

**National Education Conference - Raising School Standards 14 February 2011**

**Leighton Andrews AM, Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning: Keynote Speech**

2 weeks ago I set out an action plan to turn around performance in our schools and I am pleased to say that the reaction has been overwhelmingly favourable. Today I want to repeat the key elements that I focused on in that speech, but I will also touch on two other important areas not covered in the speech then: Quality and Qualifications; and the importance of Early Years.

If I can return to the themes of the speech four weeks ago and I'll group them under four headings: teaching; learning; accountability; and collaboration.

In terms of teaching I have asked officials to examine whether we can revise initial teacher training so that it becomes a two-year Masters course with more classroom practice so that teachers are familiar with advanced teaching skills. Officials will also examine whether this can become the standard entry qualification for teaching in Wales. There will be a statutory requirement on all qualifying teachers to be trained in literacy and numeracy and they will have been required to pass literacy and numeracy skills tests on entry and exit. One inset day per year will be focussed on literacy and numeracy assessment for teachers. We will also be reviewing teacher induction alongside our review of the GTCW. We expect to get powers over the GTCW in the Education Bill that is currently that is going through Parliament. Development and support for the first three years of teaching will focus on firm foundations for the teaching literacy and numeracy. Continuous professional development will in future be focussed on system wide needs including literacy and numeracy linked to the priorities of the School Effectiveness Framework. We want to ensure that all teachers and head teachers as part of their professional accreditation have appropriate levels of literacy and numeracy.

In terms of learning if there is poor behaviour in the classroom obviously children cannot learn. We have already announced some extensions to teachers' powers last autumn, in respect of use of force by school staff as well as a school ability to discipline pupils and impose sanctions. The next phase will concentrate on outcomes and improving behaviour to raise standards. All newly qualified teachers will undertake development modules in behaviour management as part of their induction process. And I think we need to revisit the pilots we are carrying out in respect of the attendance and behaviour action plan and the work that was previously done for us by Professor Ken Reid.

The Foundation Phase which is fully rolled out from this September and which introduces children to learning through doing, will not be allowed to lead to a reduction in literacy. The baseline assessment provides us with a floor and will be supported year on year with continuous assessment. As part of our National Literacy Plan we are introducing a National Reading test, which will be consistent across Wales and will be designed to ensure that far fewer pupils are falling behind their designated reading age. The plan will also

**National Education Conference - Raising School Standards 14 February 2011**

**Leighton Andrews AM, Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning: Keynote Speech**

include a focus on 7-11 years and catch up reading programmes as well as stretching those with pupils the highest ability. By 2012- 2013 we will be undertaking similar plans for numeracy.

In terms of accountability, performance will be our driver. To support the drive to improve performance we are creating the standards unit I think Chris Tweedale has already spoken about, to lead performance and provide challenge on a national basis. And I will not be approving any new initiatives unless they add value to our demand for higher performance.

As you heard earlier we are introducing a national system for the grading of schools which will be operated by all local authorities and consortia. Let me say now once and for all this is not a return to league tables, this is not a return to league tables. We will not publish a national league table of schools. But I do want to say to the teaching Unions, that the Freedom of Information Act cannot be un-invented. A vast amount of data is already published on school performance, by us and by local authorities. We are not going to publish league tables we are not going back to league tables. But the information is already out there and I think people need to understand that the demand for transparency by parents and pupils is not going to go away.

We will also be looking to integrate PISA assessments into school assessment at 15. As I say, use of data is critical to performance and no school will pass an Estyn inspection from next year unless they can demonstrate that their governing body has discussed the family of schools data and other relevant performance data, and have set in place actions to improve their position and I will be writing to all Chairs of Governors to make this clear.

In the Education Measure we are introducing statutory training for governors and effective clerking. We expect all local authorities to ensure that Key Stage II teacher assessments are robust and consistent with the nationally defined standards, especially in respect of literacy.

Where a school is found by Estyn to be failing and I regard the situation as irredeemable, as I said two weeks ago I will close it.

I will be changing the performance management provisions for head teacher performance management and teacher performance management, to enable closer monitoring of their approach to raising standards, engaging local authorities and consortia in this, and we will be producing statutory guidance for school improvement

In terms of collaboration, in the Education Measure we are taking powers to allow local authorities to federate boards of governors of schools. I expect more federations of schools operating under single head teachers. And finally,

**National Education Conference - Raising School Standards 14 February 2011**

**Leighton Andrews AM, Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning: Keynote Speech**

I expect local authorities to participate in consortia arrangements including shared consortium services, or suffer financial penalties.

