

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 14

Ymateb gan: Unigolyn a Phennaeth

Response from: Individual and Head Teacher

**• *The sufficiency of provision for school budgets, in the context of other public service budgets and available resources***

As pay rises have been agreed at government level, it is for WG & Westminster to ensure that the commitment is funded. Pension increases and the associated on-costs need to be catered for in settlements to local authorities (LA) and in turn to schools themselves.

The reality at the coal face is that despite constantly being told how much WG and LAs are putting into supporting school budgets, schools have faced successive real terms cuts in the levels of core funding available when cost increases and growing expectations and responsibilities are considered. The National Assembly's Research briefing entitled 'School Funding in Wales' highlights the following facts:

- Since the academic year 10-11 and the current academic year 18-19, local authority gross expenditure on schools has decreased in real terms by 7.9%.
- The average amount local authorities spent per pupil in 18-19 whilst being £266 higher than that spent in 10-11 is a real terms decrease of 7.5%. This will only become worse if something is not done soon.

The incoming Additional Learning Needs (ALNET) Bill changes will place even more responsibility on **schools** (with budgets already under considerable pressure) and local authorities. WG needs to consider the unintended consequences of ALNET as a matter of urgency if we are truly committed to meeting the needs of all children and young people.

With regard to how education funding in the context of other services' funding, the current level of additional funding to health and social care is **unsustainable**.

Additional funding announcements (whilst welcome when it seems we truly are at the point of no return) are ad hoc and serve to confuse and dilute genuine concerns and often when time and money has already been

spent on processes to brace for the impact of budget cuts, such as redundancies. In short, please pass the money directly to schools as soon as possible to avoid putting the education workforce through any unnecessary worry that their jobs are on the line.

Schools with low instances of pupils who are eligible for FSM obviously do not have their budgets bolstered by PDG funding. I do know that without grants, my school would not have support staff. The delegated budget no longer supports the staffing levels required to meet the needs of pupils and families. In my view PDG is masking the significant problem of underfunded and understaffed schools and as a school with low PDG, I can certainly say that in my school, we have been forced to reduce our support staff to the absolute minimum and now find that we are struggling to meet the needs of our most vulnerable pupils and their families. These are complex and challenging times in which to grow up and for families to raise their children. These complex times often lead to complex issues, and the country looks to schools to be the ones to work with pupils with complicated needs and support families, assuming roles that once sat firmly with health and social care – this can not be done with a skeleton staff!

***• The extent to which the level of provision for school budgets complements or inhibits delivery of the Welsh Government's policy objectives The National Mission aims for a high quality education profession to teach our children.***

Education Improvement Grant funding used to more than adequately provide recommended staffing ratios to deliver foundation phase provision and allow for school improvement. Currently, it does not even provide enough funding to satisfy foundation phase recommendations. We are increasingly becoming reliant upon the third sector to help us deliver the FP philosophy as it is intended but there is a stark warning within this 'solution' – if we are to invest in the professionalism of our workforce in Wales, ensuring the very best professional learning opportunities, they need to be permanent staff. Volunteers are a hugely valuable asset but they are temporary. The professional Learning model will soon not be as costly as feared as there surely will be a portion of the profession soon to be made redundant and meeting the needs of children with a skeleton staff does not leave a lot of time for professional learning.

With regard to 'inspirational leaders'. With our time consumed by attempting to plug the gaps left by staff we have already been forced to make redundant and worrying about how we are going to make ends meet going forward, it does not leave a lot of time to be inspirational. Upon

reading the recommendations outlined in the 'teaching, a valued profession', I felt hugely undervalued by both the recommendations and the rhetoric throughout the document that leaders who are remunerated in line with nationally agreed STPCD are a drain on budgets. Undertaking a very challenging role in difficult times requires a wide ranging and sophisticated skill set, tenacity and oodles of resilience, it seem to me that this is not valued in the same way it is in other professions. I'm sure that most leaders are proud to work for the Nation but like anyone, hope to be valued and appropriately remunerated for the role we undertake. The call for the immediate cessation of remuneration for challenges specific to the setting outlined in paragraph 9 STPCD and removal of the autonomy in which school community we lead clearly does not deliver the promised "no detriment" for school leaders in Wales. It seems to me that Wales want leaders who will work where they are told rather where they feel inspired to work. WG messages around working together with school leaders and being proud of what we have achieved so far in terms of readiness for the school curriculum feels disingenuous and hollow in the light of the recommendations outlined in the report 'Teaching, a valued profession'. To be clear, I am proud to lead my school community and am committed to playing our part in achieving the goals of the Nation. In my view, however, taking away the autonomy of leaders with regard to where they work will not make leaders more committed to working for the nation, and may have the unintended outcome of disenfranchising the very people that Welsh Government are looking to in order to successfully implement the new curriculum against the back drop of worrying budgets and the ALNET. I also wonder how attractive leadership will seem to middle leaders in Wales.

In addition, Prof Mick Walters proposed to streamline the old 54 teaching standards. This is not the case in the published new Teaching and Leadership Standards.

The National mission aims for 'strong and inclusive schools committed to excellence, equity and well-being'. Schools do not have sufficient funds to put suitably qualified, high quality staff in classes. With regard to being inclusive, many Swansea schools struggle to ensure adequate provision meeting the needs of learners with statements (let alone those without a statement of ALN) and feel this will get worse with the introduction of ALNET.

