Preamble – Things we need to stress

The SEA believes that greater stress should be put on the educational advances in Wales since devolution. These include:

* The Foundation Phase,
* The support for Comprehensive education,
* The new Welsh curriculum,
* The Additional Learning Needs Act (Wales) 2018,
* The retention of Local Authorities,
* The Welsh Baccalaureate,
* The 21st Century Schools’ Programme.

The SEA welcomes the fact that schools will not re-open until it is demonstrably safe to do so. We believe that this statement has implication for future class sizes.

**A] A great school in every community**

1. **Welsh Labour is committed to the comprehensive principle and believes that selection has no place in the Welsh Education System.** The SEA welcomes this statement.
2. **It completely rejects the Tory model of Free Schools.** The SEA welcomes this statement – but wishes to extend it to include Academies, Foundation Schools and Private Schools. We also wish to remove charitable status from private education.
3. **It supports the democratic role of Local Authorities (LAs) …** The SEA welcomes this statement – but wants clarification of the role of Local Authorities. We would like a statement that Local Authorities will be asked to discuss reducing in number such that all are big enough to be able to discharge their responsibilities. It would then be possible for them to be re-skilled and take up their full role – so that the need for Consortia would vanish.
4. **…and parity of esteem for vocational and academic routes.** The SEA welcomes this statement.
5. **Welsh Labour has tried to ensure that every part of our education system gets the funding it needs to succeed.** Labour must be honest about the funding that has been lost over 10 years of Tory austerity. The NEU is concerned that 942 schools in Wales (out of 1494 LA schools) have faced funding cuts. The NASUWT is concerned at the disparities that exist between Welsh Local Authorities.
6. **It has made available over £100 million of additional funding for Welsh Schools in the last Assembly term.** This statement needs context – how does this sum relate to need?

**B] 21st Century Schools**

1. **The Welsh Government, working with partners in local government has invested £37 million in new and refurbished schools and colleges.** This statement needs context – how does it relate to the total shortfall in capital management and the overall need to update and refurbish schools and colleges?

**C] School standards**

1. **Reading and Numeracy tests in Years 2-9 are now helping to improve standards …** The SEA rejects this statement. Welsh Government assessment policies are educationally flawed They reject research in learning and child development, deny children the right to an all-round personally fulfilling education, increase stress on learners and teachers and do not provide any new or useful information They divert funds and effort from pupils’ learning. The SEA supports teacher assessment backed up by insightful and supportive moderation by Local Authorities.
2. **Doubling investment in early years Pupil Development Grant.** The SEA welcomes this statement, but asks how it relates to the overall need?
3. **Establishing a National Academy for Education Leadership.**

The SEA supports training for school leadership. This supports the overall prestige of education staff. However, we are concerned at the over use of private providers, as opposed to school, local authority and Estyn staff. We wish to emphasize the educational nature of school leadership rather than financial and grant seeking effort

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1. **New teaching and leadership standards.** The SEA believes that Teaching and Learning should be the basis of education. This should be the groundwork of the new curriculum initiative. Teachers, in particular should be competent in supporting children with Additional Learning Needs and in supporting Minority Ethnic children, particularly those with English as an additional language.
2. **…the most generous system of student finance … in the UK.** The SEA believes that student finance has taken a step backwards. The current tuition fees are £9000 per annum. Grants are cut back at all levels of parental income by removing the most generous aspect of the old Welsh system – that which paid off the bulk of tuition fees. By removing this grant and replacing it with a loan, grants are reduced at every level of parental income. All students will receive smaller grants and end up with bigger debts.
3. **Plans for a single strategic authority for post compulsory education.** The SEA supports this statement. We wish to see both Further and Higher Education brought into the family of a national system, based on public service – not on privatisation and profit.
4. **…funds to support class size reduction and rural/small schools.** Context is needed on this. How does the funding relate to need? Are there too many small (and uneconomic) schools?
5. **New accreditation criteria for initial teacher training.** The SEA wishes to see the development of university/school Initial Teacher Training. It should include understanding of behaviour and its management to help in teaching and learning. It should also include recognition of the child’s neurological and social situation to help advance the education of all children.
6. **GCSE and ‘A’ level results have improved.** It is necessary for Welsh Labour to be honest. The following table is from the Joint Council for Qualifications. It can be seen that GCSE results are still below those in 2015.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
| A\*-A | 19.2% | 19.4% | 17.9% | 18.5% | 18.4% |
| A\*-C | 66.6% | 66.6% | 62.8% | 61.6% | 62.8% |
| A\*-G | 98.7% | 98.7% | 96.9% | 96.4% | 97.2% |

Also note that new Welsh GCSEs have departed from those in England and are no longer directly comparable.

At ‘A’ level there is some truth in the statement. Attainment of top grades has increased. A\*-A passes rose from 26.3% in 2018 to 27%, an historic high. A\* passes are now at 9.1%, also an historic high. Wales has made improvements in ranking for all grades and is now ranked first for A\* compared to the English regions and Northern Ireland. Results remained stable at A\*-C, with the overall pass rate of 76.3% at the highest level since 2009. BBC August 2019.

