

TO: Schools Forum
5 December 2024

Supplementary information for agenda item 5:

**2025-26 School Budgets: Outcomes from the December 2024
Financial Consultation with Schools**

1. The November Schools Forum meeting agreed that a consultation should be undertaken with all mainstream schools to gather views on “whether the calculation of the Block Transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block budget should be updated to include schools funded at the Minimum Per Pupil Funding Level (MPPFL).”
2. This reflected updated information from the Department for Education which confirmed that all schools could be included in Block Transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block budget.
3. The key considerations for the Schools Forum in agreeing this consultation were:
 - a) For consistency and equity, should all schools make a contribution, irrespective of their funding position? For example, the current calculation makes a transfer from schools with deficit balances but not those on MPPFL with surplus balances.
 - b) If the DfE had permitted a reduction to MPPFL when the initial Block Transfer/Top Slice decision was taken, would all schools have been included in the calculation?
4. It is important to note that the equivalent of 1% transfer of funds from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block would not increase if schools on the MPPFL were subject to the top slice. If a contribution was agreed to be made from these schools, this is expected to reduce the contribution from the DSG Growth Fund allocation, resulting in more of these funds remaining in the Schools Block budget for general distribution to all schools.
5. This was a 2-week consultation with one question as follows:

“In respect of making the Block Transfer/Top Slice calculation, do you agree that a request should be made to the Secretary of State to widen the calculation to include all schools?

This would result in schools that would ordinarily be protected on MPPFL cash values also making a financial contribution, capped at 0.5%.”
6. By the 29 November response deadline, 10 replies had been received from 11 out of 37 schools (30% response rate). A reply was received from 9 primary schools (30%) and 2 secondary schools (33%). Of the responders, 8 were in favour of the change (73%), 3 were opposed (27%).
7. Of the 7 schools directly affected by the potential change, 1 was in favour (14%), 3 were against (42%) and 3 had no preference (42%). 4 of the 7 schools (57%) that would be directly impacted from the potential change made a response, with 1 school supporting the change (25%) and 3 not (75%).

8. Comments were received from each of the 3 schools that would be directly impacted by the potential change and which had disagreed with their inclusion within the Bock Transfer/Top slice calculation, of which a summary is as follows:
 - Affected schools are funded at the lowest per pupil amount
 - Some need to generate income to balance their budgets
 - There is a danger of not being able to balance school budgets
 - Despite having low Pupil Premium and SEND indicators, there are associated financial and efficiency pressures to suitably support pupils
9. Annex A below sets out the full responses.
10. This supplementary information supports recommendation 2.1 of Agenda Item 5: 2025-26 School Budgets: Outcomes from the December 2024 Financial Consultation with Schools.

Binfield Primary School

We strongly disagree with the proposal to include all schools in the Safety Valve, as under the current LA funding formula applied, schools in the borough are not funded equitably in the first place. This school (and a few others) are significantly disadvantaged annually as a result. We would like the LA formula reviewed to make funding more equitable.

It is only in recent years that we as a school have received the nationally agreed bare minimum per pupil amount in our budget (although we wouldn't get this from the LA formula alone). We have always been amongst the very lowest funded in the borough and, as a result, we have had to generate our own additional income (in effect running a business alongside a school). This income has been used to prop up our budget in order to give our children an excellent education – for which we have been consistently recognised and have a proven track record. We have also had to be incredibly careful in managing our finances and despite a plethora of increasing challenges, have just about been able to balance our books. We should not be penalised for managing our resources extremely well.

If the proposal goes ahead, we would be 0.5% below the minimum per pupil funding guarantee and this could be for several years to come. According to our IDSR, we are already in the bottom 20% of schools nationally for what we spend on Teachers and education support staff, yet we spend near to 90% of our school budget on this fundamental resource. This is above the recommended amount and is not sustainable. However, we are facing a changing cohort of pupils with an increasing number of complex needs. If we don't have this resource, we will be less-able to meet needs. We have also reached our limit as to what can be achieved in terms of raising additional income to support our school's budget. As such, these pressures together with a top-slice from our budget, will inevitably push us into a deficit budget.

