

PE1759/E

Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills submission of 7 October 2020

Thank you for the Committee's letter of 10 September 2020, seeking further information in relation to PE1759 – Equal hours for all school children.

As you will be aware, local authorities have responsibility for the delivery of education services in their area, and this includes the length of the school day and the number of hours of learning children and young people receive in each school. The variation in the precise number of learning hours and any differences between those that apply to different stages of education is therefore a matter for local authority decision.

In accordance with the education empowerment reforms that we are taking forward in partnership with local government, we expect local authorities to ensure that the learning hours guidance they provide to schools is developed in collaboration with the key partners in an empowered system, including parents, and is focused on meeting the learning needs of their pupils.

The Committee requested further information about what constraints are in place on the flexibility for local authorities. When Curriculum for Excellence was developed, it was envisaged that it would be delivered with the same levels of teacher contact time that exist today, and that expectation has not changed.

Over time, there have been proposals from local authorities to reduce school hours from the current relatively consistent position, sometimes to make financial savings. The Scottish Government is clear that any significant reduction would diminish the learning available to young people, and would not be acceptable.

There is provision, under section 21 of the Education (Scotland) Act 2016, to amend the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 to prescribe a minimum number of learning hours per year, following a consultation. This provision has not yet been brought into force but this remains an option for the Scottish Ministers, and I would not hesitate to seek to use it if I considered it necessary.

I hope this additional information I have provided is helpful.

JOHN SWINNEY