# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE** | **Reducing Infant Class Sizes and Raising Standards** |
| **DATE** | **20 April 2018** |
| **BY** | **Kirsty Williams, Cabinet Secretary for Education** |

Our National Mission is to raise standards, reduce the attainment gap and deliver an education system which is a source of national pride and public confidence.

International research and evidence tells us there is a positive connection between smaller class sizes and attainment, particularly for pupils from poorer backgrounds. This is most significant for younger children. And a reduction has the largest effect in raising standards when accompanied by changes and reforms to teaching and pedagogy. In response to this evidence, the Welsh Government has made available a total of £36m over the course of this Assembly to reduce infant class sizes, starting with the largest classes first.

The criterion for the funding is aimed at infant classes of 29 or more in schools which have at least one or a combination of:

* high levels of eligibility for free school meals;
* below average outcomes and where the school is Red or Amber in the School Categorisation System;
* high levels of special educational needs;
* high levels of where English/Welsh is not the first language.

I am pleased that local authorities expressed a keen interest in benefiting from the grant and subsequently all authorities submitted detailed business cases for the £16 million revenue element of the grant targeting schools that meet the criteria.

This means that more than 80 schools across Wales will benefit from the revenue funding initially, through the appointment of over 80 additional teachers to reduce the largest infant classes in schools which have high levels of deprivation, special education needs and/or where teaching and learning need to improve. As this is the first year the grant will be in operation, this number will increase as local authorities target further schools for the revenue funding.

I had the pleasure of visiting one of those schools yesterday. Awel-y-Mor Primary School in Neath Port Talbot is a prime candidate for the grant, having above average levels of eligibility for free school meals and special educational needs. From September the school will benefit from an additional teacher to reduce its infant class sizes and improve standards. The appointment of an additional teacher and smaller infant class sizes will benefit the school as it continues on its improvement journey.

A number of local authorities have also submitted bids for the capital element of the grant where reducing infant class sizes in schools that meet the criteria is dependent on additional classrooms. These bids are undergoing final scrutiny and will further increase the number of schools benefiting from the grant.

Reducing teacher workload is a key priority for the Welsh Government. Smaller class sizes will both lessen the workload while improving the quality and quantity of time teachers spend with pupils.

The additional teachers secured through the reduction in class sizes will support compliance with foundation phase ratios, and importantly will also provide additional qualified teaching time, which is crucial for the effective implementation of the foundation phase pedagogy.

This investment linked to our other reforms, will improve early years’ attainment, have a significant impact for more disadvantaged pupils and support teachers to be innovative and increase pupil engagement.

We recognise that reducing class sizes is not the only driver for school improvement in our schools, which is why this policy is being delivered in the context of our wider reforms as part of our nation mission to raise standards. This includes removing unnecessary bureaucracy, strengthening initial teacher training, new professional standards for teachers, a national approach to professional learning development and incentivising new and mature graduates into the profession to ensure every child gets the best start in life.

I am confident that this is a policy that not only responds to concerns by teachers and parents, but also contributes to our mission to raise standards, reduce the attainment gap and deliver an education system which is a source of national pride and public confidence.