

CSN POLICY BRIEFING

DfE Consultation - Schools national funding formula

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Author Alan Docksey
LGiU/CSN Associate

Summary

The DfE launched on 7 March 2016 its latest plans on introducing a National Funding Formula for schools to redistribute £31 bn of school funding. Consultation closes after the Easter break on 17 April 2016. There are two consultations being undertaken, one on a national formula for funding schools (this briefing) and a second one on the funding arrangements for High Needs (mainly special educational needs). Related consultations on Early Years funding arrangements and for school improvement are expected later in the year.

This is a “Stage 1” consultation on the principles to form the basis of the revised funding arrangements. The “Stage 2” consultation will look at the details of the reforms and in particular will provide figures from which the implications for the individual funding of schools and the funding of LA responsibilities for Special Educational Needs will be identified. There is as yet no timetable for the Stage 2 consultation.

This briefing will be of interest to both elected members and officers who have corporate responsibility for their local authority as well as those with responsibility for school education, as well as parents, school staff and governors, local employers and those with an interest in local education provision.

Overview

In the Autumn Statement delivered in November 2015 the Chancellor not only announced that there would be a consultation on a national funding formula for schools but that “we will make local authorities running schools a thing of the past”. The current consultation not only looks towards fulfilling

The drive behind the implementation of a national funding formula for schools is the apparent unfairness that a young person with a recognised set of attributes and needs would attract a different sum of money depending where in the country they went to school. Those allocations are driven by the relative spending priorities of those authorities during the early years of local management of schools and the aggregate funding (and assumptions about locally raised resources) that past governments have allocated through national resourcing arrangements. The introduction of the dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) in 2006 locked-in those historic local priorities as LAs had little or no ability to amend the relative priorities of schools and other local services in the new system. The Government believes that moving to a national funding formula is the only way to address the post code lottery that is creating concern. The linked document on the case for

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change sets out the problems with the current funding arrangements for both mainstream schools and High Needs responsibilities.

The DfE's preferred approach is calculate each school's formula allocation centrally and to distribute that sum directly to each school. The DfE rejects the approach which would have sought fairness between local authority areas and left each local authority with its Schools Forum to continue to determine the local distribution to schools and the funding of the High Needs Block. However, a relatively lengthy transition period is proposed.

Much of the detail of the schools' formula funding proposals will be familiar to those already involved in discussions about the DfE specific grant, the Dedicated Schools Grant, and schools' financing. The recognition of the need to fund demographic growth locally and in-year will be welcomed as will a continuation of an area cost adjustment. The proposed removal of Mobility and LAC formula factors will be a concern to many. The transition arrangements proposed suggest that gainers will rely on the capacity of losers to manage change in order to secure the benefits of the reforms.

In the financial arrangements a separation of the Schools Block and the High Needs Block is set out that will add to the challenge of managing High Needs pressures. The full impact of these proposals cannot be appreciated without a reading of the separate and related consultation on High Needs funding and other reforms (for which there will be a further CSN Briefing) . The High Needs consultation provides more information on how a High Needs Block formula could operate and the merits of the various factors being proposed. The supporting technical paper is also worth reading to understand better how the proposals have been shaped and could be implemented.

In setting out the arrangements for the funding of continuing LA responsibilities the proposals to end Education Services Grant for LAs and Academies are set out. These include a move to a formulaic basis for the allocation from DfE to LAs that reflects the average level of spend by LAs currently. There is also some clarity about timescales for the transition in this part of the proposals. This part of the consultation sets out details on the future expected role of LAs that is the subject of the DfE White Paper Education Excellence Everywhere (Cm 9230) published don 17 March 2016.

The proposals represent a significant contraction of the current role of the Schools Forum long term. The DfE makes no proposals for change but indicates there will need to be changes in readiness for 2019/20.

On 16 March 2016 the Chancellor in his budget statement confirmed the Government's intention that all schools will achieve academy status by 2020 or have plans to achieve it by 2022. In addition, he announced that the implementation of the national funding formula would be supported by £500m of additional core funding so that 90% of the gainers can achieve their new levels of funding by 2020. The decision to introduce the national funding formula was confirmed by the Government White Paper Education Excellence Everywhere published on 17 March 2016.

Briefing in full

Schools National Funding Formula Consultation

In November 2015 the Chancellor announced in his Autumn Statement that there would be a consultation on proposals to introduce a national funding formula for schools. On 7 March 2016 the Secretary of State announced a Stage 1 consultation on the underlying principles for a national formula with the details and implications to follow in a stage 2 consultation: the timing of which is to be determined.

