

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 21

Ymateb gan: Unigolyn

Response from: Individual

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

Welsh Government has said it has transformational changes planned and being worked towards for Wales, however, we will have a new curriculum, with a renewed focus on professional development, but classes with increased numbers in each, because school budgets reached breaking point around three years ago and therefore teachers will not be able to maximise the benefit of their professional development or of the new curriculum because classrooms will be over capacity and support for pupils with ALN and EAL will not be achieved. It is impossible to see how this vision can be achieved. WG made a clear statement this year when they increased spending on other key areas, but cut spending to LAs, this will affect further spending on schools. We cannot offer the children who are our future what they deserve.

It seems as though governments (Welsh Government (WG) or Westminster) agree to pay rises, pension increases and the associated on-costs without then ensuring these commitments are catered for in settlements to local authorities (LA) and in turn to schools themselves. This is not a criticism of the agreement to pay increases etc. that are frankly long overdue. Despite constantly told how much WG and LAs are putting into supporting school budgets, it is irrefutable that 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%.

The reality is that there are more children in the system, therefore there has been no real terms increase per pupil.

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 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. Schools that don't have their budgets bolstered by PDG funding are inadequately funded and there is a significant amount of pupils for whom the PDG/LAC fund is aimed at supporting (namely those pupils formerly LAC and now adopted from care) who are missing out as there is no means of identifying where these pupils are in 'the system'. Additionally, LAC funding seems to have been regionalised. As a result it is not aimed per pupil within each region, with LAs that have fewer LAC pupils taking a greater amount per pupil than other LAs, this results in equity not being achieved for LAC learners. Urban schools do not appear to be funded equally in relation to schools in rural areas. Whilst I acknowledge the difficulties rurality brings, it is not fair that children in urban areas do not benefit from the smaller class sizes that children in rural areas do. The funding stream for pupils with EAL has been savagely cut and now the support for these pupils will no longer exist. Again, urban schools, that have the greatest proportion of EAL children will have to use the insufficient resources they have to support these children with no additional means, again, another real terms cut.

### **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. In Swansea, the amount of classes taught by an unqualified teacher has increased. Class sizes are increasing. Needs of ALN pupils are not being met. Education Improvement Grant funding used to more than

adequately provide recommended staffing ratios to deliver foundation phase provision and allow for school improvement is insufficient. Currently, it does not even provide enough funding to satisfy foundation phase recommendations. Mixed age classes have also increased. The number of schools able to meet the recommended adult:pupil ratio in Foundation Phase (1:8 Nursery and Reception and 1:15 Years 1 and 2) has decreased. With regard to 'inspirational leaders'. Leaders are under so much pressure due to the 'high-stakes' accountability system in Wales and the pressure of budgets and staffing their schools that many certainly do not feel in any position to 'inspire' others. This is further compounded by the recommendations regarding pay and conditions (Prof. Mick Waters et al) recently published, which certainly do not deliver the promised "no detriment" for school 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 others associated with those pupils. 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 addition of regional consortia in addition to LAs, adds another layer which costs more money and takes funds away from children.

### **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. Tier 1 tells schools that money is being put into supporting schools and tier 2 tells schools it is not enough and then can't agree between themselves (LA v Region) how much funding they receive/give and what that funding should be spent on. 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. With confidence in the middle tier low and a complete lack of impact evaluation, the question of whether Wales can either truly afford or needs this unnecessary additional layer of governance must be candidly and transparently addressed. In our experience, there is also a lack of transparency regarding budget spend/allocation by regions and LAs.

### **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 and huge implications for the future economy of Wales.

### **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 as a headteacher and as a parent that each 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. They too can have emotional, physical and educational needs that schools must meet, whilst the impact of in-work poverty must not be ignored. 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.

## **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'. It is also worth noting that schools in Wales are less resilient than those in England as they have suffered under funding for much longer than those in England. 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, affecting the future economy of the nation.