

Maintained Schools Budgets 2024-25 - Consultation Responses

Comments on the national funding formula and transfer of 0.5% to the high needs block
In principle we agree with this request but feel there should be protections in place to ensure better access to HNF and it not feel like a competitive grant. [x8 responses with this message]
In principle we agree with this request but feel there should be protections in place to ensure better access (and sometimes quicker access) to HNF and it not feel like a competitive grant.
Accessing the high needs block is problematic and never enough to fund effective support
We feel that the percentage should be higher into high needs block as needs are increasingly high nationally. If this were to happen schools could continue to apply for funding where needs arise and the pot would be large enough. If the money is all shared equally then it is not necessarily where the greatest need is.
While I feel this supports the high needs block, particularly as more schools are having to accommodate more children with complex SEND need due to lack of places in specialist provision, my concern is how this will impact the education of the children in the mainstream sector as their funding will be reduced. If the high needs block is already in a deficit, how will this added income be used to support children with SEND. I'm concerned that this money may be used to balance that budget rather than increasing funding for those children with additional needs.
Schools cannot afford to take a reduction to support the high needs block. I agree the high needs block needs additional funding but not at school's expense.
While this is not the ideal scenario, the number of children with significant needs has increased, our school has children with special arrangement funding in place in addition to their EHCP funding due to the lack of Special School places within the LA. Despite this funding, the challenge of meeting the growing needs of pupils impacts significantly on staffing and, therefore, if place funding is not forthcoming from the DfE to support pupils remain within the maintained sector, it needs to come from somewhere.
Whilst i do think it's important that high needs funding is increased, i do not think it should come from school's budget. Schools need every penny they can get.
I agree that it's necessary but at a time when school budgets are being stretched more that ever and funding moved from the schools block to ease a problem elsewhere just exacerbates the problem within schools.
Simply isn't enough funding within education, all needs need to be covered

Split site funding comments
It's part of the NFF so it should be included in calculations. Where any capping has been applied - it should be proportionate and if individual schools are materially affected by capping, adjustments must be made to ensure the funding passes through fairly and as intended. Small schools are more adversely affected by capping rules. [reponses x6]
Using the full rates for the split site factor as provided in the national funding formula It's part of the NFF so it should be included in calculations. Where any capping has been applied - it should be proportionate and if individual schools are materially affected by capping, adjustments must be made to ensure the funding passes through fairly and as intended. Small schools are more adversely affected by capping rules[responses x2]

<p>I have to walk my children to St David's Sports Hall on the Harborough Road, which is maintained by my school, and the main site of the school is on Kingsthorpe Grove Road. I feel that my school should be able to access the split site funding.</p>
<p>We have a split site due to a small school hall and limited outside space on the main school site. We have struggled to support the running of the building with our main school budget and capital allocation. It is a large site and the grounds are now in a state of disrepair. Updates to this cannot and should not be funded from our existing budget.</p>
<p>We have tried, unsuccessfully, to obtain funding to replace the astroturf which is becoming almost unusable in wet weather. This additional funding will enable the school to fully replace with a new all weather pitch.</p>
<p>Not applicable to our school</p>
<p>Doesn't affect our school so have no opinion</p>

Growth Funding Comments
<p>While I agree that due to the need for more school places this needs to be in place, but there should be assurances that there is a strategic overview in place to ensure school places are located and allocated appropriately. Locally we have, in recent years, seen a local 1 form entry primary being allocated 9 reception children, with other local schools also having gaps. The pressure this creates on school budgets is unnecessary and, had there been a strategic overview, the 9 children could have been placed locally, therefore reducing the burden on the school with the low intake and supporting other schools in reaching their PAN.</p>

Central Schools Services Budget Comments
<p>Need better services in West Northants for Education eg Finance support , legal, SEN</p>
<p>Need better services for this money in WNC for education e.g. finance support, legal, SEND</p>
<p>We need better, more responsive services in West Northamptonshire.</p>
<p>SEN, :Legal, Finance</p>
<p>Agree but we need better services in West Northants for education e.g. finance, legal, SEN</p>
<p>We need better services in West Northants to be consistent in education e.g. finance support, legal, SEN etc</p>
<p>Need better services in west northants for education - finance support, premises</p>
<p>The Services in West Northants need to improve and be more responsive.</p>
<p>SIP, Caroline Barton, is very good.</p>
<p>I didn't spot the information regarding as to why there is a proposed value relating to the Teachers' Pay and Pension Grant within the CSSB.</p>
<p>Happy to continue with central services expenditure contribution.</p>
<p>I would like to point out that maintained schools struggle with contacting some of this support. Contact emails and telephone numbers are not readily available. We have to use allbursar email to obtain information. Ideally this should be placed on some sort of central portal (Teams etc) that we could all have access to. This is not finance related but should form part of the services provided.</p>

While I agree that these services are important for schools there seems to be a disparity between support for WNC maintained schools and NNC schools, particular in relation to schools finance. While, to my knowledge, the service for NNC schools has continued, the WNC finance team has seen a significant reduction in staffing and more importantly the level of support on day to day issues ensuring school budgets are managed correctly. While I have been in post for several years and am experienced in my role, this lack of support and expertise at WNC in dealing with operational finance queries is concerning. I know locally of new bursars, and experienced finance staff who are leaving, and are concerned at the lack of support available. The disconnect between the use of finance packages in school, and how the finance team need actions to be made should be addressed, certainly if de-delegated funds are being used to support the North, but not schools in the west

With the cost of PFI increasing dramatically over the last 2 years and this impacting our budget massively, i would question if we are actually receiving the best value for money. With regards to the site staff provided at our school, their abilities are very limited resulting in school staff taking on tasks which should be completed within our PFI contract.