Furthermore, actions now being taken by the LA in terms of SEND provision, although welcome, are largely targeted at secondary-aged pupils and there remains an ever-increasing gap to support early years and primary aged pupils who are simply not able to cope in a mainstream setting, despite excellent inclusive practice.

We would urge the school's forum to consider those schools in a minority position, like us, recognising the long-term impact of very low per pupil funding and the unsustainability of this moving forwards.

College Town Primary School

This was raised at FGB and although we appreciate the dilemma as a school funded MPPFG we feel we should not be included.

Warfield Primary School

As the headteacher of a maintained C of E school I absolutely uphold the importance of solidarity particularly in the face of the educational and financial challenges that we currently face. There are occasions however that you have to champion the best interests of your pupils and staff.

Although the fact that this consultation has been scoped out at all probably negates the need for comment, particularly as it is only in the best interests of the few to vote against it, I do feel I have to articulate our school's point of view with regards to this proposal.

We of course welcome the announcement of increases in the MPPFL to at least £4,955 per pupil in this year's budget but it is my understanding that this would still place us as receiving the lowest possible funding per pupil compared to some schools. Despite being in this position as a result of the Bracknell Forest Funding Formula we have managed to submit balanced budgets and provide good standards of education consistently over the years a fact that is now being used as a key consideration for the schools forum to agree this re-consultation. This seems counter intuitive.

Although I don't agree that the schools in deficit budgets should have come within the scope of the block transfer/top slice calculation I certainly do not understand that the fact that we have managed to maintain an acceptable budgetary position despite our low per pupil funding due to the Bracknell Forest funding formula should now be a contributory factor to us being considered under the recalculation.

It would be my rudimentary understanding that the block transfer/top slice would effectively undermine the MPPFL reducing our overall budget position which in turn would result in a reduction in the minimum spend available for our pupils and bringing us below the MPPFL.

Despite managing our budget within our limits for many years we, like all schools, find ourselves in a precarious position. There is a very limited amount of time that we will be able to maintain this balance and it will take very little to tip us into deficit.

We will also find ourselves with reduced funding due to reduced numbers at the point of the October census (numbers of pupils which have now revived) This is purely circumstantial but will nevertheless have a considerable impact on our indicative budget in the new financial year so to also experience an additional £10.177 top slice will put our financial viability in jeopardy. This will impact on pupil provision and potentially a staff reduction to continue to maintain a balanced budget.

It is suggested that this top slice will ultimately benefit all schools by enabling higher level of funds remaining in the schools block budget for general distribution. It may be useful to understand how this could impact on schools and what the relative benefit would be in comparison to the direct impact the loss of £10,177 would have in our school budget. Would the money within the school's block budget be exempt/protected

from the pressures of repayment of the safety valve funds which we are currently falling behind in? Given that our low PPG, SEN and deprivation indicators already contribute to our low level of funding under Bracknell Forest formulas would these factors still limit our access to these suggested increased funds and therefore further exacerbate our reduced funding position?

The £10,177 remaining in my school budget will evidently have a much more direct impact on the outcomes for all of my pupils. That £10,177 would pay for a skilled member of staff to support the learning of individuals and groups within my school ensuring that I can meet the needs of my learners effectively and lessening the deficit I find myself in my own high needs budget with funds that fall short of what I require to provide the correct support for my most vulnerable learners. At the very least it would ensure that colleague's job.

Although low deprivation factors, low PPG and low SEN indicators within my school would be indicated by many of my headteacher colleagues as a beneficial position, it brings with it its own financial and efficiency pressures in providing effective and sustainable educational provision for my pupils. The low numbers also mean low flexibility and options in providing innovative solutions to meet the ever increasingly complex needs of our learners. Approaches that are presented as desired practice by LA officers. Despite this we have maintained a consistently good standard of education for the children of Warfield.

I realise that my understanding of the parameters of this discussion may be rudimentary but I come from a position of looking at the impact on my children and staff. It goes against my instinct to present this very singular point of view and I hope it can be seen by my previous actions that I understand the importance of contributing as a team and the power that this has however I feel it is my responsibility to press forward the individual needs of my school community.