The National Mission recognises 'well-being' as including mental health. Schools are dealing more and more with mental health issues of both its pupils and increasingly, trying to support parents experiencing mental

health difficulties. Waiting lists to access CAHMS are long. There is insufficient support for schools to be able to deliver this aspect of the National Mission.

The National Mission intends to 'utilise the relevant technologies and skills to transform the digital competence of our learners'. This will be undeliverable within the context of ever increasing real terms cuts to deleted budgets. Who pays for the infrastructure, hardware, software and staff expertise to be able to deliver this element? In primary schools, the task of school 'technician' usually falls to someone who has shown some aptitude with technology. However, this person has other responsibilities and this is simply more work for them to do with little or no training or remuneration.

The National Mission's Three-tier Model inadvertently sums up the current situation quite well pictorially. The top tiers bearing down on schools (Tier 3) and the middle tier being heavy with various organisations all in receipt of funding from WG and all contributing to the pressure schools are facing. A colleague's FOI request regarding the amount of funding given to Tier 2 was not answered satisfactorily by WG. There is a lack of transparency in how funding in Wales is spent in tiers 1 & 2.

***• The relationship, balance and transparency between various sources of schools' funding, including core budgets and hypothecated funding***

As mentioned above, there is a lack of transparency in how funding in Wales is spent in tiers 1 & 2 of the three-tier model. There is too much duplication between regional and LA work/responsibilities and this is a waste of money that could be better used by schools.

Schools are not properly consulted with regard to what they need.

Regional initiatives are often rushed, are not differentiated to meet the individual school's needs, not properly thought through and often require a disproportionate amount of paperwork to access the initiatives.

In our experience, there is also a lack of transparency regarding budget spend/allocation by regions.

As leaders of schools, we are constantly evaluating, continually asking the question 'is this good value for money?' There simply is not enough money swishing around for us to carrying on spending on something that is not working. Many are surely aware that confidence in the middle tier is low and

the lack of evaluation is a red flag leading us to question whether Wales can either truly afford or needs this unnecessary additional layer of governance.

**• *The local government funding formula and the weighting given to education and school budgets specifically within the Local Government Settlement***

I recognise that education remains a relative priority but is not funded nearly as well as other areas seem to be. I am not familiar with the formula but it would appear to have a disproportionate weighting on rurality. Is this additional funding for small and rural schools having the desired impact? Have other ways of operating small and rural schools been investigated? I work and live in Wales' second largest city. A mostly urban city with high levels of ALN, deprivation, and EAL; yet we are consistently one of the worst funded LAs. Why is that (given that research highlights poverty and deprivation as posing the greatest risk to pupil achievement)? This will have huge implications when the ALNET is implemented. It is all too easy to look at EAL data and dismiss the need for support, what is clear is that these pupils success can be attributed to the support that they enjoyed throughout their primary school experience, support which is no longer available in anything like the levels of the past. Working in a school with large numbers of pupils who are at early stages of English due to high transience, these pupils need support from well trained in order to meet their needs. Jo Hutchinson's 2018 report 'Educational Outcomes of pupils with EAL' outlines the need to support pupils with English as an Additional Language in order to ensure their success and includes funding per pupil with EAL in key countries and regions. How do Wales compare? Surely we wish to avoid a sink or swim culture for our pupils with little or no English.

**• *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 pupils with Additional Learning Needs and pre-compulsory age provision***

The OECD suggests a national funding formula. I agree that a child in Wales should be worth the same. However, if the current formula for allocating money to LAs and the LA formulae for allocating to schools should not be used as a model for all going forward. Transparency over what the weightings will be etc. need to be consulted widely on before implementing a national funding formula. It surely can't be efficient for a country the size of Wales to have 22 different funding formulae. Pupils from 'affluent' areas should not be penalised for their postcode. Why should they

attend schools with a skeleton staff that rely upon the third sector? Don't they deserve to have at least a minimum pupil staff ratio? Don't they deserve to be educated by well-trained permanent staff? Don't they deserve to have support for any complex needs including mental health concerns? Do we really want to create another kind of poverty, i.e. sending pupils to impoverished schools furnished by wonderful documents relating to the National Mission without the staff to make it a reality?

Before any national formula could be explored, however, we need to be sure that there is sufficient funding in the whole system, otherwise the inadequacies in funding will simply be spread more widely. Furthermore, the adequacy of as crude an indicator as FSM must be properly scrutinised.

**• *Progress and developments since previous Assembly Committees' reviews (for example those of the Enterprise and Learning Committee in the Third Assembly)*** Unable to comment.

**• *The availability and use of comparisons between education funding and school budgets in Wales and other UK nations It is difficult to make a meaningful comparison.***

There are suggestions that the gap between per pupil funding in Wales and England has reduced to the point of being negligible. However, this is not because of increased funding in Wales. the research briefing states 'there has been a greater per pupil funding reduction in England (8%) than in Wales (5%) since 2009-10'. There also remain significant differences in what each of the 22 LAs in Wales spend per pupil, let alone the country as a whole compared to other countries. Therefore, until the LA variations are evened out, a national 'average' per pupil spend is an unhelpful comparator.

Ultimately, WG has very ambitious plans to have an education system that is a world leader. Ambitions that I applaud. However, that simply will not be achieved if funded at current levels and if this situation continues WG might have to revise its ambitions and be satisfied with a very basic education system, one in which many large classes are taught by unqualified teachers and schools are led by increasingly de-motivated leaders.