

**COUNCIL'S DRAFT RESPONSE  
LOCAL MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOLS COMMON  
FUNDING FORMULA**

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 In responding to the proposed changes to the common funding formula, Council is aware of the number of significant challenges facing schools. In particular that the changes are at a time of continued demographic decline, significant inflationary pressures and new demands brought about by policy initiatives such as the implementation of the 'Entitlement Framework' and 'Every School a Good School.
- 1.2 Before considering each of the areas for consultation, Council would emphasise that effective change requires a coherence of policy matches to an appropriate level of funding. The formula attempts to distribute funds in line with need. This requires an adequate level of funding to begin with. The Council has lobbied for a major and fundamental review of the funding formula to reflect the changes in education policy and the growing recognition of a need to promote early and appropriate intervention when learning deficits are identified. Such a policy of prevention rather than cure would have significant benefits to individual children and accrue savings to the education budget over time. Council also believes that significant additional resource is necessary as a 'bridging loan' to allow for early intervention without further disadvantaging those children clearly in the system and still in need of additional support. Council believes that in the absence of additional funding any redistribution could have significant impacts on vulnerable schools. In these circumstances, Council believes that only minimal change to the current arrangements is desirable in this year.

**2 Age Weighted Pupil Units (AWPU) Factor**

- 2.1 The use of Age Weighted Pupil Units (AWPU) is the main factor within the formula. Therefore, any change in AWPU can have a dramatic effect on all phases of education. The purpose of weighting the value of the unit is to attempt to reflect differing costs associated with different stages of education. Council recognises that in the proposals there is a swing towards directing a small resource to the earlier years of a child's education without detriment to older pupils. This is to be welcomed as it allows schools to begin at the earliest possible stage to develop learning skills in

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young children. However, the absence of a significant additional resource concerns the Council as the additionality of resource is not sufficient to effect major development.

### **3 Foundation Stage**

3.1 The introduction of a recognised funding for the foundation stage specifically underlines the changes in teaching methodology within the first two years of primary education. Council welcomes the additional resources have and would urge that they be efficiently utilised by ensuring maximum cohesion into key stage 1 and with pre-school from 0-6. It would also urge the Department to reflect on the full implications for schools of appropriately addressing any issues impacting on learning deficit at the earliest possible time. The adult/teacher to pupil ratio jumps significantly as children transfer from pre school to primary education. A further cap on class size to ensure that the increase in resource is matched by a clear focus on individualised responses to children. While benefiting all this approach would focus on not only disadvantaged children but also facilitate swift identification and intervention of children with special educational needs. Council has a growing concern about the increasing pressures on schools with Year 1 classes of 30+

### **4 Primary Principals' Release time**

4.1 The rural nature of Northern Ireland means that there are many small schools performing a valuable role in our society. However, Council has long argued that the funding arrangements and indeed the definition of "small schools" should be reviewed in light of changing contexts and the need to sustain vulnerable, often rural, communities. While not all small schools can or should be retained some must. It is also the case that the formula should not be skewed because of the number of small schools. This requires a careful examination of the implications of the Bain Review, Reshaping of the Schools Estate and the Department of Education Sustainable Schools Policy.

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- 4.2 As the major employer, we have long had concerns about the pressures on principals particularly teaching principals in small isolated primary schools. We welcomed the additional funding to facilitate an increase in release time that recognises the administrative and leadership responsibilities they have in addition to their teaching.
- 4.3 The Council believes that the Department needs to ensure its policies are consistent and compliment each other in how they affect small schools. Council is concerned that with demographic downturn more schools will become small schools and that some of the existing small schools will become smaller and possibly unviable.
- 4.4 Council is somewhat concerned that the additional funding identified under this factor is not ring fenced. This may leave principals and governors in schools with budgetary pressures with major difficulties. Council recognises that the LMS process is predicated on the autonomy of the Board of Governors but considers that for this to be a real authority the budget must be sufficient. Council could not support a funding methodology, which would allow principals in small schools to face the dilemma of taking 'release time' while facing a deficit. The personal cost to the individual should not be at the discretion of governors or indeed the Principal advising them.

**5 Conclusion**

- 5.1 Council encourages the Department to revise the formula in light of policy initiatives such as the new curriculum, Post-Primary Review and the Entitlement Framework, the outcomes of the Bain Review and of the Sustainable Schools Policy. It calls upon the Department to review its policies on a number of related matters including the question of funding, to ensure a consistent approach to providing a first class education for all children.
- 5.2 In conclusion, the Council supports the minimum changes to the current formula proposed by the Department of Education. Council emphasises, however, that the key issue is the securing of adequate funding to meet the emerging agenda for early preventative intervention. It also urges the Department of Education to carry out a fundamental review of the LMS formula at the earliest possible time.