5,713	632	12.4	1,160	16.9%
Bridgend	52	12,085	1,949	16.1	10,197	10,497	10,583	10,902	11,191	11,413	1,216	11.9	672	5.6%
Caerphilly	75	17,826	3,812	21.4	13,929	14,057	14,340	14,652	14,901	14,981	1,052	7.6	2,845	16.0%
Cardiff	101	29,261	4,901	16.7	24,807	25,242	25,636	26,123	26,407	26,726	1,919	7.7	2,535	8.7%
Carmarthenshire	112	18,057	4,824	26.7	13,385	13,343	13,332	13,325	13,344	13,365	-20	-0.1	4,692	26.0%
Ceredigion	61	6,451	1,678	26.0	4,816	4,873	4,864	4,953	5,004	5,059	243	5.0	1,392	21.6%
Conwy	61	9,325	1,891	20.3	7,520	7,460	7,430	7,492	7,537	7,575	55	0.7	1,750	18.8%
Denbighshire ^{note 2}	52	8,612	1,634	19.0	7,090	7,136	7,103	7,171	7,171	7,171	81	1.1	1,441	16.7%
Flintshire	74	13,995	2,529	18.1	11,457	11,649	11,786	11,893	12,065	12,072	615	5.4	1,923	13.7%
Gwynedd ^{note 3}	103	11,546	3,065	26.5	8,556	8,512	8,482	8,499	8,499	8,499	-57	-0.7	3,047	26.4%
Merthyr Tydfil	24	4,949	570	11.5	4,379	4,388	4,474	4,545	4,548	4,553	174	4.0	396	8.0%
Monmouthshire	32	7,397	1,229	16.6	6,180	6,133	6,229	6,340	6,318	6,280	100	1.6	1,117	15.1%
Neath Port Talbot	71	13,573	3,700	27.3	9,900	9,895	9,978	10,112	10,240	10,307	407	4.1	3,266	24.1%
Newport	48	13,613	2,134	15.7	11,523	11,569	11,872	12,068	12,356	12,582	1,059	9.2	1,031	7.6%
Pembrokeshire	61	10,546	1,379	13.1	9,195	9,190	9,308	9,464	9,534	9,602	406	4.4	945	9.0%
Powys	101	12,040	2,876	23.9	9,197	9,242	9,259	9,316	9,399	9,432	235	2.6	2,608	21.7%
Rhondda Cynon Taf	114	24,670	6,916	28.0	18,066	17,892	18,220	18,665	18,756	18,987	921	5.1	5,683	23.0%
Swansea	84	20,723	3,804	18.4	17,091	17,196	17,362	17,618	17,807	17,972	881	5.2	2,751	13.3%
Torfaen	30	8,575	1,666	19.4	6,937	7,100	7,141	7,306	7,572	7,723	786	11.3	852	9.9%
Vale of Glamorgan	46	11,906	2,027	17.0	10,028	10,060	10,194	10,348	10,402	10,504	476	4.7	1,402	11.8%
Wrexham	60	11,569	1,638	14.2	10,205	10,321	10,380	10,531	10,641	10,710	505	4.9	859	7.4%
Wales	1,439	280,108	57,858	20.7	224,276	225,585	228,099	231,611	234,216	236,121	11,845	5.28	43,987	15.7%
Annual difference						1,309	2,513	3,512	2,605	1,905				

Notes

1. As this table does not take into account oversubscription, (c) will not always be equivalent to (a) - (b).
2. Denbighshire local authority did not supply projections for the full period - a constant value has been carried forward for missing years
3. Gwynedd local authority did not supply projections for the full period - a constant value has been carried forward for missing years