**D] School Improvement**

1. **The School categorisation system … is a smart and fair accountability framework.** The SEA believes that the colour coding system, while a marginal improvement on the original system based on quartiles, is a poor excuse for an accountability system. It provides no new data and is not a good mechanism for distributing the rather low level of support funding. It also provides the basis for Press treatment of the colours on a league table basis that promotes competition rather than cooperation between schools
2. **Fewer schools need the highest levels of support.** This figure is of no importance since the colour coding is a result of discussions between headteachers and challenge advisors. It is therefore a subjective evaluation. The SEA is informed that changes in colour code are made when a new headteacher takes over, regardless of any change in the quality of education.
3. **No local authorities are now in special measures.** However Estyn reports that the education service in Pembroke causes “significant concern. Literacy, numeracy and 2nd language Welsh require improvement” in half the primary schools and all the secondary schools inspected since 2017. Wrexham must “urgently improve outcomes for learners”. In Powys “many secondary schools are weak”. (Western Mail 12/2/20). We must not make statements that conflict with the evidence.
4. **The OECD supports the Welsh Government reforms.** We wait to see if this has any effect on the PISA results.

**E] Changes to the Welsh Curriculum**

1. **The Welsh Government has published ‘A curriculum for Wales – a curriculum for life’.**

The SEA welcomed the publication of the original Donaldson report on Curriculum and Assessment arrangements 2015. This was a good document and its implementation could lead to improved teaching and learning.

1. **Support for implementation is given through a network of Pioneer Schools.** The SEA feels that insufficient preparation has gone into its implementation. There has been limited involvement of those whose job it is to support teacher development. Consortia and Higher Education Institutions have largely delegated responsibility to seconded class teachers. The pioneer schools do not reflect the diversity of school types and teacher expertise. There has been insufficient contact and cross fertilisation between the pioneer schools and the rest of the profession. They were given limited areas to research, with overemphasis on information technology and too little on teaching and learning, which should have been the main point. Teachers involved had limited non-contact time and resources and insufficient support from professional educationalists (such as the Nuffield Foundation in England). The Curriculum for Wales Guidance is unclear and does not support curriculum change as envisaged by Professor Donaldson.
2. **A National Endowment for Music is to be established.** Wales is the only UK country with no national plan for music (NEU November 2019).

**F] Supporting the Profession**

1. **High quality Professional Development.** This is a vital part of the task of school improvement. Teachers must be given back the authority to know their classes, to plan work that meets their needs, to differentiate the work to meet the needs of all pupils and not to be constrained by artificial constructs such as the old national curriculum and whole school plans that do not fit their pupils.
2. **Initial Teacher Training.** This is a vital part of improving education and reversing the decline in teacher autonomy that has taken place since the Thatcherite Education Reform Act of 1988. Initial Teacher Training must have a University dimension as well as a school dimension. It must include understanding of child development as well as of literacy, numeracy, pedagogy and social development. It must also pay due attention to local issues from ecology to working class history.We also need more people to be trained in Educational Psychology to contribute to the diagnosis of children, but also to participate in the training of teachers to recognise and plan for neuro-diverse conditions such as Asperger’s, Autism and Dyslexia and the removal of behavioural and social obstacles to learning.
3. **Supporting Leadership.** School Leadership must take the lead in promoting good teaching and learning. Their role should not be to continually struggle against underfunding. Grants for specific purposes (such as Additional Learning Needs and Minority Ethnic Achievement) should be reliable year on year and not dependent on grant writing.
4. **Masters in Educational Practice.** This is an important weapon in improving teaching and learning. It can help teachers seize back control of lesson planning – as indicated in the Donaldson report. It is also a point to be learnt from the success of Finnish Education in developing respect for teaching.
5. **Federations of schools.** The SEA supports the good work that has been done under school clusters over the past 20 years. It is not clear what is meant here by ‘federations’, especially given the misuse in England of Academy chains.
6. **Devolution of pay and conditions.**

The SEA supports the aim to maintain the terms and conditions of Welsh teachers. We would like a more definite expression of support for Teaching Assistants. We are worried about the increased use of Teaching Assistants, Higher Level Teaching Assistants and Cover Supervisors to substitute for qualified teachers. These staff are taken from the jobs they are trained for and are often in the firing line when redundancy is threatened. We are also worried that in spite of the improvements that have been made in the Framework for Supply Teachers, schools are still being offered Supply Staff that can be paid “off framework”. A recent Freedom of Information request found that almost £114 million of taxpayers’ money was given to Private Agencies in the three years to August 2018.

1. **Confidence, recruitment and retention of teachers.**

The SEA is worried that an increasing number of young teachers are talking of leaving the profession. One aspect of this retention problem is workload, resulting largely from bureaucratic demands for information from too many accountability centres. These include the Literacy and Numeracy testing, but are greatly worsened by the number of centres that can demand information from teachers (worried senior managers and Headteachers, Consortia and Challenge Advisors, Local Authority bureaucrats, who no longer can provide support, Estyn and the Welsh Government itself).

