Minister for Education

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Deputy Rob Ward
Chair, Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel
Scrutiny Office
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Dear Deputy Ward,

Thank you for writing to me on 15th September 2020, please see the below answers to your questions:

1. Education and IT infrastructure

Covid-19 has highlighted the importance for an Island wide, all-encompassing IT infrastructure that is efficient and workable throughout schools. It was evident during the crisis that some schools were able to adapt more quickly to online ways of working and offer more superior online experiences compared to others.

a) Is the Minister intending to review the IT infrastructure in schools, if so, what approach will be followed?
Yes, a network architecture review will be conducted by the Government Modernisation & Digital department, following a decision to integrate Education IT into that department. This will identify opportunities for performance improvements and efficiencies through a shared use of assets and datacentres.

The Schools IT Infrastructure was last reviewed externally in 2016, with specialist consultancy 'Aspire2Be' and the technical remediations carried out by the 4 local strategic IT partners (C5, JT, Logicalis, Evolution). These infrastructure remediations were concluded over school holidays in summer 2017, 2018 and 2019 and the project is now closed. This investment delivered a platform which was then used in Feb-May 2020 to establish an online learning platform within Microsoft Teams, which has still been delivered as a strategic capability albeit on a fast-track timetable during the Covid pandemic.

b) What is the timescale for this evaluation?
The review will commence 1st October but has not yet been fully scoped with a confirmed end date.

c) What actions will the Minister be taking to improve the IT infrastructure for schools to ensure more equal and reliable IT resources throughout?
A request for 'catch up' funding has been made, to deliver devices and connectivity to those most disadvantaged around access to learning during the Covid pandemic. Replacement WiFi and network routers will be deployed across all schools into 2021.

2. CYPES Target Operating Model

The Panel recalls that the second Phase of the Target Operating Model was in full progress at the time of the Government Plan review and an implementation timeline of Q1 2020 was envisaged.

a) **As this timeframe falls within the Covid-19 crisis period, has the timeline been impacted, if so, to what extent?**
To recap: the 30-day statutory consultation began for those colleagues in tier three and four roles on 22 October 2019 and concluded on 28 November 2019. Taking feedback into account, some amendments were made to the proposals and a final model agreed. Following further engagement with the trade unions, Ministerial support was secured and, ultimately, approval to implement was granted by the States Employment Board (SEB) in March 2020.
However, with the onset of the pandemic, implementation was paused at the request of the SEB and the Director General was asked to reflect on the plans in light of the impact of CV-19. This review was undertaken and some moderate revisions were made to a small number of roles. Ministers' support was again secured and the changes were approved by the States Employment Board in July 2020. The final outcome was communicated to CYPES colleagues in July and implementation occurred on 1 September.

b) **Can the Minister update the Panel with regards to the status of the CYPES Target Operating Model?**
Please see above.

c) **It was foreseen that service reviews would commence immediately post implementation of TOM 2. What is the status on this? Has this been delayed by the Covid position?**
It is still the plan for there to be a rolling programme of functional and service reviews to ensure that resources are aligned to priorities and that frontline service configuration is designed to ensure the maximum impact on outcomes. Where appropriate, reviews will be aligned with work streams that deliver recommendations of the independent school funding review.

There has been a delay to the implementation of this programme occasioned by CV-19 but the Departmental Operational Business Plan for 2021 will set out the future rolling programme, whilst for the remainder of 2020 reviews that had started or were due to start pre-CV-19 will be resumed (eg the CAMHS service redesign and the non-schools element of the Business Support Review).

d) **Has Covid-19 impacted the budgets available to address this?**
No. TOM2 was all but completed prior to the onset of the pandemic. Implementation was delayed. The impact of covid-19 on service reviews is unknown at this point, but the Department remains committed to a rolling programme of reviews (as set out in previous Operational Business Plan) both to reshape functions and services to ensure: a) maximum alignment with Ministerial priorities; and b) invest resources in the most impactful delivery models in order to make the most difference to outcomes.

Funding for policy development has been slightly reduced but remains sufficient; there is no specific budget for implementing the recommendations of service reviews but the scale of impact on cost can't be ascertained until the work is complete. The Department has had to release funding in the rebalancing process which will undoubtedly make budgets tighter overall, but it is confident it will be able to prioritise resources to conduct this important review work, the results of which will have to be addressed as the recommendations of the service reviews are published.