The consultation sets out 7 principles which are the expanded upon in 22 consultation questions. The principles are:

- Supports opportunity. Fundamentally the funding system should support schools and local authorities to extend opportunity to all pupils to achieve their potential
- Is fair. It should allocate funding to schools and local authorities on the basis of objective measures of the needs and characteristics of their pupils
- Is efficient. It should support efficiency within schools and local authorities, and across the system as a whole
- Gets funding straight to schools. It should maximise the resources available for teaching and learning and enable headteachers and local authorities to achieve value for money
- Is transparent. It should be easily understood and justified
- Is simple. It should rationalise funding streams as far as possible
- Is predictable. It should ensure schools and local authorities can manage and plan for year on year changes

The details of how these principles are to be implemented are expanded upon in the following Chapters:

Chapter 1: reforming the funding system

Chapter 2: The building blocks of the national funding formula for schools

Chapter 3: transition to a reformed funding system

Chapter 4: Funding that will remain with local authorities

Chapter 5: The future of the Education Services Grant

Chapter 1: Reforming the funding system

This chapter sets out changes to the structure of the Dedicated Schools Grant. It introduces a fourth block the “Central Schools Block” to include current centrally retained costs such as managing admissions arrangements but adds in the retained rate of education services grant.

It redefines the calculation of the Schools block to be the sum of individual schools’ allocations, as determined by a national formula and requires that 100% of the block is delegated to schools. This removes the ability of Schools Forum to vire resources between the DSG blocks.

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The intention to move to a national funding formula by 2019/20 is set out but to ease the transition Local Authorities will be allocated the nationally calculated sum for their schools but will use their existing local formula to distribute that sum – the so called ‘soft’ national funding formula. Described later in the consultation is the proposal that LAs might apply a local minimum funding guarantee to impact the transition to the ‘hard’ national funding formula allocation (when all schools are funded directly by a national formula).

The DfE hope to gain experience from the local implementation of the national formula during 2017/18 and 2018/19 before the final implementation of the ‘hard’ national funding formula in 2019/20.

Chapter 2: The building blocks of the national funding formula for schools

The DfE is proposing that the national funding formula should have four blocks that make up the whole and that relate to the costs and needs that schools face.

The first block would be pupil-led and what schools currently recognise as the basic entitlement funding. This is to provide certainty to schools as to what sum each pupil would attract. Currently, 76% of available funding is provided to schools in this way. The only consideration exposed here is whether each key stage should attract a different level of funding. The proposal is that there should be rates for Reception Key Stage 1/2 combined, Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. There is no discussion about the primary to secondary funding ratio. The expectation is that the current national calculation of 1:1.28 would continue which may not accord with views of primary school leaders.

The second building block would be additional needs and it is proposed that this is calculated using five indicators: the numbers of pupils on Free School Meals (FSM), the numbers who have received Free School Meals in the last six years (FSMEver6), and the Income deprivation affecting children index (IDACI - a Government calculated area deprivation index), prior attainment of pupils (using national Curriculum assessments) and the number of children for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL). The paper discusses the need for broad proxies of additional need and produces evidence that the IDACI score when combined with FSM data produces a stronger correlation with FSM alone. IDACI is widely used by Local Authorities and the turbulence caused by the 2015 five yearly update of the data is evidence of its importance in local formulae. DfE recognise the potential for five-yearly turbulence and proposes to examine ways this could be managed in future in order to maintain confidence in the factor.

Low attainment and existing prior attainment factors are proposed to be retained. DfE recognise however that changes in assessment arrangements will need to be reflected in the final proposals for the national funding formula.

An EAL factor is also proposed for retention (EAL3 being the preferred measure) but issues about the robustness of the data are recognised and further work is proposed before a final decision is made. It's a widely used factor currently and research indicates that it is a good indicator of need in schools.

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The third building block is school or institution based factors. The inclusion of factors for a lump sum, business rates and sparsity are to be expected and should not be controversial. The inclusion of pupil growth in relation to expanding schools and providing funding for pupils not included on the census is welcome, as is the recognition of PFI costs.

The value of the lump sum will need some further consideration given the variety of values in use currently. Given that lump sum values may often have been the result of seeking best fit in formulae rather than solely reflecting some of the unavoidable fixed costs of having a school it should be possible to build up an agreed set of fixed costs to be valued which can then constitute the lump sum for the future.

The proposal to include in-year demographic growth is on the basis of past expenditure and assumes that growth remains constant year on year or that where there is currently no growth that will be the case in the future. If it is felt possible to include rates on an actual cost basis then it ought to be possible to do a similar exercise with Local Authorities on growth allocations.

On PFI costs these are also proposed for inclusion based on past costs. However, given that the standard Building Schools for the Future (BSF) contracts in place for many of these PFI projects have RPIX clauses, i.e. the annual unitary charges rise by RPI each year, then this proposal as it stands could cause significant problems.

The fourth building block is geographic costs and a recognition in the national funding formula that some areas have a higher cost base than others e.g. London and the South East. The proposal is that an area cost factor is applied to the funding formula factors in building blocks 1 to 3 (with some exceptions for costs that are already being recognised at cost such as rates). The area cost adjustment (ACA) being proposed is the hybrid cost adjustment rather than the General Labour Market (GLM) model used elsewhere in government funding allocations. The hybrid model relates specifically to teaching labour costs and uses GLM calculations for support staff costs.

