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Dear Convener,

I am pleased to provide the Committee with advanced sight of the report authored by John Wilson, an experienced former headteacher, who was appointed as Independent Professional Advisor in September 2025 to consider how Scotland's education system could be reformed to drive improvement.

Mr Wilson's report, "*Shaping the Future: Strengthening Scotland's Education System through Empowered Schools*", is due to be published at 09:30 on Monday 28 September.

The report contains recommendations across a range of areas. Publication follows local governance reform proposals published by the First and Deputy First Ministers on Monday 21 September and will contribute to dialogue with local authorities over the coming weeks. I will respond directly to the recommendations made in the Report once that process is complete.

As set out in the Programme for Government, and in my discussions with MSPs in the chamber and committee rooms, I intend to be a reforming Education Secretary and am taking action to improve outcomes for children and young people. I am committed to raising standards, empowering headteachers and reducing unwarranted variation in educational outcomes across Scotland. I am committed to the pursuit – and the realisation – of excellence and equity in Scottish education.

There is much of which we can be proud in Scottish education. This year saw improved attainment across National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications, alongside a second consecutive narrowing of the poverty-related attainment gap. Recent statistics also show record levels of literacy and numeracy, a joint record high proportion of young people leaving school and going into work, study or training, and record numbers of young people being accepted into university. Notably, this includes record numbers from deprived backgrounds.

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However, I am not content with, for example, recent PISA results and contend that change is required. Improvement will principally be achieved through curriculum and qualifications reform, action to support phone-free learning environments, and wider efforts to ensure our education system is equipped to meet the needs of young people now and in future through the unique opportunity for improvement offered by the First Minister's Public Service Reform agenda. We have an opportunity to take all that is delivering well in our education system and enhance this so that every child has the opportunity to achieve their best.

This is my goal but it is a national endeavour. It cannot be undertaken by the Scottish Government alone. This report makes a valuable contribution to those efforts, and I am grateful to Mr Wilson and everyone who contributed evidence, experience and expertise to support the report's development and inform its recommendations.

The publication of this report, alongside our wider work on local governance reform, is intended to support constructive engagement with local government and other partners on the opportunities that public service reform presents to optimise delivery of education. I look forward to considering the recommendations in full and hearing views from partners, including the Committee, as we work together to ensure as part of that engagement the very best outcome for all children in Scotland.

Yours sincerely,



MÀIRI MCALLAN