2011 Data for Secondary Schools - Numbers on Roll and Projections to 2016

Local Authority Data - Secondary Schools

Local Authority	Position at January 2011					Pupil Projections 2012 -2016 as at January							Percentage of total capacity which would be unfilled at 2016	
	Total number of schools	Total capacity of schools (a)	Number of unfilled places (b)	Percentage of total capacity which is unfilled	2011 Numbers on Roll Actuals (c)	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Trend 2011-2016	% variance		Number of unfilled places at 2016
Anglesey	5	5,462	1,254	23.0	4,207	4,274	4,133	4,088	3,931	3,919	-288	-7	1,543	28.2%
Blaenau Gwent	5	4,812	664	13.8	4,154	4,010	3,857	3,855	3,705	3,598	-556	-13	1,214	25.2%
Bridgend	10	11,789	2,124	18.0	9,665	9,711	9,724	9,576	9,469	9,293	-372	-4	2,496	21.2%
Caerphilly	14	14,700	2,455	16.7	12,260	12,236	12,075	11,864	11,878	11,841	-419	-3	2,859	19.4%
Cardiff ^{note 2}	20	24,908	4,456	17.9	20,686	20,297	19,915	19,574	19,331	19,263	-1,423	-7	5,645	22.7%
Cardiff	14	13,154	1,442	11.0	12,068	11,878	11,664	11,411	11,227	11,095	-973	-8	2,059	15.7%
Cardiff	7	6,353	1,627	25.6	4,726	4,639	4,577	4,504	4,482	4,463	-263	-6	1,890	29.8%
Ceredigion	7	8,696	1,453	16.7	7,243	7,224	7,163	7,097	6,979	6,903	-340	-5	1,793	20.6%
Conwy	8	8,465	1,032	12.2	7,458	7,295	7,306	7,211	7,076	7,025	-433	-6	1,440	17.0%
Denbighshire ^{note 3}	12	11,750	1,497	12.7	10,311	10,162	9,969	9,787	9,586	9,575	-736	-7	2,175	18.5%
Flintshire ^{note 4}	14	10,823	3,326	30.7	7,497	7,454	7,405	7,231	7,231	7,231	-266	-4	3,592	33.2%
Gwynedd ^{note 5}	4	5,053	1,174	23.2	3,879	3,855	3,762	3,665	3,621	3,589	-290	-7	1,464	29.0%
Merthyr Tydfil	4	6,068	915	15.1	5,153	5,118	4,998	4,949	4,963	5,000	-153	-3	1,068	17.6%
Monmouthshire	11	11,233	2,827	25.2	8,406	8,291	7,957	7,672	7,377	7,260	-1,146	-14	3,973	35.4%
Neath Port Talbot	8	10,454	650	6.2	10,440	10,286	10,068	9,959	9,864	9,750	-690	-7	704	6.7%
Newport	8	9,251	1,283	13.9	8,182	7,899	7,722	7,501	7,308	7,117	-1,065	-13	2,134	23.1%
Pembrokeshire	13	10,652	1,944	18.3	8,766	8,588	8,417	8,176	8,009	7,825	-941	-11	2,827	26.5%
Powys	19	21,881	4,205	19.2	17,884	17,111	16,855	16,549	16,522	16,364	-1,520	-8	5,517	25.2%
Rhondda Cynon Taff	15	16,181	2,299	14.2	14,036	13,888	13,710	13,479	13,344	13,297	-739	-5	2,884	17.8%
Swansea	7	8,701	953	11.0	7,837	7,657	7,513	7,275	7,076	6,938	-899	-11	1,763	20.3%
Torfaen	8	10,485	1,001	9.5	9,823	9,733	9,495	9,242	9,143	9,008	-815	-8	1,477	14.1%
Vale of Glamorgan	9	8,460	1,907	22.5	6,548	6,589	6,506	6,442	6,426	6,439	-109	-2	2,021	23.9%
Wrexham	222	239,331	40,488	16.9	201,229	198,196	194,793	191,108	188,549	186,793	-14,436	-7.2	52,538	22.0%
Wales					Annual difference	-3,033	-3,402	-3,685	-2,559	-1,756				

Notes

- As this table does not take into account oversubscription, (c) will not always be equivalent to (a) - (b).
- Cardiff's pupil projections did not include sixth form students - there was a total of 3,216 sixth form pupils at Jan 2011. Assumption made that 3,200 will attend for each year
- Denbighshire's projections may be subject to change.
- Flintshire has included numbers of pupils in SEN units in its projections.
- Gwynedd local authority did not supply projections for the full period - a constant value has been carried forward for missing years