# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE** | **The next stage in the review of school improvement - the roles and responsibilities of education partners in Wales** |
| **DATE** | **31 January 2024** |
| **BY** | **Jeremy Miles, Minister for Education and the Welsh Language** |

In December, I committed to bringing education partners together to ensure that we have a comprehensive and system level response to our shared challenge of improving educational performance and raising standards.

Today, as a sector we reflected on recent educational performance as well as on the long tail of challenges arising from the pandemic, highlighted again today by Estyn in its annual report. We also acknowledged the extremely difficult operating context for teachers and for school leaders.

All education partners have a shared interest and role in improving educational performance and I was pleased to hear commitments and consensus from across the sector which collectively will take us forward. As a system we need a clearer focus on national priorities with a clearer national role in leading improvement. We must improve performance through stretching our learners but also by continuing to reduce the equity gap. To do this we need a sharper focus on attendance, behaviour and well-being; excellent teaching; curriculum reform - with a particular focus on literacy and numeracy; and additional learning needs support.

**The Review of the future direction and roles and responsibilities of education partners**

Today we also discussed the [**review of the future direction, and roles and responsibilities of education partners**](https://www.gov.wales/review-roles-and-responsibilities-education-partners-wales-and-delivery-school-improvement) which I commissioned last year. I met with the review team in December 2023 and they highlighted to me the consistent messages from across the education system.

The findings chime with the wider evidence base picking up threads that have been explored in a range of previous reports, (such as the leadership review, OECD’s TPL report, the Sibieta Review of School Spending in Wales, Estyn findings[[1]](#footnote-1)). The wider budget pressures are being felt keenly in our schools and as a government we have taken new action to simplify, streamline, and amalgamate funding for 2024-25. This action chimes with the review’s feedback on previous grant complexity and we have now taken action to address this. My thanks go to the review team and the large numbers of our practitioners and partners who have engaged with the review and provided their views.

**The next phase: a new focus and clear delivery expectations**

The feedback was clear regarding the preferred direction of travel that school leaders and a majority of local authorities want to see. I am attaching a copy of the letter I received from Professor Dylan Jones, review team lead, to share these messages transparently with the sector. Given the alignment of these messages with wider evidence, I concur with the review team that continuing the review with a focus on exploring the features of the current system, and the views across the system would not be best value. I am therefore moving the review onto a new phase. I have determined that we will use this phase to explore how school improvement can best be supported at three levels:

**1.** **Supporting school-to-school working at a local level**

**2.** **Supporting school-to-school collaboration and networking across local authorities and at national level**

**3.** **Supporting school improvement at national level.**

Our activities moving forward will therefore be focussed on exploring how school improvement can best be supported at these three levels, (local, supra-local and national) and this will form the core workstreams for the next phase of the review.

I have asked Professor Jones and ISOS Partnership to continue to engage with and support the work moving forward, particularly focussed on supporting elements exploring school-to-school working at the local level, and across local authorities. I have also asked them to continue to act as a critical friend to my department as it considers the national level support structures and our role in national leadership.

In agreeing to this move to the second phase of our work I want to emphasise my aspirations for this work. I am clear that I want these new arrangements to:

* deliver improved educational standards, in the context of clear roles and responsibilities across the education system which the Welsh Government will set out;
* target resources in the most appropriate, efficient and effective ways, prioritising funding to schools and improving impact and delivery within the constrained budgets we are working with;
* reduce workload at school level through implementation of a shared national improvement framework and simplified, streamlined reporting;
* deliver more effective local collaboration, between schools and between local authorities, with an expectation that all schools and local authorities will work in partnership. It will provide greater consistency of support and empowerment, with school improvement at the heart of realising our education reforms.
* build more education expertise and implementation capacity nationally to provide stronger national leadership and clear frameworks to deliver our priorities.

I want all partners to be clear that in undertaking this work our primary aim will be **to improve educational outcomes through stretching our learners and reducing the equity gap**.

It is also important to me that this next phase is guided and managed in accordance with the following principles:

* The approach needs to relentlessly focus on improving education standards in Wales in a consistent and coherent way, and how the system will enable this.
* Collaboration and cooperation between schools, between schools and their local authority and between local authorities will be at the heart of the approach. All local authorities will still be expected to work in partnership with at least one other local authority.
* Promoting a culture that supports a genuinely school-led system and facilitating school leaders to act as system leaders nationally and locally thus creating a more direct two-way link between national and local action.
* Co-design and co-construction of the solutions are our de facto approach.
* The principles and ways of working of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Wales are how we will take this work forward.
* Value for money will be a guiding principle.

I intend to strengthen the governance with the establishment of a National Coherence Group (NCG) to oversee the work of the second phase of the review. The NCG will support and connect the thinking of the Welsh Government, local authorities, regional consortia and partnerships, Estyn and Prof Jones’ team to move forward in an orderly way. Specifically, the NCG will confirm any proposed partnership models as well as ensuring that the totality of change for Welsh Government, Estyn, local authorities, and regional partners is coherent and robust at a system level.

**Timelines and ensuring continued support to schools**

I expect that this second phase of the review will commence immediately in February 2024 and continue for 6 months until August 2024, after which the NCG will agree the proposed approach across the sector. I expect that there will be further phases to the work in terms of transition to any new arrangements that are proposed.

To ensure continuity of support to schools while the review progresses, we will expect any current regional working arrangements to continue during this time and be facilitated through the specific grant funding to support curriculum and professional learning in our schools.

1. [independent-leadership-review-nov-2021-en.pdf (gov.wales)](https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2022-05/independent-leadership-review-nov-2021-en.pdf), [Teachers’ professional learning study: Diagnostic report for Wales | en | OECD](https://www.oecd.org/unitedkingdom/teachers-professional-learning-study-diagnostic-report-for-wales-caf912c7-en.htm) , [Review of school spending in Wales | GOV.WALES](https://www.gov.wales/review-school-spending-wales), [Welcome to Estyn | Estyn (gov.wales)](https://www.estyn.gov.wales/) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)