

Written evidence submitted to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee's inquiry into the funding of public services in Northern Ireland

Submitted by the Controlled Schools' Support Council

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Background

- As the support body for almost half of the schools in Northern Ireland, the Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) welcomes this opportunity to provide written evidence to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee inquiry into the funding of public services in Northern Ireland.
- The controlled sector is the largest education sector in Northern Ireland, representing 49% of all schools. CSSC supports controlled schools in Northern Ireland (NI) which include Nurseries, Primary Schools, Secondary Schools, Grammar Schools, Integrated Schools, Special Schools and Irish Medium Schools.
- CSSC would welcome the opportunity to present oral evidence to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee. CSSC has been working since its inception in 2016 to highlight the severity of the financial situation facing all schools but specifically controlled schools, presenting to the NI Affairs Committee inquiry on education funding in Northern Ireland in January 2019.
- Education in Northern Ireland must be provided with sufficient funding that provides equity to our children and young people. Schools need stable budgets with a clear pay and price commitment.
- In January 2023 Mark Baker, CSSC's Chief Executive, along with the Chief Executives of the main education bodies in Northern Ireland (NI), wrote to the Secretary of State for NI and the Head of the NI Civil Service echoing and reinforcing concerns raised by the Education Authority (EA) regarding significant limitations to education funding and its impact on our children and young people.
- This outlined concerns surrounding the systemic underfunding of education in NI evidenced by a report from the Institute of Fiscal Studies¹.
- Core to the concerns of CSSC and other education bodies is the belief that this may not be fully understood by UK Government and in the absence of a Northern Ireland Executive has resulted in decisions which has reduced school budgets and has impacted negatively upon services provided to all schools by EA. This is compounded by misguided comments by the Minister of State in relation to duplication.
- This is in stark contrast to the Chancellor's announcement of £2.3 billion to schools in England in his 2022 Autumn Statement. The Treasury stated that this would result in an average cash increase for every pupil in England of more than £1,000 by 2024-25, compared to 2021-22.
- This NI Education Chief Executives collaborative forum has since declared in a joint call that they agree the situation can only be resolved by:
 - An overarching strategy for education to provide direction and enable leadership at all levels across the system.
 - Sustained investment in education.
 - Continued transformation of critical services.
 - Adequate investment to improve the fabric of our school buildings.
- There is a need for greater recognition of the significantly important role education plays in shaping, investing and protecting the future of our children and young

¹ <https://ifs.org.uk/news/school-spending-pupil-highest-scotland-lowest-northern-ireland>

people and of the immeasurable impact education has on the economy and wider society. As we mark the 25th Anniversary of the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement it is important that we state the role that education must continue to play in a post conflict society. The UK Government as a signatory to this agreement must consider how education is supported in Northern Ireland. Whilst short term funding has been welcomed now is the time to truly address investment in education, not just bringing it up to the levels enjoyed in the rest of the United Kingdom, but to the level where it is fit for the purpose required in Northern Ireland in 2023 and beyond.

1. The impact of the lack of a functioning Executive on budgetary management and strategic decision-making across the Northern Ireland Departments.

- CSSC supports children and young people being educated together and believes there is a need for transformation and investment in education in NI.
- Transformation is required and must be supported by funding and investment, as well as strong leadership and collaboration across all Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Executive. Children and young people are supported by all Executive Departments and their education is impacted by all Departments, directly and indirectly.
- Education needs a vision and strategy that includes everyone working together and all voices being listened to.
- This strategy must be ambitious and innovative to ensure education meets the needs for all of our children and young people and to provide, promote and enable leadership.
- The key focus of this transformation must be on doing things more effectively in achieving better outcomes for all our children and young people and not solely on financial efficiencies. To this end a functioning Executive would assist in making the decisions needed to achieve this.
- It is recognised that while the Executive will face the same budgetary pressures that currently exist Education has to be prioritised as it is investment in the future of Northern Ireland.

2. The financial situation facing Northern Ireland's public services, including the police, health, education and children's social care, and the consequences of budgetary pressures on the delivery of those public services.

- CSSC, with other education body leaders remain concerned about the ever growing and unprecedented pressures facing education. The current pressures will carry into the next financial year and beyond, and the accumulated detrimental impact that this will have for children and young people must be addressed urgently.

- The financial outlook for 2023/24 is significantly more challenging than anything the sector has faced to date. The additional funding provided to Education by the Secretary of State, in November 2022, was non-recurring in nature and therefore the underlying pressures of almost £300m that the Education Authority was reporting earlier in 2022/23 have not been addressed. Rather those financial pressures are growing.
- Taking into account the 2023/24 anticipated pay and price inflation, continued projected growth in demand for Special Educational Needs (SEN) services as well as proposed budget cuts across the NI public sector generally, the existing shortfall is only likely to grow.
- Core education funding should not be dependent upon in-year monitoring rounds or ear marked funds. Core funding must be sufficient for schools and those that deliver key services to them to operate effectively, before any additionality is provided.
- For a number of years CSSC and other education bodies have been highlighting the lack of an adequate baseline budget for and in support of schools. It is impossible for schools and the sector as a whole to plan effectively when each financial year commences with a funding deficit.
- The position is steadily deteriorating with over 50% of all schools expected to report a funding deficit at 31 March 2023. As the funding authority this directly contributes to the EA deficit.
- The significant backlog in support for school infrastructure, maintenance and minor capital works must be addressed urgently.
- Spending to maintain the fabric of the school estate is now predominantly limited to items that would pose significant risk to health and safety.

