



Primary Forum

The Association of Hillingdon Primary Headteachers

Ben Lea
Schools Resources Manager
Education and Children's Services, Finance
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17 January 2011

Dear Ben,

I am writing on behalf of the Primary forum in response to the budget consultation document circulated on Monday 10 January 2011. This response is the outcome of a meeting of a representative group of more than a third of Primary Headteachers (32) and of the resulting draft response being circulated on two occasions with opportunities for all Primary Heads to comment, add or amend. We believe, therefore that it fully represents our collective views on the Local Authority's proposals.

As a general note, we have been concerned at the hurried nature of the consultation, the lack of accurate data and the need to resend revised documentation, with no visible sequence or data stamp to identify priority. We appreciate the difficult pressured conditions under which the material has been prepared but at the same time need to identify the difficulties it has caused us as 'consultees'. We suspect that this limited time available was the primary reason why the presentation on Tuesday 11th January lacked clarity and was difficult to follow. Perhaps it would be useful consulting with Headteachers and Governing Bodies about possible changes in the consultation process that would enable better engagement in the discussion in future years.

We have chosen to respond as a letter, rather than employ the form, since there are a number of individual responses that are best linked or covered by a single comment. The response is based on the order in the consultation document; we have included references to the budget response form where appropriate.

Section 5

5.2 - 5.14 Primary schools are aware that a significant level of thought has been given to the Early Years Single Funding Formula (EYSFF). We are sincerely grateful for all this work.

We strongly support the proposal to dis-apply the MFG to Nursery Budgets included in the EYSFF. (Consultation Question a)

We also strongly support the proposal to remove nursery elements (pupil led and non-pupil led) from the Primary Schools funding formula.
(Formula Factors Question a)

In addition we support the proposal that nursery counting for the purposes of participation led funding under the EYSFF be based on historical termly counts to inform estimates of predicted future take-up for setting indicative budgets prior to the start of the financial year and that the indicative budgets will be adjusted during the year to reflect the difference between actual and estimated take-up.

(Formula Factors Question b))

5.15-5.25 We have had reference to the spreadsheet distributed on the evening of Wednesday 12/01/11 correcting several errors in the originals series of spreadsheets distributed previously.

We are in agreement with a MFG of minus one point five percent (-1.5%), since this benefits the majority of schools.

However we have grave concerns about the validity of the data. We would ask that, in order to ensure that the final budget presented to Cabinet for approval reflects that we have seen, and on which we have been consulted, the finance team:

- a) asks individual schools to verify the data used to drive the allocations as soon as possible after its collection on Thursday 20 January 2011; and
- b) a representative group, possibly Schools Forum members, have sight of the final spreadsheet to ensure it is broadly in line with that on which we have based our comments.

We are concerned that the January pupil count (20/01/11) will identify higher numbers of pupils in schools than those used in the modelled spreadsheets; we would wish to be assured that this will be reflected by an increased DSG from the DfE, and thus will not affect adversely the value of the AWPU.

Section 6

Arrangements for Special Educational Needs

We have concerns that if there is no uplift in funding for SRP units staff reductions will result and, following that, a need to reduce pupil numbers.

Section 10

Collectively, the representative group of headteachers who met to produce the draft of this response to the budget consultation had significant concerns about the continuation of the arrangements for school meals. Recent experiences had generally not been positive and as a consequence schools questioned whether they were receiving 'value for money'. As a result the consensus was that as

much funding as possible should now be delegated to schools and without being ring-fenced. This would imply that **we question the need to retain any money centrally and, if this were still unavoidable that both the size of the devolved element should be increased significantly and delegated to all schools without being ‘ring-fenced’.**

We make further comments concerning School Meals monies below (Section 13).

Section 12

We recognise the need for money to follow expanding schools to ensure appropriate accommodation for additional pupils. Therefore we support the proposals set out as ‘Arrangements for Capital’.

Section 13

Specific Grants

We have significant concerns about the arrangements for Specific Grants. We understand that the current allocation from the DfE is an interim measure and has largely replicated the values from 2010-11 to arrive at the amount included in the DFG. However, we also note that these are no longer ring fenced and ultimately intended to enhance schools’ own budgets. In the main therefore, we are strongly in favour of as much money as possible being directly delegated out to schools at the start of the year. Further as this money relates to former grants of various types we feel that in the main (but not exclusively) distribution should be on pupil numbers rather than weighted.

We wish to see as much funding as possible delegated out to schools at the start of the financial year, this will avoid the associated technical breach of the CEL.