It would be useful to have a full breakdown / analysis of the services provided with the associated costs so that appropriate comments could be made.

Trade Union Facility Time Comments

As more academies / Trusts opt-out of TU Facility Time what is the long term strategy? It is going to financially challenging for those LA schools and Trusts that continue to represent the diminishing group and costs rise. [x9]

Less risks involved.

As an academy we do not currently buy into the facilities time payment.

As schools have seen a minimal increase to support staffing costs, I feel this approach should be mirrored with the trade union fund.

As the unions are paid for by their customers I am unsure as to why schools need to contribute.

There should be no payment for union activities; put the money into pupil books and other resources.

School Improvement Comments

happy to use the De delegation to support schools with financial advice

It would be useful to have a provision for finance support for Bursars/Business Managers/Heads available, as the service previously offered by WNC was withdrawn, whether this be for schools needing some additional support in the short-term, or as a service available to all schools if/when required. Without tailored support being available to schools, and changes to processes at WNC's end, it has been challenging to manage and understand school financial systems, reports, and budget management.

It is difficult to seek external training and support when it isn't always clear what WNC expects to see when requiring schools to match back to their reports. Changes to budget management on our finance systems requested by WNC mean that the monitoring reports that we have used in the past don't give us the same or a clear picture of the financial position.

I have been in schools for many years and have found these changes frustrating and difficult, so I really feel for those people who are just starting their journey in schools' finance or leadership. I understand that schools are using a number of different finance systems which means that those supporting would need sufficient knowledge to support this, or specialists for each system, but with many schools facing significant financial pressures, it is imperative that finance staff and leaders can have a clear picture of their budgetary provisions to enable them to use their delegated funds and income in the most valuable ways, and to have accurate information for monitoring and longer term planning.

[submitted x2]

It would be nice to see a Schools Finance function returned to offer assistance when needed to schools that do not have the expertise, knowledge or understanding of the functions they are required to perform with regard to finance.

We do have an external company that assists with finance, however, they cannot respond quickly and sometimes can't even solve issues which leaves the school in a difficult situation with solving the issues. I had to employee Charlotte Dennison to come and solve the issue for me which she did within an hour of being here.

It would be especially useful to be able to call upon a knowledgeable person that understands FMS and Schools Finance when annual tasks are required. I can populate my three year plan easily as I am quite efficient using Excel, however, when it comes to calculating carry forward and completing the budget proposal I find this task difficult and am always uncertain that I have completed it correctly.

Providing a service that we could call upon would be a valuable use of de-delegation funding.

A service which is widely used in maintained schools and is definitely beneficial to ours. Due to the finance support being withdrawn from WNC, would it be possible to add a team or member of staff to support business managers? Maybe a 'super bursar' type role.

Redundancy Funding Comments

If school are having to restructure or make redundancy's then the county council as main employers should fully fund this not (as main employers) not schools that are already in debt

With costs continuing to increase, more schools will unfortunately need the support.

Notional SEND Budgets comments

The notional SEND, MUST relate to the number of SEN children on role. It is unfair and in our case, wholly insufficient otherwise. Currently there is no equality, the funding must be relative to the school and not just a larger proportion of the AWPUP percentage. We are failing both the children who are and are not on our SEN register if we continue to take this approach.

Notional send is not clear to identify within the schools budget. It is difficult to track. In terms of the amount received set at £6K for SEND this has been in place for years and never increased and even with the notional send is never enough to meet the needs of the children. In primary school we are getting more SEND needs and with specialist provisions bursting at the seams this has a huge effect on school budgets

This is difficult to decide because if schools have high SEND, high deprivation and low prior attainment then there is not an option that fits perfectly and these schools do need financial support to be successful.

With the increase in Support Staff costs over the past two years, rising costs of energy and general cost of other resources the school needs to use part of the notional SEN budget to resource the school. We cannot afford to put the notional SEN allowance to one side for those children that require SEN, therefore, we have to look at these on a case by case basis.

We have a high proportion of SEN children with significant needs that do not have an EHCP and the process is a lengthy one to apply for them, meaning we are incurring costs to support these children whilst waiting for a decision (not to mention failing these children as they are in the wrong setting).

If our notional SEN is increased this will limit us being able to apply for additional funding for those children that need it.

I would like clarity on how decisions on the review of element 2 spend will be made by officers, to ensure consistency, openness, transparency and fairness across WNC.

Increase in pupils requiring support.

Funding based on prior attainment could be more appropriate when determining future notional SEND funding. We believe this option would require the academy to fund a lower amount internally before being able to apply for additional HNF. This is the determination of our CFO As well as the accounting officer. If this is not the case, greater clarity in the explanation would be useful.

As a school with a significant number of pupils with EHCP's in place plus special arrangement funding due to a lack of WNC provision for SEND pupils, increasing the notional funding, which does physically exist, only puts us in a significantly worse situation in the ability to request sorely needed additional funding for children who have not be provided with a special school place.

Any other Comments

As a school in West Northants the financial support and checking was removed. As a school we have no one who comes to support heads, bursars or SBM in the management of school finance - and when asking questions quite frankly no one really knows. Eg. how much will the PFI charges be next year? School finance (which lets face it is a complete minefield and over complicated in my opinion) has been left floundering. Bring back the county advisers to the West - the North are still supported why not us?

Please let me know how I can further progress my request for split site funding.

Will there be any changes to De-delegation funding to reinstate Bursar support from LA Schools finance. The private Financial Support available to schools is not proving to be beneficial or value for money.

Sadly the impact of these consultation changes do little more than move money from one target area to another, some will win and some will lose. The impact of the unfunded support staff pay rises has been significant, and could potentially result in redundancy in our school in the next financial year. The result of this is less support for the pupils in our school and a reduced capacity for the SLT to deliver the intended outcomes for the children and families within our school.