March 2018

Dear James,

This letter is to provide the Committee with an update on the continued work of the Scottish Government in response to the recommendations made by the Education and Culture Committee in their report on the ‘Attainment of pupils with a sensory impairment’ published 23 September 2015.

In response to the Committee’s report the Scottish Government developed a plan of actions and activities to address the Committee’s recommendations. The attached update is provided in the form of a Work Plan and should be considered along with the Scottish Government’s previous letters dated 11 June 2015, 16 December 2015, 8 March 2016 and 19 April 2016.

As part of his evidence to the Committee the then Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland’s Languages, Dr Alasdair Allan, committed to establishing information on the levels of qualifications of teachers in British Sign Language (BSL). Since the Committee’s report was published Scottish Government officials have worked with stakeholders including the National Deaf Children’s Society (NDCS), the Scottish Sensory Centre and Education Scotland, to establish a survey of education authorities to establish qualification levels. The Scope of the survey was widened to establish not only the qualification levels of BSL but also the numbers and qualification levels of Teachers of the Deaf (ToD), Teachers of pupils with visual impairment and Teachers of pupils with multi-sensory impairment. The attached update contains a copy of the survey report and its main findings.

The qualification requirements for teachers of pupils who have a sensory impairment are set out in regulations and guidance. As a result of the information provided by the report, I have agreed the following.

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

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In relation to the regulation 'The Requirement for Teachers (Scotland) Regulations 2005' related to the qualification of sensory impaired pupils, it is my view that this regulation continues to be appropriately framed and therefore does not require amendment. However, following the survey I asked Scottish Government officials to set up a new working group to review the Competency guidance for teachers of children and young people who are hearing impaired or visually impaired or both hearing and visually impaired. This work will commence shortly.

I can confirm that in line with the BSL National Plan further research will be completed in 2018-19 to investigate the level of BSL held by support staff working with D/deaf pupils in schools and that this research will be extended to include the qualification levels held by support staff working with visually impaired pupils.

In order to inform work on habilitation services, my officials will work with Education Scotland and stakeholders, to consider the issue of habilitation provision. To inform this work, as a primary step, we will seek information about how habilitation services are currently provided. This will also be informed by the views of those who have used habilitation services.

I hope that this report is helpful to the Committee. As a Government we remain committed to ensuring that all learners can access the support they need to reach their full potential and we will continue to work with our partners and key stakeholders to anticipate and respond to that changing landscape.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

JOHN SWINNEY