

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and Education Committee

Cyllido Ysgolion yng Nghymru | School Funding in Wales

SF 10

Ymateb gan: Cyngor Abertawe

Response from: Swansea Council

Local Authority: SWANSEA – produced in consultation with primary and secondary headteachers through the School Budget Forum

Areas of focus	Comments:
The sufficiency of provision for school budgets, in the context of other public service budgets and available resources	<p>The lack of clarity regarding full funding for teachers pension and pay increases raises a key principle – significant cost increases and raised expectations regarding the responsibilities of schools and local authorities should not be agreed by the UK and Welsh Governments without adequately reflecting the full cost impact in local government funding settlements. There have been many other ‘hidden costs’, reflecting national policy and decisions, such as the apprenticeship levy, which also have an impact on costs within schools. This has to be the fundamental need before announcements of specific funding tied to new initiatives and responsibilities, however good these ideas might seem (e.g. small and rural schools grant, school business managers, reducing class sizes funding etc.). A Food Bank analogy might be appropriate, as schools should not need to be constantly seeking help and ‘top ups’ for the basics.</p> <p>The adequacy of the absolute level of funding for statutory education provision has been repeatedly challenged by comparison with other parts of the UK. However well or badly Wales compares, it is absolutely clear that there continue to be significant real terms cuts in the level of core funding available over time once funding changes are compared with the scale of cost increases and growing expectations and responsibilities / policy initiatives placed on local authorities and schools.</p>

	<p>There is a consistent trend of increasing pupil/teacher ratios with increasing use of unqualified teachers etc. to plug gaps, increasing the number of classes without a qualified teacher in nursery, for example. The priority of early years remains and yet nursery remains non-statutory.</p> <p>Expectations and cost pressures need to be more effectively managed, not just for Education services (particularly home to school transport and ALN expectations), but even more fundamentally for Health and Social Services where greater joint planning and working must be essential to make the best possible use of the available funding. The current level of repeated additional funding to Health is quite simply unsustainable.</p> <p>3 year funding settlements would aid planning and delivery, however challenging the level of funding, but the need for greater certainty for WG funding is also recognised.</p> <p>Additional funding announcements regularly appear, seemingly 'out of the blue', and often late in a financial year, and serve more to confuse and dilute concerns rather than addressing them.</p>
<p>The extent to which the level of provision for school budgets compliments or inhibits delivery of the Welsh Government's policy objectives</p>	<p>The level currently limits it - the provisional cash settlement is £18k for Swansea against pressures of £7m to £8m, particularly with pay/additional pension costs and demographic pressures, and this inevitably results in significant further real terms cuts.</p> <p>Core statutory education provision is fundamental to the delivery of the WG's longer term policy objectives and needs to be consistently recognised as such. Short term / time limited initiatives, however well intentioned, can have only a limited impact without maintaining an adequate level of core resourcing and provision rather than continual 'seed' funding.</p> <p>There appears to be inconsistency between WG objectives e.g. to reduce surplus places on the one hand but at the same time to increase Welsh-medium places beyond identified current demand and protect small and rural schools.</p>

	<p>The ALN Act has significant and well documented implications for the potential future continuing growth in demand for provision and support (and hence costs falling to Councils) as does the implementation of the new curriculum. Such fundamental changes to the educational landscape are coming yet without the necessary core funding to support them.</p> <p>The 'Tier 2' level of the national mission is too broad and lacks clarity / transparency, particularly regarding regional consortia and 'top-slicing' of available funding that is increasingly being channelled through consortia. Consequently, there is a risk that the impact of such funding will be ineffective and it must limit / commit funding that could otherwise support front line provision within schools.</p> <p>Schools need to be trusted to take personal and collective responsibility for professional learning if they are already highly effective and autonomous, as opposed to filtering funds through a consortium.</p>
<p>The relationship, balance and transparency between various sources of schools' funding, including core budgets and hypothecated funding</p>	<p>The core funding level for authorities and schools needs to ensure an adequate basic level of funding for all schools without the need for areas of 'top up' such as Pupil Development Grant.</p> <p>Pupil Development Grant theoretically should be 'additional' but in practice is at such a level that it has become an essential element of core funding.</p> <p>There is no core funding to deliver key aspects of the national mission, such as emotional well-being and mental health support for schools and learners.</p> <p>Regional Consortia School Improvement funding used to be sufficient to deliver Foundation Phase ratios as well as some elements of school improvement, but has effectively been cut to such an extent that it is now insufficient to cover even the Foundation Phase recommendations. It would make more sense to ensure the adequacy of Foundation Phase funding than to focus on marginal impacts to address matters such as class sizes.</p> <p>Funding is not consistently transparent - it is only necessary to look at last year's one-sided MEAG transfer</p>