What is the impact on the delivery of education in Northern Ireland?

- The current generation of children have already been adversely affected as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Cost saving initiatives for more than a decade have significantly reduced the purchasing power of funding provided to our schools, children and young people.
- The EA annual budget has been reduced through cost reductions by £150m since 2015. This is transformation carried out to reduce funding requirement rather than to provide the right services for the future of our children and young people.
- School leaders are clearly stating that unless this under investment is addressed, it will be impossible to provide our children and young people with an education that ensures they have the best start in life.

3. The effectiveness of the Barnett formula in calculating the amount of money the UK Government makes available to Northern Ireland for providing essential services.

- Central to this issue is the presumption that Northern Ireland is,
 - receiving sufficient funding that values children and young people equitably with those elsewhere in the United Kingdom
 - starting from the same place as the rest of Great Britain and requires similar investment.

This does not recognise the specific nature of the challenges facing education in Northern Ireland.

- Key to any inquiry needs to be evidence from the Institute of Fiscal Studies – this highlights that educational spend per pupil in NI for 2021/22 was the lowest of the 4 UK nations.
- Scotland was the highest at £7,600 per pupil with NI spending £6,400 per pupil.
- If England was taken as a mid-range comparator, at £6,700 spending per pupil, and if NI was given the same level of funding, the NI education budget would be £108m greater than its current level. (Note this does not include the extra £2.3 billion given to education in England in November 2022 which further increases the imbalance, as already stated).
- Table 1 presents the Treasury’s 2021/22 Public Expenditure Statistical Analysis (PESA) for education. It clearly demonstrates spending per pupil in NI is 15% lower than the UK average and £1,000 per pupil less than England before its recent increases.
- CSSC and other education bodies have publicly called for an answer as to why such a lack of equality between the important funding commitments given to pupils in England and children and young people in NI exists.
- In January 2022 EA reported; ‘There is significant growth in the number of children with Special Educational Needs. In the last five years there has been a 26.44% increase in the number of pupils accessing a placement in a Special School and in the same period there has been a 24.1% increase in the number of pupils accessing a placement in Specialist Provision in Mainstream. Based on the Department of Education (DE) projections this trend is expected to continue.’² The challenges facing education in Northern Ireland are significantly different to those in Great Britain.
- DE forecast that total expenditure for Special Education Needs is projected to be £500 million in 2022/23, an increase of 100% over the previous 8 years and will account for nearly 25% of DE’s budget.
- To quote the Independent Review of Education in Northern Ireland Interim Report, ‘Education should be viewed as an investment: it equips individuals and society to

² : https://www.eani.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/Special%20Education%20Strategic%20Area%20Plan%202022-27%20-%20Planning%20for%20Special%20Education%20Provision_0.pdf

face the future. In turn, this can minimise longer-term costs and provide better outcomes for individuals, taxpayers and society as a whole. On the basis of our work to date, we are of the view that the education system in Northern Ireland is not adequately funded.’³

- CSSC states that the UK Government needs to accept that the Barnett formula is not and will not deliver adequately for the futures of the children and young people of Northern Ireland. Further investment is urgently needed.

Table 1 – PESA 2022⁴

	Northern Ireland (£m)		England (£m)		Scotland (£m)		Wales (£m)		Average
Pre-Primary and Primary Education	947		25,175		3,706		1,841		
Secondary education	1,251		40,898		3,167		2,269		
		2,198		66,073		6,873		4,110	
Post-secondary non-tertiary education	-		572		-		-		
Tertiary education	418		2,393		1,774		339		
Education not definable by level	108		752		123		132		
Subsidiary services to education	442		3,956		323		277		
R&D education	0		2671		0		-		
Education n.e.c.	170		1556		384		129		
Totals	3,336	2,198	77,973	66,073	9,477	6,873	4,986	4,110	79,254
Number of pupils 2020/21		344,900		8,890,357		794,364		469,176	10,498,797
Total school education spend per pupil 2020/21 (£)		6,373		7,432		8,652		8,760	7,549
Population (census 2021)	1,903,175		59,597,542		5,479,900		3,107,500		
School pupils as % of population	18%		14.9%		14.5%		15.0%		

³ <https://www.independentreviewofeducation.org.uk/files/independentreviewofeducation/2022-10/Interim%20Report%20-%20Published%2012.10.22.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/public-expenditure-statistical-analyses-2022>