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Annwyl Lynne

Strategic Workload Coordination Group

I write to update you on the work of the Strategic Workload Coordination Group (SWCG), which I have been chairing on your behalf since February 2024. Workload concerns are a persistent challenge for the education workforce; I was grateful for the opportunity to chair a group dedicated to co-ordinating efforts to tackle it.

Three working groups reported to the SWCG, each was tasked with looking at discrete aspects of policy that impact workload at a school level: Finance, Policy Development and Implementation, and Reporting and Engagement. Each group was chaired by a senior education trade union representative, in one case jointly with a senior member of a regional school support service and was further supported by Welsh Government officials. Each group was asked to develop a workplan covering the period from February 2024 until July 2025, identifying areas of education policy which impact significantly on school level workload, and to agree actions to tackle these. The SWCG co-ordinated the groups' work and ensured consistency and coherence across the three. It also reported progress to the Schools' Social Partnership Forum (SSPF), chaired by you as Cabinet Secretary.

I will focus in this letter on areas which might usefully be considered for ongoing work as part of your Strategic Education Workforce Plan (SEWP).

Ways of working

Effective ways of working were established, involving all the key partners. The work was characterised throughout by a determination to make a difference at school level. It is also noteworthy that each of the groups has engaged with stakeholders well beyond their immediate membership to make progress and gain valuable wider input. That partners from local authorities and other regional support services, trade unions and Welsh Government were driving the work of the groups proved an effective model to ensure the inclusion of views and expertise from across the

sector. **I recommend that these ways of working be adopted and further developed as the SEWP work is progressed.**

Impact of the work and suggested areas for a future focus

- A perceptible shift in the culture of the education directorate is arguably the biggest gain from this work. Workload is now more routinely considered at the start of policy development at WG and LA level. This approach evolved further during the lifetime of this project. This evolution was evident in the way officials revisited some policy areas – the 14-16 Learner guidance and the Welsh language guidance for example – and looked again at the workload implications. The development of the homelessness policy on the other hand was shared as an example of how to apply the workload impact assessment process from the start. This approach is confined to education policy while other areas, notably health policy, also impact the education workforce. **Workload impact assessments should be a routine requirement for all policy areas which affect schools, before changes are introduced.**
- Case studies have been developed in the course of this work detailing the everyday experience of teachers, school leaders and teaching assistants. These remain to be completed but will be helpful in illustrating the ‘day in the life’ of school-based practitioners, and the extent to which a range of pressures undermine practitioners’ ability to focus directly on teaching and learning. **These should be completed and shared widely to support better system-wide understanding of current pressures and stimulate ideas on how to address them.**
- The Reporting and Engagement Group developed a document, currently entitled ‘Establishing principles for engagement with Government and LAs’ with the aim of offering practical approaches around workload. The principles outlined in this document have been carefully considered and are the result of detailed consultation with a wide range of partners. **These principles should be formally adopted by all parties. The final document is attached for your attention.**
- The Finance Group’s workplan focussed on a number of areas which impact workload. The reduction in reporting requirements in relation to Welsh Government grants was warmly welcomed as these reduced from 50 to eight during the lifetime of this project. **This new streamlined system should be kept under regular review to maintain the downward pressure on bureaucratic reporting requirements and progress reported regularly.**
- The much-anticipated review of local government schools’ funding is still ongoing, with any improvements in transparency likely to be introduced at the earliest in the 2028/29 financial year because of the legal complexity surrounding the changes. These were understood by the SWCG members, but it will be important to continue to focus on this area over the next period in relation to workload considerations. A new group was established to support this work made up of School Business Managers (SBMs). I understand that a pilot programme is also now in place offering funded training to SBSs. **I recommend that the SBM group be maintained as the changes to local government funding models are developed, and that the impact of the**

pilot, and its potential to support the wider school system be considered as part of the work of the SEWP.

Arguably the most valuable outcome of this work was the leadership role undertaken by the stakeholders involved, and the agency this project afforded them to engage with and seek solutions from across Government – national and local. It also enabled them to focus on what they felt were – and which were not – the most purposeful areas to tackle at this point.

I would offer one caution. While it was agreed that the work undertaken by the groups would impact favourably on school leader workload, this will be harder to discern at a classroom level. The groups had clearly defined terms of reference which informed the action plans they developed to effect change over a twelve-month period. As the SEWP is developed, it will be helpful to consider how a similarly structured process can respond more fully to the workload concerns of the wider school workforce as well.

Finally, I would like to thank the groups for their hard work and engagement over the past twelve months, and for the collegiate way in which they have approached it.

Yn gywir iawn

Anna

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