(Consultation Question d)

We also believe it is more appropriate that where money is delegated out to schools this should be on the basis of current (January 2011) data. (Consultation Question e)

13.8 School Development Allocation

We note that the Local Authority wishes to retain around 20% of the designated amount initially. **While we do not necessarily disagree with this course of action we wish to understand better the extent of the current costs, a description of what is achieved through this expenditure and what will be lost if the money were to be delegated directly to schools rather than retained.**

(Specific Grants, Question a)

13.12 School Lunch Allocation

We have elsewhere identified that we believe this money should be delegated out to all schools on a per pupil basis.

13.13 Ethnic Minority Achievement Allocation

We support an allocation made in 2011-12 against this heading and that the method of distribution is that of previous years.

(Specific Grants, Question e)

13.14 1 to 1 Tuition Allocation

We have considered this in detail. We recognise that this initiative has been of significant benefit to a number of pupils and recognise the contribution made to ensure its success in the past. The mechanism for its distribution has on the whole been successful. However, we also note that the allocation is of significant size and would require continuing administration and monitoring if it is to be retained for a further year. Therefore, taken in the context of our comments on the other Specific Grants, we feel that this to would be **best delegated out to all sectors on a per pupil basis** (i.e. not age-weighted).

(Specific Grants, Question f)

13.15 Extended Schools - Sustainability / Subsidy Allocation

We believe that all aspects of this allocation should be directly delegated out to schools at the start of the year on a per pupil basis (i.e. not age-weighted).

(Specific Grants, Question g)

13.16 National Strategies (Primary / Secondary) Allocation

We believe that the phase-specific allocations should be retained. However, within each phase, **the individual phase allocations should be delegated out to the relevant schools at the start of the year on a per pupil basis** (i.e. not age-weighted).

(Specific Grants, Question h)

Exceptional Circumstances Grant

We note that the Local Authority has been informed that there is a potential further sum of £804k that may be added to the DSG but wishes to be cautious in earmarking that funding (par. 13.21). We are aware that should the further allocation within the DSG become available there will be no requirement from the DfE as to how it should be spent or as to whether it needs to be retained or delegated.

Considering the specific proposals:

13.23 Dual Registration

Within the Primary sector, we strongly support the move to offer pupils from Community and Foundation schools in Hillingdon access, without charge, to the Pupil Referral Units and for this reason **we are in agreement with the proposal.** (Consultation Question f)

However, we do see future funding could be an issue and encourage the LA to ensure this is properly considered as part of a significant review of the formula before the next funding cycle.

13.24 SEN Pressures

We have significant concerns about continuing requests for money to support SEN.

Over the past two years mainstream schools have agreed to a permanent shift in funding that now benefits Special Schools to a sum, annually, in excess of £1.4m. Prior to 2009 there were a number of additional allocations made to meet a range of SEN needs. While we have every sympathy with the needs of the children and their families that might be supported by the proposed new allocation, we are worried about these continuing demands. We have noted the significant success of the Specialist Resource Provision strategy and wonder whether an expansion of this initiative, taken together with the provision available in our special schools, cannot circumvent this problem in the future.

Currently we find it very difficult to support this proposal

(Consultation Question g)

13.25 Allegations Manager Post

We are deeply conscious of the value of the current officer charged with investigating allegations against staff and appreciate the significant demands that are made on her.

However, we also feel that the post needs to prove its worth, especially when future financing may be an issue. **If we are to support such an appointment therefore, we feel it should be on a one-year fixed term basis in the first instance.**

(Consultation Question h)

13.26 Academies LACSEG

We are concerned that no sum has been identified for retention. We are also concerned that by reserving a sum for the potential loss of schools to Academy Status, this may be signalling an endorsement of this option. **We do not feel it appropriate to retain money for this purpose.**

(Consultation Question i)

Should the Exceptional Circumstances Allocation become available we would wish to see all uncommitted funds distributed to schools.

Section 15

Changes to the Balance Control Mechanism

We have no desire to see the retention the BCM which appears to have generated a significant amount of paperwork and not a little irritation to little if any positive effect.

(Consultation Question j)

We wish to convey our appreciation in being consulted and trust that our comments, given above, will be of use to Officers in formulating their proposals to put before Schools Forum on 25 January and subsequently their final budget to Cabinet for its consideration.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Philip Rutter". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Philip Rutter

On behalf of London Borough of Hillingdon Primary Forum