

All Party Parliamentary Rural Services Group – Tuesday 23rd February 2010

Devon associations are grateful for the invitation to give oral evidence to the group. The changes we would like to see made to the current formula appear on page 3.

Context

One representative has been invited by the APPG and the Devon Association of Primary Heads (DAPH) has requested that the Chair of DASH represent their views.

On a per pupil basis Devon is the 148th worst funded out of 151 English Local Authorities. We strongly believe that the gap between the City of London per pupil funding at the top of the “league table” and those at the bottom has become morally indefensible, if not obscene. Devon’s performance in measures such as 5+A*-C including English and Maths is slightly above the national average. Devon constantly overcomes its lack of resources to meet challenging benchmark targets, but the pupils, who are going to lose out with reduced funding are those who do not reach the national benchmark – nearly 50% at the end of KS 4, for example. At a time of reduced employment opportunities for today’s school leavers, this surely can not be right.

This iniquitous position for Devon’s school children has led to a campaign for Fairer Funding for Devon’s school children and the launch of an on-line petition to Number 10 Downing Street. The model for the campaign has been offered to other f40 members. Currently the No.10 on-line petition has the third highest number of signatures in the Education sub-category, with the petition open until October 2010. (*See links below*)

<http://www.fairfundingfordevonschools.org.uk>
<http://petitions.number10.gov.uk/handsup4schools/>

Support for the campaign has been unanimous from both the Devon Association of Primary Heads (DAPH), Devon Association of Secondary Heads (DASH), Devon Association of Governors (DAG) and Special Schools Heads’ Association for Devon (SHAD) supported too by the political members of the County Council and Officers. Peter Younger-Ross, MP, recently held an end of session debate on the perilous state of funding of the County’s schools.

We are disappointed that Devon has not had opportunity to contribute to the proposed consultation on review of the funding formula variously promised before end of 2009 and then by 4th January, mid-January, end of January and now according to Stephen Kingdon in the oral evidence session before this, before the General Election. Devon has been waiting for the opportunity to respond as we knew the 3 year funding settlement for 2008-10 would create difficulties for Devon’s schools. We know that if nothing changes for 2011-14, if there is another 3 year funding settlement, we face inadequate resources to provide basic education. We would prefer to be able to give a considered response and not have to rush one off in the Summer holidays!

We have been running a “fair funding for Devon school children” campaign since the Autumn term 2009. In this current financial year a child in Devon is funded at £378 less than the average amount per pupil. In the next financial year the figure will be £393. For a comprehensive of 1,000 pupils this equates to £393,000 per annum. Given that a teacher at the top of the pay scale costs the budget roughly £45,000, one can see how many additional teachers this would add to a school’s staffing, with consequent smaller group sizes, let alone additional teaching assistants and administrative support.

Devon has 364 schools, 37 of which are secondary schools. (There will only be 32 left in rural Devon, should Exeter be allowed to pursue unitary status.) In 2009-10 20% of Devon’s secondary schools made staff redundant and the rest had to reduce staffing through “natural wastage”.

Devon’s school budget balances have been scrutinised, particularly since Peter Younger-Ross’ debate, but false conclusions drawn. It is not that some have surpluses, because they can manage their allocation correctly, and some have six figure deficits, because they are financially inept. Some schools are fortunate to have additional lettings income, for example, particularly in urban environments. However, the main reason is that some schools have a very experienced, but costly staff. The figure of £45,000 has already been mentioned above. An inexperienced teacher in the first few years of teaching will cost a school budget only about £30,000 i.e. £90,000 will fund only two teachers in one school, but three in another. Formulae do not take account of this.

The pay rates for teachers are set nationally. Single status legislation (job evaluation) has also resulted in greater similarity of pay for support staff and we await the outcomes of the new School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB). Given that 80% of a school’s budget is spent on staffing, we have to ask why an Area Cost Adjustment is necessary outside of London. These staffing costs were predicted to create pressure on schools’ budgets in Devon: staffing costs are recurring, national pay deals for teachers agreed at 2.3% have been greater than the minimum funding guarantee of 2.1% and the effects of the implementation of single status legislation have also been increasing pressure on expenditure at a rate higher than income, as support staff have been mostly upgraded in small rural schools and placed on the bottom of an incremental range leading to increased recurring costs over several years. The librarian in my school, for example, is paid the same as the librarian in the largest school in Devon, with 2,200 pupils: same job title, but hugely differing incomes.

