THE ATTAINMENT GAP

During the Committee session on 29 June, I undertook to write to you following a number of questions from members about the criteria to be used in measuring the attainment gap. I covered some of this during the session but in the interest of clarity I will set out the Scottish Government’s intentions here.

There should be no doubt that the Government is firmly committed to developing an education system which delivers both excellence and equity in education for all children and young people in Scotland. Our education system needs to deliver excellence and equity at every stage of a child’s journey, from before school, through the primary and secondary stages to leaving school and beyond; therefore we should not be focused on any one point of the education journey in isolation. There is therefore no single measure by which the attainment gap can be judged. Indeed, our long term ambition is that there should be no pattern of lower attainment at any stage between children and young people from more and less deprived backgrounds and that should be the case however, wherever and whenever that is measured.

The information collected as part of the National Improvement Framework will include a range of data and evidence from across all stages of education to ensure that we have such a comprehensive picture of children’s progress that does not focus on one single measure of performance. For example, the 2015 Interim Framework Report on the National Improvement Framework presented evidence on attainment from the early years and Primary 1 through to the Senior Phase and school leaver destinations. We will use the new data that will become available through the Framework to identify the attainment gap at different stages and at school and authority level and develop plans to make demonstrable progress in closing the attainment gap during the lifetime of this Parliament and to substantially eliminate it in the next decade.
In December 2016 we will publish the annual National Improvement Framework report. We will use the new evidence being gathered to consult on this issue with key stakeholders, and will seek advice from the newly appointed International Council of Education Advisers. I will be happy to write to the Committee again in the new year to update them on progress.

I hope this is helpful,

Sincerely,

JOHN SWINNEY