

SCHOOL BUDGET 2018-19

As you will be aware, school budgets have been significantly cut for the coming year, while inflation continues to rise. Over the last two years the monetary value of a pupil in our school has been reduced by £60.71 per child. In a school of over 450 pupils that equates to a considerable sum of money. Over the same period staffing, amenity services and maintenance costs continue to rise. These latest cuts are a further attack on your children and their educational opportunity.

Historically primary and nursery schools are already significantly underfunded compared to post primary schools (at least £1300 less per pupil) – this disparity is simply unjustifiable and no longer sustainable.

Furthermore, the formula by which schools are funded, works against schools like Academy as we do not receive additional funding for social deprivation or newcomer pupils. Academy's 451 pupils have been given a budget for 2018-19 of £1120971 whilst published lists of school budgets by the DE reveal schools with about 200-50 pupils on budgets of over a million pounds. It doesn't take a mathematician to do the sums to see the imbalance in the current funding arrangements! Whilst I whole heartedly agree that schools should receive additional funding to assist them where there is significant social deprivation, or there are significant numbers of newcomer children this cannot be at the expense or to the detriment of other schools or children. ALL SCHOOLS should be properly funded first, so that ALL CHILDREN receive the resources required to fund their educational entitlement.

Academy is full to capacity as it is both a popular and successful school. We should be properly funded to ensure that we have the resources to continue to provide a high standard of education for our pupils. Instead, our budget is swallowed up in our running costs and salaries, leaving little or no money to spend on learning materials or additional support for our pupils.

In addition, schools in primary schools in Northern Ireland are significantly underfunded when compared to the funding model in Scotland, where the devolved government has made education and children's needs a priority.

The Department of Education finance director Gary Fair, in a letter to schools laying out their budget for the forthcoming year, warned "difficult decisions will have to be made". Mr. Fair said it was not possible for the department to ease the additional pressures facing schools with more cash and they should not assume more money is to come. "It is important that firm financial management and budgetary discretion is applied and that you take immediate action to review your school's budget position, to enable difficult decisions to be taken now to ensure that you live within your allocation for 2018-19," he wrote.

If as a school we follow the Department of Education edict as regards setting a budget for the new financial year, we will have reduced SEN support, reduced classroom assistant hours, reduced ICT support staff and reduced ancillary hours. It is becoming increasingly difficult to replenish classroom learning resources and to upgrade our IT equipment. You will know that we depend almost entirely on PTA fundraising and school fund contributions to pay for the basic necessities and this has been the case over the last number of years.

The situation is now critical, and it is time for teachers, classroom assistants, parents and governors to take a stand for our children – this is their time, this is their opportunity to learn – don't allow the Department of Education, the Education Authority and the lack of political coherence in Northern Ireland to negatively impact upon your child's learning entitlement and opportunity. They pass this way but once.

Please lobby the Department of Education, Education Authority and local politicians, and don't be fobbed off; it's their responsibility to resolve this debacle. YOUR CHILD MATTERS! Yes, we are in times of austerity, but our children's educational needs must be prioritised and protected.

Stephen Moore