3. Return to school

Considering children's experiences in school pre-Covid, what significant changes have taken place in respect of their experiences post-Covid in relation to the following school groups (please can you provide specific examples for each respective group).

- **Nursery and reception**
- **Key stage 1**
- **Key Stage 2**
- **Key Stage 3**
- **Key stage 4**
- **Key stage 5**

Some of the key issues raised are as follows:

In terms of the EYFS children, the guidance restricts children from being able to

- have **shared** messy and malleable resources like play dough/gloop/clay but this is allowed if individual containers are used and disposed of after use by that one child.

- Access messy play **indoors** but this can be allowed outdoors, so that children can still enjoy sensory play in a mud kitchen, outdoor sand and water.

- Play with **shared indoor** sand and water trays, however this is allowed outdoors.

- Group singing activities due to the increased risk of this category 2 activity (under review)

- Limited **soft play** resources but enough to allow purposeful play and learning, e.g. dressing up clothes and baby clothes/blankets in the domestic role play to allow for manageable and regular laundering of these items

- Access shared resources like paintbrushes, glue sticks, crayons and pencils as they would have done but having to have their own individual packs to allow continued safe access to these materials

PRIMARY – In a number of schools

- The teaching of phonics approaches are being affected: Read, Write Inc groups take longer and the TA's who are supporting are then not available for class support.

- In foundation stage – difficult for children to various materials (play dough); role play area snack time a different experience

- The day has to be extended to manage the bubbles – break times, lunchtimes on rota over longer period. Covering the duties for this is challenging and falls to TAs because of teacher terms and conditions.

- Less opportunity for physical play at lunchtimes; children have to adhere to specific zones so the bubbles do not mix.

- Reception / Nursery inductions has to occur in the school holidays: required additional staff commitment

- No school, house or Key Stage assemblies. School assemblies now online, but this has required significant additional cost to make provision for this.

- Interhouse events have been cancelled.

- PTA events (school disco, bingo, movie nights) are not happening

- Singing has ceased.

- Communication with parents has to go online. Schools are losing their community feel because their parents are at arms length and their day to day contact has been lost.

- Children have to get used to queuing and waiting at the start and end of the day.

- Cannot play with their friends and siblings in other year groups at playtimes

SECONDARY

All headteachers wish to emphasise that while restrictions in some cases, are limiting, a solution focussed approach is being sought to ensure that pupils education in the most widest sense is not compromised.

In some situations, the experiences of pupils are different from pre-COVID-19 but this does not mean they are less 'valid' than before just more varied. All staff are seeking to be innovative and imaginative in their new approaches. There is a great 'positivity' amongst staff to maintain the community spirit of schools e.g.

- Assemblies are undertaken virtually

- Virtual prize giving ceremonies or small gatherings

- Creative projects devised during lockdown to celebrate the new experiences

- A good partnership has been built up with CYPES by making the health regulations applicable to schools

- Schools are undertaking diagnostic assessments to ensure learning is targeted to any gaps in knowledge, skills or understanding

- Pupils are being supported with emotional and mental health well being

Examples where restrictions, however, are taking place include:

The arts

No singing, restrictions on bands, orchestras for mixed year groups, school productions.

House event across that groups. No choir, cappella group, no Battle of the bands, no steel bands can take place.

School assemblies

Keeping year groups separate is understandable however preventing them from coming together as a year group may affect their identity and sense of belonging.

Sport

Although team matches between 2 schools are allowed, the type of sport allowed to be played is an issue. Level 4 moderate intensity indoors, fleeting contact sports only outdoors, no netball, rugby or football.

Practical subjects

After-school extra-curricular opportunities example STEM clubs, science clubs and BAKE OFFS can no longer take place.

Leadership opportunities
Senior students are given roles and responsibilities to work with younger students this can then longer happen for example reading buddies, sports coaches and former representatives and house captain duties. Some senior students who lack confidence are given opportunities to welcome Visitors and conduct toes at evening events and during the school day. This saves them blossom and their confidence and self-esteem are nurtured this can no longer take place. Language ambassadors are unable to visit primary schools and carry out the work they have been trained to do.

 Year group activities

Wider school community issues

• Parents and grandparents siblings and friends will be unable to visit schools to see exhibitions or familiarise themselves with the school.

• DoE experiences are now very different the volunteering element for most students is completely unobtainable.

• Year 10 students will be affected by Trident which for the second-year running is unlikely to take place.

Yours sincerely,

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Minister for Education

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