

Huw Lewis AC / AM
Y Gweinidog Addysg a Sgiliau
Minister for Education and Skills



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref
Eluned Parrott AM
Eluned.Parrott@assembly.wales

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Dear Eluned

I am writing in response to your concerns raised to the Business Minister during Plenary on the 09 February, regarding the availability of educational psychologists to work in schools in the Vale of Glamorgan and the possible impact this may have on learners with potential autistic needs.

The Welsh Government is committed to creating an inclusive education system for all learners, regardless of their needs and background to ensure all learners are able to access a high standard of education.

Under the Education Act 1996, local authorities (LAs) and schools are responsible for providing a suitable education for learners, including those with special educational needs (SEN). As such, it remains a decision for Vale of Glamorgan LA, like all other LAs across Wales, to determine how it configures its specialist support services, including Educational Psychology services, whilst being mindful of their statutory responsibilities. LAs should be working closely with their schools to determine how LA Educational Psychology services should be accessed, by schools, in order to meet the needs of their learners.

To support LAs in meeting their legal responsibilities, the Welsh Government has published the SEN Code of Practice for Wales, to which all LAs in Wales must have due regard. This provides practical advice to LAs, maintained schools, early years settings and others on carrying out their responsibility to identify, assess, and provide for learners with SEN. It is for LAs to determine the evidence base, including use of private educational psychologist reports, in any child's assessment of need. I have attached a link to the document:
<http://learning.wales.gov.uk/resources/browse-all/special-education-needs-code-of-practice/?lang=en>

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1NA

English Enquiry Line 0300 0603300
Llinell Ymholiadau Cymraeg 0300 0604400
Correspondence.Huw.Lewis@wales.gsi.gov.uk

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.

The Welsh Government recognises the important role that Educational Psychologists play in tackling the challenges encountered by children and young people in education within Wales. Their work helps to support the wellbeing and enhance learning opportunities for some of our most vulnerable learners. In support of this recognition, I announced, in September 2015, that Welsh Government would directly fund the provision of the DEdPsy programme at Cardiff University for the next three years. This will ensure a minimum of three new cohorts of prospective trainees entering onto the DEdPsy programme from September 2015-16.

In addition, as part of Welsh Government's wider approach to reforming the system of SEN, we have been considering capacity of the education workforce to support the needs of learners with SEN. We have recently concluded two critical studies to better understand the workforce development requirements of the general education workforce; and assess the capacity of specialist support services in supporting learners with SEN.

Work is now progressing, linked to our approach for the New Deal Pioneer Schools, to ensure our workforce develops knowledge and skills in relation to differentiation, assessment, meta-cognition and SEN. Ensuring our workforce has the necessary tools, and confidence to use those tools, will reduce the need to refer to specialist support services, including Educational Psychologists. This in turn, will also improve the capacity of specialist support services to focus on those learners with more complex needs.

The final reports for these two workforce studies have been published which can be accessed via the following link:

- <http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/publications/reports/an-assessment-of-special-educational-needs-workforce-development-requirements/?lang=en>
- <http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/publications/reports/workforce-planning-sen-specialist-services/?lang=en>

The responsibility for workforce planning of local specialist SEN services lies with LAs, however Welsh Government are working with the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) to consider options for developing a national workforce planning system that will enable the effective commissioning of future placements at universities for specialist training courses.

In regards to your concerns that children with suspected autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) are not being assessed, our ASD Strategic Action Plan for Wales, published in 2008, set the direction for statutory authorities to follow in terms of assessing people on the autism spectrum and providing the services and support necessary to meet their needs. The Welsh Government made a commitment to build on the success this achieved by refreshing the ASD Strategic Action Plan. In May last year we published the ASD interim delivery plan which included an action to develop awareness raising and training packages for professionals including schools. Welsh Government has been working with the WLGA and schools in Gwent to develop these resources, which are due to be rolled out in March. This training in addition to the New Deal initiative will ensure that any child or young person is provided with support in the classroom without needing to wait for a formal diagnosis.

You will also be aware that the Minister for Health and Social Services announced a £2m investment in neurodevelopmental services as part of a wider announcement, in 2015, of an additional £7.65m annually for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

Neurodevelopmental conditions are generally longer term, non-acute conditions, and can take time and the involvement of multiply agencies and professionals in the assessment process. The new services compliment ongoing activity under the NHS Together for Children and Young People Programme. The programme seeks to examine the whole

system of providing for the emotional and mental wellbeing of children and young people and includes a work-stream which is specifically examining the provision of neurodevelopmental services. Education services are fully engaged in the programme.

Best Regards
Huw

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