I want to say a few words today about the quality of what we are teaching at 14 to 19. There has been an explosion over recent years in both the numbers of subjects being taught at A Level and the wide variety of vocational subjects. The question we have to ask ourselves is we giving our young people the right guidance about what qualifications really matter to them, to equip them for the career paths they chose. I am not making this call with a view to being prescriptive about particular subject areas. I simply want to start a debate on the things that matter for young people. A debate to see what employers and universities want in the years ahead. I think we have to get our focus and our priorities right for the future. We know there are lists of subjects where some universities want the focus to be, we also know there are some qualifications that employers don't want. It's our responsibility as a department to ensure that schools and FE colleges focus on what matters when it comes to skills and qualifications. In the light of the revelations from the Russell Group of Universities that they frown on certain subjects at A levels, should we be looking in Wales at a narrower range of subjects? In view of the fact that employers have some concerns about certain vocational qualifications Should we also narrow the range of vocational qualifications taught at 14 to 19, ensuring that there is adequate time as well for basic skills. Is it acceptable that we have subjects taught by teachers not qualified in those subjects? Isn't it time we focussed on quality and rigor rather than an apparent choice which sump simply does not meet the real needs of learners, that panders to the alphabet soup of qualifications set up by the private examination boards. Isn't it better to have clarity in the academic and vocational roots so that there is no ambiguity for those performing the important roles of learning coaches and those from Careers Wales giving advice?

I am not going to leap to conclusions on this, but I do think we need a wide national debate. We set out in the learning and skills measure ambitious plans for a real choice for learners. Intended to achieve a strategic shift in the range of vocational courses taught. We have achieved that strategic shift, but I think we need to ask what kind of choice we should offer. Are we giving the best advice are we trying to cover too much, are we failing on the basics because of the drive for a wider points score. I have already announced the suspension of the national planning and funding system the NPFS had many benefits but it allowed duplication of courses unnecessary competition between institutions and too many unviable classes. That was hard to justify in the best of times but impossible in a time of difficult public finances And Estyn has told me that competition is still there at 14-19 where it does not need to be.

I think as we move forward we are going to need also to look again at what we're doing in the Early Years. I don't doubt that teachers face enormous challenges today, not least in primary schools. There is a generation of

**National Education Conference - Raising School Standards 14 February 2011**

**Leighton Andrews AM, Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning: Keynote Speech**

children who come from families without recent experience of work or discipline of time-keeping. For some, school is the first place where effective boundaries are set and necessary social and behavioural skills are learned. The impacts on the grandchildren of Thatcherism on the classroom is serious.

We have sought to address this through schemes such as 'Flying Start', which we launched five years ago. Evaluation of 'Flying Start' has largely been positive. There has been consistent qualitative evidence that emotional and social development is better, with 'Flying Start' children better prepared for school quicker to settle, better behaved and more confident in interacting with other children, and some evidence of better language and cognitive development. There's evidence that parents are better engaged and more confident themselves. And we know that health outcomes have improved, including reduced referral to A&E, and hard to reach families are actually getting support. Early Years remains key to what we do later. I think there is always a danger that this work is seen as less of a priority when it comes to lobbying for resources. The headlines go to Higher Education, to GCSE and A-Level, to literacy and numeracy in primary schools. There are strong lobbies for students, teachers and head teachers but who lobbies for the Under 4s? We all have to be lobbyists for the youngest in our society and ensure that programmes such as 'Flying Start' are maintained and supported.

We're starting to see a real divergence in policy terms now in terms between Wales and England. We've made it clear here in Wales that we are committed to the comprehensive model. We will not have academies in Wales; we will not have Michael Gove's free schools. And we are taking steps in Wales to prevent the establishment of more Foundation schools as well in our current Education Measure. So we are committed to a comprehensive model of education in Wales but what we have to demonstrate is that the comprehensive model is delivering for all our young people.

Thank you

Chris Tweedale

Ok, any questions for the Minister?

...

Q1. Has any consideration been given to the implication for statutory training for governors and the likelihood of governors to come forward given there have been difficulties in terms of increasing governors?

