



the National Parent Forum of Scotland

Fair Funding to Achieve Excellence and Equity in Education

The National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFS) is pleased to respond to the Fair Funding to Achieve Excellence and Equity in Education consultation. Whilst we very much appreciate the efforts of the Scottish Government team, for actively seeking our input and simplifying the consultation document in response to feedback from our meeting, we must point out that many parents have struggled to engage with this consultation. Many parent councils have told us that they feel it makes little sense unless they have had direct experience of school funding.

Much of our response is based on the wealth of evidence previously gathered for the Governance consultation. The four focus groups within Glasgow, Dumfries and Galloway and Highland represented a broad demographic, including: urban and rural areas, primary and secondary schools, ethnic minorities, parents with English as an additional language (EAL), and a range of SIMDs (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation).

We have considered comments submitted from parents via social media, email and our website, which focused on both this and the original Governance consultation. Input from a large number of umbrella local authority parent council groups has also been included, as well as up-to-date submissions and discussions with all of our volunteer representatives. Our volunteers have represented 28 of the 32 local authorities over the period of these consultations.

Question 1

*(a) What are the **advantages** of the current system of funding schools?*

Parents feel that local authorities are accountable and understand the local issues within the wider social environment that each school sits, and are sensitive to the demands of their area.

Devolved school management is looked upon positively by the parents that provided feedback.

Although targeting areas of need through the Attainment Challenge is welcomed, parents continue to feedback, from all areas, that schools are struggling on their current budget. Pupil Equity Funding has been widely accepted by parents as being a useful initiative benefiting the school.

Some parents have told us that they believe it is an advantage that we do not have a national standard for the amount of money that can be spent per child, so that Scottish Government can recognise, and be responsive to, local differences.

*(b) What are the **disadvantages** of the current system of funding schools?*

Devolved school management is seen as a positive initiative, but national agreements on staffing arrangements and salary levels means that the bulk of this budget is taken up by staffing costs. This places limits on the flexibility and autonomy for other types of spending.

Current procurement systems also place additional restraints on headteachers, and the majority of parents feel that local authority contracts do not always provide best value for money.

Parents feel that children with additional support needs are suffering disproportionately from budget cuts. In a 2015 NPFS online survey: 55% of respondents did not feel their school's additional support for learning (ASL) resources met their child's needs; 38% said their child had been adversely affected by the changes to ASL provision in their school.

Parents from rural areas of Scotland state that education provision is adversely affected by their location. Fuel poverty is an issue and the financial burden of flights and ferries limit opportunities.

In our opinion, one of the main disadvantages is that schools rarely consult with parents on any funding related issues. Although encouraged by the number of schools starting to engage their parents in discussions on how to spend their Pupil Equity Funding, we look forward to this issue being addressed in the forthcoming Education Bill.

Question 2

(a) What are the benefits to headteachers of the current Devolved School Management schemes?

(b) What are the barriers that headteachers currently face in exercising their responsibilities under Devolved School Management? How could these barriers be removed?

As these questions are directed towards headteachers, we think it is inappropriate for the NPFS to respond.

Question 3

How can funding for schools be best targeted to support excellence and equity for all?

The NPFS feel schools must do more to involve parents from socially deprived backgrounds. We would like schools to have dedicated funds to help encourage wider parental engagement across the whole parent forum. These funds could be used in various ways, such as: paying for meals, transport, childcare, specialist tutors, craft materials, and supporting homework clubs etc.

This requirement is evidenced through recent independent research, which was conducted to inform the review of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006. According to the research (with 502 respondents):

- parents and carers living in deprived areas are less likely to feed back to the school through formal means. (5% of parents living in the most deprived areas would feed back formally, compared with 20% in the least deprived areas.)
- parents and carers with a lower socioeconomic status are less likely to be interested in joining the parent council. (52% of AB parents would be interested in joining the parent council, compared with 34% of DE parents.)
- parents and carers with a lower socioeconomic status are less likely to know what the parent council does. (For example, 32% of DE parents do not know if the parent council asks for parents views about what the children in the school are learning, compared with 17% of AB parents.)

Question 4

(a) What elements of school spending should headteachers be responsible for managing and why?

Parents feel that headteachers should have the core responsibility for selecting their team. This was felt to be particularly important for the recruitment of additional support needs (ASN) provision, where specific knowledge is most valuable. However, it would be helpful if some of the bureaucracy that surrounds recruitment could be shared.