**G] World class school and college buildings**

1. **Investment in buildings.** There have been some improvements but more information is needed on the accumulated need for capital investment.
2. **Reduction of infant class sizes.**The SEA welcomes attempts to limit the size of Infant classes.

**H] Community schools**

1. **Pupil Development Grant.**

We support moves to increase funding for deprived pupils. It is necessary to take further steps to reduce the inequalities inherent in capitalist society – particularly given the social deprivation statistics for Wales.

1. **Education Maintenance Allowance.**

The SEA welcomes the retention of the Education Maintenance Grant as a contribution to ending the effect of deprivation on post 16 education.

1. **Cost of school uniforms.**

Families should be supported in provision of key clothing, such as good shoes, warm winter clothing and PE kit. We do not support expensive status-driven school uniforms – which sometimes act to preserve social division and deprivation.

1. **The holiday hunger scheme.**

The SEA welcomes the attempts by the Welsh Government to provide free lunches for pupils in the school holidays. We congratulate the Welsh Government for maintaining free meals through the Covid-19 lockdown. We think that this should be extended to term time breakfasts and lunches for all pupils.

1. **Youth Services.**

The SEA would welcome retention of Youth Services, but we have been told of many examples where they have been cut. Context is needed here on the demand and funds available to meet it.

1. **Looked after children.**

The SEA welcomes all attempts to provide funding and to act as corporate parents to looked after children. We know of good examples given by some Local Authorities but would like context to be given about the overall picture.

**I] Higher Education**

1. **Student finance.**

The SEA believes that people should be free to study at University or College free of Tuition Fees. They should also be supported by a system of grants to fund their living costs while studying. The right to education should be open throughout life, both for vocational and for general cultural reasons. We need a statement of opposition to the creeping casualisation affecting higher education staff (a process also seen in Further Education). There are too many short-term contracts and academic jobs based on gig economy philosophy. Adult education of a specifically vocational nature is pushing out generalised cultural and self-development courses. Supply teachers and Teaching Assistants are also facing casualisation and privatisation. This process must stop.

1. **The Seren programme.**

While the SEA supports initiatives aimed at giving all children access to Higher Education, we would ask that it not be confined to Oxbridge and Russell Group Universities (or to the Higher Education Sector).

**J] Further Education**

1. **Body to oversee FE and HE.** The SEA might support this, dependent on what is planned and how it is to be implemented..
2. **Personal Learning Accounts. T**he SEA would like to see pay and condition in FE equivalent to post 16 provision in schools. Many ‘full time’ FE students receive inadequate time for learning (such as 16 hours per week over a 34-week year)

**K] Additional Learning Needs**

1. **New ALN act.**

Schools are given responsibility for Additional Learning Provision (ALP) but this is non-statutory, unfunded and may result in staff burn out. The education of all pupils must be maintained. Links with other bodies, mentioned in the 2018 Additional Learning Needs. Act (such as CAMS and the Health Boards) should be developed. Dealing with the education of pupils with additional learning needs is the responsibility of all teachers.

**L] Education and the Welsh Language**

1. **One million speakers.** The SEA believes that all schools should make provision for Welsh Teaching and separate Welsh Medium Schools are divisive. The higher achievement observed in Welsh Medium Schools is explicable by their privileged intake. Welsh Government statistics (published 17/2/20) indicate that Welsh medium schools have half the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Age group | Welsh medium schools | English medium schools |
| Foundation phase | 8.7% | 16.5% |
| Key stage 2 | 9.6% | 18.5% |
| Key stage 3 | 11.9% | 20.3% |
| Key stage 4 | 10.0% | 22.0% |

Currently, there is over-emphasis on formal Welsh grammar. The language needs to be simplified and examination standards changed so that more young people are confident in using it.

1. **Developing Modern Foreign Language teaching.** This is somewhat of a pious hope in the absence of significant planning and funding.

Conclusion – the aims of Education

* Education is not about the success or failure of the children it serves. If there is a problem, it is a problem of the system, not the children.
* Education should be about offering good opportunities for children to enjoy learning, not just about examination success.
* Education should allow people, of all ages, to demonstrate skills, the type and balance of which will differ between individuals but which is to be equally valued.
* Education includes basic skills and vocational techniques, but it also offers access to the entire spectrum of culture created by those who have gone before.
* It also allow further contribution to the skills and knowledge of humankind, both in the locality and globally.
* The best structure to deliver these aims is a National Education Service, administered through local democracy. It needs to be supported by adequate funding, sufficient to reverse the austerity cuts of the wasted Tory Years. It needs to be supported by enthusiastic Local Authority Teams. Accountability must be largely provided through self-assessment by those who are doing the job - assisted and supported (but not dominated) by good practitioners in the schools, the Local Authorities and Estyn.