



Ein cyf/Our ref: WQ84947

Andrew R.T. Davies MS
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26 April 2022

Dear Andrew,

Thank you for your Written Question of 8 April which asked, ‘what steps is the Minister taking to ensure that schools can offer children access to speech and language therapy?’ My response is set out in this letter.

The ability to communicate is an essential life skill for all children and young people and early identification and intervention is essential.

Local authorities and schools are responsible for ensuring suitable educational provision for all children, including those with additional learning needs (ALN). Prime responsibility for the provision of speech and language therapy (SLT) services to children rests with the health service and many local authorities in Wales have service level agreements with their health boards in order to provide SLT in schools.

Early identification, intervention and prevention is a key principle underpinning the new additional learning needs (ALN) system, which began a phased implementation in September 2021. The new ALN system will help improve the planning and delivery of additional learning provision so it is much more focused on individual need. It provides an opportunity for Education, Health, and Social Services to work in a more collaborative way and strengthens the legal responsibility on local health boards to meet the clinical needs of the child. The ALN system will ensure that all children and young people who require additional support to meet their needs, which may include speech and language therapy, have that support properly planned for and protected.

The delivery of routine NHS services, including SLT, is a matter for local health boards. Speech and language therapists support children in a range of ways to develop their speech, language and communication skills. Therapists work as part of a multi-agency team around a child, supporting them alongside their family and often within the school setting. Schools and speech and language therapists work closely together to maximise access to SLT for children who have communication difficulties or language delay. They can also be referred to speech therapists by a range of professionals such as health visitors or early years practitioners.

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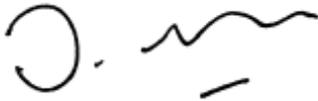
We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

I recognise some services have been disrupted by the pandemic and services are working hard to provide treatment and services. Health boards and schools have explored new ways of delivering SLT services during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as phone and video consultation, and continue to deploy these where appropriate. Decisions whether to select face to face or other modes of treatment have been based on what is most clinically appropriate in any given situation or environment.

The Welsh Government has continued to invest in education and training for allied health practitioners, including speech and language therapists, and a new Welsh language SLT course is being developed in Glyndwr University to provide more SLT for our Welsh health and care services.

The pandemic has been especially challenging for learners with ALN. In 2021-22 I allocated an additional £10 million to local authorities to provide extra resources to support learners with ALN affected by the pandemic, which could include speech and language therapy.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large 'J' followed by a series of wavy lines and a short horizontal stroke at the end.

Jeremy Miles AS/MS

Gweinidog y Gymraeg ac Addysg
Minister for Education and Welsh Language