I speak as Principal of Holsworthy Community College, a 700 pupil comprehensive in NW Devon with 14 feeder primary schools. There are 700 pupils on roll and about the same total in the feeder primary schools. 10 of the latter receive £180,00 per annum subsidy allocated as a result of Devon’s Education Forum formula distribution,. Every £1,000,000 million in the DSG in Devon equates to about £10 per pupil via the AWPU (Age Weighted Pupil Unit) i.e small school protection as a result of Devon’s own formula deprives learners in other schools of about £20 per pupil funding. This is the funding implication of resourcing small primary schools in just one learning community

(family of schools) in Devon. Were the new formula to fund small schools in the same way, this would alleviate pressure on other schools, who currently are penalised.

What changes would Devon like to see as a result of the formula funding review?

The ending of the Area Cost Adjustment outside of London, because schools increasingly pay the same for posts as a result of national pay scales.

A sparsity factor for secondary age pupils and not just primary age pupils. Sparsity should be calculated on the population density of pupils in mainstream education and not general population density.

A more up to date method of calculating deprivation that recognises rural deprivation, as well as urban deprivation. FSM is not a robust enough method to allocate funding. As Mr Kingdom has pointed out Tax Credits may well be a fairer way of calculating this. For Devon, we are currently in the bottom third of deprivation funding allocation, whereas more up to date methods of calculating deprivation used by the DCSF would place Devon in the middle third.

An activity led funding formula based on real costs today and not historical spend. Devon spends less, because it receives less. Our own Schools' Forum activity led funding calculation sees schools funded at about 75% of the actual need calculated.

Regional funding of what we might term "high tariff" pupils e.g. pupils with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD) and the increasing number of pupils on the Autistic spectrum. We heard in the first oral evidence session how Somerset spends £10 million in addition over DSG – for Devon we calculate this as £6 million.

Devon is not being tardy or burying its head in the sand. The Devon Education Forum has a consultation document out for discussion on the educational viability of the current model of provision of schools. We are being pro-active, but the discussion is inevitably a heated and emotional one, as the rural school's budget is seen as essential to the livelihood of the local community.

In the last financial year Devon was unable to fund the required number of redundancies to balance school deficit budgets, as there was insufficient county funding centrally.

We feel inadequate funding is causing us as educationalists to have to look at rationalising the provision of schools in Devon. This is very emotional for small rural communities and we question whether education funding should be the saviour of rural communities, instead of a rural support grant.

Should funding remain inadequate to fund the current provision of schools we will be forced to move to a different model, but this can not be achieved overnight. School re-organisation will not be achieved for September 2011, for example.

Much has been made of the issue of transport in the first session. 85% of pupils travel to Holsworthy Community College by school bus – the highest percentage in Devon. The College has to fund additional out of school hours transport four nights a week in term time to enable pupils with no other means of transport home other than the end of school bus, to access extra-curricular activities. This year this additional transport will cost the school about £20,000 funded out of specialist status monies. Urban schools do not face this pressure.

Reference was made in the earlier session to CPD. It is infuriating that the exam boards and organisations such as the SSAT seem to think that training for the South West is fine, as long as it is held no further south than Bristol. Finance for INSET (Standards Fund) is related heavily to pupil numbers. Isolated small rural schools face a “double whammy” of a smaller than average training budget and higher than average costs of accessing the training e.g. mandatory examination board training for GCSE has seen my staff having to go to Portsmouth and Birmingham, as the NEAREST venues offered for training.

Having Initial Teacher Trainees in school has not been an issue for us, but not having sufficient money to fund Graduate Teacher Trainees on the GTT Programme has been frustrating. Recruitment is difficult, as small rural schools are unable to match the TLR allowances offered by financially better off schools.

We are grateful for the opportunity to present our case and should any further clarification be required, please contact me via e-mail at principal@holsworthycollege.devon.sch.uk or by telephone at school on (01409) 253430