Leighton Andrews

I think we have got to ensure that governors play a full role in the accountability process of schools and that means we do expect them to be more than cheerleaders for their own local institution. We do expect them to have a wider responsibility to the community, and to learners and therefore I

**Leighton Andrews AM, Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning: Keynote Speech**

think we should have expectations of governors and at the very least I think we should start with statutory training for chairs of governors, and induction training for all governors and I think these need to be quite clearly understood. We're going to need to ensure that governors understand the data that been provided for their school and how they can contribute to the progression of a school or institution.

Now, will that have an impact? It might have an impact in some places – that's why I think we may see a Federation of governing bodies in some areas and that's something we're addressing within the Bill as well, but at the end of the day, we actually want governors to perform a role and that means that there are responsibilities that go with that role and I think in the short term we've got to ensure that training is there.

Q2. You mentioned considering reducing the number of subjects and vocational courses at the end of KS3 and 4. Would you think (of) doing the same at KS2 if you want to improve standards of literacy and numeracy?

Leighton Andrews

Well, it's an interesting question I suppose, and we've made quite a lot of moves to a skills based curriculum. I welcome any input people have if they think there is a problem at KS2. I suppose the public debate has largely been the KS3 and KS4 which is why I wanted to open that up and we've got quite a way to go in terms of this debate.

We need to do some internal assessment ourselves about the range of policy cases, we need to decide what is appropriate for public money to support in terms of the examination systems that currently is, we need to look at whether the Welsh Bacc can become a wider qualification – a whole series of kind of issues here that we've got – which is not going to be a short process – it's not something I'd expect to be discussed or concluded overnight.

I'm well aware of evidence in Wales that they have a different way of approaching teaching at the earlier stages. I'm certainly open to looking at the curriculum between 8 to 14 before we had the David Egan group looking at that in the past but if you've got views on that, let me hear them.

Q3. Given the changes that have been announced to 14-19 funding and the 11<sup>th</sup> hour nature of these announcements, what advice would you give to schools and authorities who are facing holes in their budgets next year?

Leighton Andrews

Well, I don't think it's been any secret that the Assembly Government's budget for next year has been cut by £860 million by the UK government nor is it any secret that because the comprehensive spending review was announced so late we are 6-8 weeks behind in our budgetary process within the Assembly. We would normally have concluded the final budget in the Assembly before Christmas, but the comprehensive spending review came so late we have to put all our processes back.

**National Education Conference - Raising School Standards 14 February 2011**

**Leighton Andrews AM, Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning: Keynote Speech**

Now what we've tried to do to give people a way forward is to move to a three year budget plan so that people have clarity not just for the one year but for the two years that succeed and clearly there is a cut in year one overall but we see budgets rising in cash terms in years two and three so I'm hoping we can provide some stability through that which means that people can look at their budgets on the likely three year basis rather than on the basis of a single year. I think these are very difficult financial times. We've put protection into the schools budgets through the revenue support grants and the additional £61 million we put in.

In terms of post 16 we've had to make savings in the first year but as I say, the budgets are cash positive in years two and three. But look at the context. Our budget for next year is £860 million lower than it is this year. Over the next three years our budgets in the Assembly will be £1.8 billion less in real terms as a result of what we're receiving from the UK. So education has been protected – we're 1% above the money we get from the block grant that we get from the UK government has been put into the Revenue support grant and into my own department's budgets and we've also put in additional money for the Foundation phase as well, so I think overall what we've done for Education has been good but there are inevitably going to be problems when we're facing that level of budget cuts but hopefully the three year budgets will bring some level of stability.

Q4. (very rough translation)

You've clarified why you've decided to do away with the Finance system for post 16 funding but why following that are you allocating the money left behind on learners who are a year behind instead of on the basis of current pupil numbers?

Leighton Andrews

Well I think we've used up-to-date figures in terms of what we've put into place but clearly if we're planning on the three year period ahead we're going to have to start somewhere and we're starting with this year. What I don't want to do frankly is re-open the MDFES every year during the course of what is going to be a tough year of funding. I think it is far more important that we use this three year period to get a sensible judgement about the resources that are available both to FE colleges and through LAs to post 16 school education and that we look as we moved forward over these three years at the balance of provision that exists for 14-19 locally. What I hope this will do is ensure greater collaboration bear in mind that we're also keeping the additional 14-19 funding that is there in the budget for next year for the 14-19 Learning networks. But we've got to in this time that is difficult look at what we can achieve through greater collaboration and I think that this is the time to do it. Whatever year we took, whether there's going to be a difference on data monthly in going forward I think we've made some sensible judgements.

END