A degree of flexibility over procurement would be welcomed. Parents feel it would be more efficient and, in many cases, more cost effective for individual schools to have greater autonomy over purchases. This would be particularly helpful for tailoring products and services to the individual schools. Larger and more expensive purchases, such as IT, should only remain above the level of the school when economies of scale could be achieved.

Local authority support during the actual procurement process would be important; it is essential that schools be offered some protection, particularly if they encounter difficulties with vendors of services or goods.

*(b) What elements of school spending should headteachers **not** be responsible for managing and why?*

Parents are concerned that headteachers may become too tied down with new financial responsibility; therefore, suggest that many aspects of school spending should remain out-with their remit. These costs include: utilities, school building and maintenance, school transport, clothing grants and school meals.

Parents also have concerns about where legal responsibilities would lie in an altered system.

(c) What elements of school spending are not suitable for inclusion in a standardised, Scotland-wide approach and why?

A more comprehensive and accurate funding method for calculating need would be welcomed. Funding which targets areas based on SIMD data is not only inappropriate for rural areas but also inaccurate for urban areas. This is due to the significant proportion of families living in private (landlord) housing due to lack of social housing.

If SIMD continues as the basis for measuring need, it will require alteration and enhancement to ensure it is fit for purpose.

Funding based on free school meal (FSM) uptake, such as Pupil Equity Funding, is also flawed given the number of additional support needs (ASN) schools that provide free meals that are out-with the FSM system. The current criteria for FSM also makes it difficult for many low-income families to qualify.

Question 5

*(a) What would be the **advantages** of an approach where the current system of funding schools is largely retained, but with a greater proportion of funding allocated directly to:*

1. Schools

Although we do not believe parent councils should have a statutory duty to be involved in financial decisions, we do believe that parent councils should be involved in school level decisions through statutory consultation, and that the consultations should be clear and transparent. This would be much more achievable at a school level.

2. Clusters; or 3. Regional Improvement Collaboratives?

Centralising resources, such as quality improvement, speech and language therapy and educational psychology, could ensure consistency and best practice across schools.

Although there have been successful examples of secondary schools sharing timetables in order to offer a wider range of subjects to students, strategic investment in ICT would help balance the time and/or financial constraints of travelling.

*(b) What would be the **disadvantages** of an approach where the current system of funding schools is largely retained, but with a greater proportion of funding allocated directly to:*

1. Schools

If greater financial and budgeting powers were given to schools, headteachers would need appropriate training, including finance, human resources (HR) etc.

As previously stated, we would prefer adequate support in these areas to ensure teachers are free to teach and headteachers are not overburdened. This is a significant issue in areas where several schools share a headteacher, or in very small schools where the headteacher is mostly class bound.

If headteachers are not held by statutory obligations to consult with parents there will be a real danger for accountability, as they will be working in isolation.

2. *Clusters; or*

3. *Regional Improvement Collaboratives?*

We would urge that services delivered at a regional level are limited to those that do not involve interaction with parents or members of the public in general. Whilst we appreciate the value in saving money, parental interaction works best on a local level.

Question 6

The Scottish Government's education governance reforms will empower headteachers to make more decisions about resources at their school. What support will headteachers require to enable them to fulfil these responsibilities effectively?

Parents suggest business managers would be required for any additional administrative tasks in order to avoid extra pressure on teachers. Although it is important that business managers are managed directly by the headteacher to avoid any potential disempowerment, there are still concerns over the impact of having an additional member of staff to manage, a greater number of decisions to oversee and the potential extra salary costs incurred.

As previously stated in Q5 (a) 1, it is important that headteachers are supported in decision making, especially in the early stages of acquiring this additional responsibility. Consultation with parents, peers and other stakeholders, such as Quality Improvement Officers (QIOs), should be recognised as an important element for achieving high quality and effective strategies.

Question 7

What factors should be taken into account in devising accountability and reporting measures to support greater responsibility for funding decisions at school level?

Parents feel that, in many cases, there is a good level of accountability in the current system so would seek for this to be replicated in any new arrangement. For example, parents know there are mechanisms within the local authority for raising issues.

If accountability moved from local authorities, to regional collaborations for example, we would welcome clarity over the proposed method and process.

Question 8

Do you have any other comments about fair funding for schools?

We trust that Scottish Government will consider funding in schools carefully to ensure that the primary aim of any change is to benefit the child in the classroom and aid their learning experience. There will always be those who perceive themselves to be winners or losers in a new system and Scottish Government must make every effort to communicate changes effectively with all stakeholders.

Kind regards,

Joanna Murphy.

Joanna Murphy, Chair, National Parent Forum of Scotland