	<p>although now largely sorted (at least for 2018-19) after extensive dialogue.</p> <p>The teacher professional development grant would have been put to better use to ensure appropriate core funding of teachers pay/pensions etc. - training and leadership development is important but day to day teaching even more so.</p> <p>There are too many short term initiatives which, however well intentioned, are inadequately planned and poorly implemented with too short a timescale (e.g. small and rural schools grant, school business managers, class reduction size funding etc.) The time commitment and resources required to bid and deliver can be out of all proportion to the scale of funding on offer and the time limited nature of that funding.</p>
<p>The local government funding formula and the weighting given to education and school budgets specifically within the Local Government Settlement</p>	<p>Education remains a relative priority in settlement terms but is utterly swamped by the figures needed for social care.</p> <p>The weighting for sparsity is currently greater than for deprivation and is consequently out of balance. There is currently far too large a disparity between the relative funding per pupil in some Welsh authorities by comparison with others (which can be more than £1,000 per pupil).</p> <p>The need for a greater reflection and weighting for deprivation needs is further underlined with the ALN Act implications.</p> <p>There is inevitably a broad correlation between level of Education IBA and LA spending on Education, in spite of there being no intended hypothecation.</p>
<p>Welsh Government oversight of how Local Authorities set individual schools' budgets including, for example, the weighting given to factors such as age profile of pupils, deprivation, language of provision, number of</p>	<p>Generally, this appears reasonable, allowing some local choice and discretion, but Wales is a small country - the alternative would be a single funding formula. Any change inevitably results in winners and losers.</p> <p>Currently we effectively have a national funding formula for councils which operates to the detriment of urban authorities such as Swansea, and there would be concern that any move to a national funding formula at school level would equally disadvantage schools serving</p>

<p>pupils with Additional Learning Needs and pre-compulsory age provision</p>	<p>more urban areas, if the same approach and weightings were to be used.</p> <p>Continuing initiatives and specific grants – particularly Pupil Development Grant – inevitably skews funding formulae weightings and can effectively result in elements of double funding re FSM for example. The impact of the change to Universal Credit will surely require further funding to meet the needs of deprivation and hence a shift of balance between deprivation and sparsity elements within the formula to allocate Revenue Support Grant between Councils.</p> <p>The growing expectations relating to ALN etc. could be understated in current formulae, but is there sufficient in the core per pupil funding / basic entitlement? The increasingly litigious nature of such areas of provision and processes will continue to drain increasing amounts of funding from core school budgets. Welsh Government needs to work with LAs to ensure that the expectations of the public and the ability of LAs to deliver are more closely aligned so as to improve confidence and reduce costly and time consuming appeals and litigation, which draws funding away from frontline services.</p>
<p>Progress and developments since previous Assembly Committees' reviews (for example those of the Enterprise and Learning Committee in the Third Assembly)</p>	<p>Not able to comment.</p>
<p>The availability and use of comparisons between education funding and school budgets in Wales and other UK nations</p>	<p>Previous comparisons indicated a difference of up to £600 per pupil in funding, although Inner London skewed the picture of course and the data is now well out of date. The difference should theoretically have reduced to some extent but is there any solid evidence? If so this is not because Welsh funding has improved but because funding in England has been cut to a greater extent, but from a higher historic base. Differences in funding mechanisms and the role of authorities makes comparisons problematic and it must be significantly hampered by the Dedicated Schools Grant in England. This makes comparison difficult, as does one off DfE grant funding for pay/pensions reserves etc. Also the Pupil Development</p>

Grant in Wales is such a large sum, and along with other time limited specific grants, impact on school by school funding.

Whatever any average funding comparison indicates, differences will be compounded at school level by the differential impact of the funding allocation formulae within each nation and authority.

The focus should therefore be equally on the trend in funding levels over time - both in cash and real terms.