3 October 2017

Dear James

Thank you for your letter of 31 August about measurement of the attainment gap and milestones towards closing it.

I am pleased to enclose a consultation paper that will be issued later today, seeking views on our proposals for measuring the gap and related milestones. I would welcome the Committee’s views on these proposals.

We already use a number of indicators to monitor progress, and what this data makes clear is that there is a gap in achievement between children and young people from the least and most disadvantaged backgrounds across the system measures that we have.

I do not therefore believe that it is sensible or realistic to assess the performance of our system using a single measure. My proposals are based on using a range of measures that reflect the breadth of issues that can impact on attainment. They set out a proposed basket of key, mainly attainment measures supported by a set of sub-measures of detailed attainment measures and of factors known to impact attainment that will measure progress in closing the attainment gap across the 3-18 age range. This approach has been welcomed in initial discussions I have had with key stakeholders.

As for milestones, I propose that the most effective way of measuring progress is to use stretch aims, similar to those set out in the Children and Young People Improvement Collaborative, which set aims that reflect improvement in every quintile of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). Stretch aims set a challenging ambition that harnesses the energy and motivation of those working on improvement and gives them something to strive towards rather than setting targets which are primarily set in order to achieve an expected goal, and to allow scrutiny and accountability of whether work achieves the level of success expected by the target.

I believe that using stretch aims in this way, would assist the Scottish Government, local authorities and schools to develop and implement the most appropriate improvement activities to secure educational improvement for all children and young people in Scotland.