Dear Meg

Treasury Minute response – Academy accounts and performance

Thank you for your letter of 27 June concerning the Treasury Minute response to the Academy accounts and performance report. The up-to-date position on Recommendations 2 and 7 are described below.

Recommendation 2 – Improving the Academy Accounts

The Department is committed to improving the transparency of the Academy Sector Annual Report and Accounts (SARA) and intends to implement the recommendation. We were unable to fully reflect this within the 2017/18 SARA due to the data collection having already completed by the time of the January 2019 recommendation. We have however incorporated new analysis of the cumulative deficit by the number of academies within a trust and have enhanced our annexe listing the individual academies within a Trust.

We will look to incorporate further analysis within the 2018/19 SARA which will be published in July 2020. This is why we unfortunately required a later implementation date to fully address the requirement.

We would welcome further input as to the additional analysis the Committee would feel would be useful. Would it be possible for my officials to meet members of the Committee to allow us to ensure the Committee’s expectation and requirement for these disclosures are sufficiently understood?

Recommendation 7 – Asbestos in schools

In line with its commitment to publish information about the responses to the Asbestos Management Assurance Process (AMAP) at responsible body and school-level, the Department published a comprehensive analytical report of
findings from the AMAP on the 16 July
Alongside the report, the Department also published a full list of all responsible bodies and schools that participated in the AMAP, including school Unique Reference Numbers.

At the start of the new school term I will write to all responsible bodies and schools that have not yet participated, requesting that they do so. The AMAP portal will remain open so that responsible bodies and institutions can submit information and the Department will periodically update the list of responsible bodies and schools that have provided information, to ensure that it captures the latest position.

The Department will continue to work closely with the Regulator, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and has shared information with HSE about schools whose responses suggested they may not be meeting their duties in The Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012. The HSE will follow up where appropriate with schools of concern in line with its investigation policies.

The Department also plans to visit all government-funded schools in England over a five year period, as part of the second Condition Data Collection (CDC2). As part of this process we intend to ask schools to demonstrate that they have an Asbestos Management Plan and Asbestos Location Register, to populate or update key information in the AMAP, ensuring that the system is kept up to date.

The AMAP was a voluntary survey and responsible bodies and schools were not obliged to respond. Our view is that ‘naming and shaming’ responsible bodies and schools would be likely to discourage future participation in data collections on asbestos, or other subjects. This would undermine our ability to collect information to support the effective management of asbestos in schools in the future.

I hope this update is helpful. I am copying this letter to Gareth Davies, Comptroller and Auditor General and David Fairbrother, Treasury Officer of Accounts.

Jonathan Slater
Permanent Secretary