Given that the hybrid was used because teaching costs were found to be lower than indicated by GLM indices when the hybrid was introduced it might have been appropriate to provide the relevant data now to inform the responses as to which model consultees preferred.

Finally, the DfE propose to exclude from the national funding formula factors for: mobility, LAC, and the legacy post 16 factor.

While the exclusion of a LAC factor seems odd, the proposal to deal with it through pupil premium is well argued.

The Mobility factor attracts little money nationally (£23m of a total of £31 bn) and it is argued rewards unpopular schools. There are also some concerns about the robustness of the data being used and given the push for simplicity then a reasonable argument for deletion is made. Some LAs have a particular experience with mobility and the factor is helpful in their local formulae and it is significant to some schools. However, those arguing for retention in their consultation response will need some convincing evidence.

At the end of the Chapter the DfE recognise that there are significant decisions to be made in the Stage 2 consultation as to the weightings that are given to the formula factors in constructing a formula that meets the principles it needs to support and deliver on. Local Authorities and Schools

fora will want to have an eye to Stage 2 when considering their responses to these consultation questions in Stage 1.

Chapter 3: Transition to a reformed funding system

The transition to a reformed system is going to take some time, unspecified in the consultation, and is to have no additional or temporary funding to support it so that transition costs have to be accommodated within the national total for the DSG.

The first stage of transition is for LAs to distribute their national funding formula allocation via their local formula for the period 2017 – 2019. During that period the DfE intend to learn how LAs have supported gainers and losers in order to inform the subsequent period of implementation from 2019/20.

Each LA allocation will be the sum of the individual schools' national formula allocations after application of the minimum funding guarantee (MFG) for losing schools or "cap" for gaining schools. As some LA allocations will be smaller than in 2016/17 the DfE is proposing that there could be a different local MFG to allow bigger losses to take place. Alternatively, there may be other local reasons to want to vary schools' allocations which would require a different MFG to generate the necessary funds.

In determining the national pot for the Schools Block, DfE are to re-baseline each LA's DSG Blocks to reflect spending in 2016/17 rather than the DfE allocations. The aim is to ensure that DSG Blocks at a national level better reflect the reality on the ground. This should then ensure that the 2017/18 allocations to LAs are a better reflection of their patterns of spending. The DfE are to issue further details of this exercise imminently in order to be able to progress the Stage 2 consultation. The High Needs consultation proposals plan to use 2016/17 as a formula factor that is heavily weighted in the proposed High Needs Block formula.

The DfE are then proposing, as a result of having more "accurate" allocations for DSG Blocks, that the LA Schools Block is 100% allocated to schools with no central retention by LAs. The most common transfers are between Schools Block and High Needs block and this is often a result of spending decisions by schools that create High Needs pressures subsequently. For those managing high needs expenditure this would remove a lever that can facilitate change in addressing high needs issues.

In terms of time scales the DfE do not propose a fixed date for full implementation but rather a flexible one which will be driven by how much the losers can manage without each year until they reach their real national formula funding allocation. This means that gainers are unlikely to realise their full gains until the losers are at their final position unless additional resources are applied from elsewhere in the national DSG pot. The DfE recognise that this will be an issue for the gainers, and on 16 March the Chancellor announced additional funds that would help address this issue and enable 90% of gainers get to their hard formula level of funding.

Finally, in order to support losing schools a raft of financial management advice is being made available through a number of routes to support governors ask the right questions about the use of financial resources. In addition the DfE are to launch an invest to save fund to support one off expenditure that reduces a school's ongoing costs including the costs of staff restructuring.

Chapter 4: Funding that will remain with local authorities

This Chapter sets out how the new Central Funding Block will be created, what it will cover and how it will be funded.

The Block is created by combining the retained duties funding of the Education Services Grant (£15 per pupil) and an allocation for centrally retained expenditures.

The responsibilities to be covered are:

- School admissions;
- Servicing of schools forums;
- Fees to independent schools for pupils without SEN;
- Education welfare services
- Asset management
- Statutory and regulatory duties

The DfE propose that funding for this block is determined by a formula but recognises that because of the variation of spend on centrally retained DSG that some transition arrangements are necessary. It also expects that as a result of the formula approach some LAs would receive an allocation greater than their current spend. DfE anticipates the Schools Forum and LA would need to agree which other block to allocate this to rather than increase their centrally retained spend.

In addition to responsibilities set out above some LAs have historic commitments which the DfE expect to end but would in the short term be funded on the basis of evidence provided through the re-baselining data gathering exercise. These are:

- Contribution to combined budgets: costs of providing combined education and children's services
- Termination of employment costs: premature retirement or dismissal costs for maintained school staff.
- Equal pay – back pay: costs of meeting equal pay commitments in schools
- Capital expenditure from revenue (CERA): where the authority uses revenue funding to meet capital costs
- Prudential borrowing costs: for repayment of some authority loans

Chapter 5: The future of the Education Services Grant

This Chapter describes how the commitment to reduce ESG nationally by £600m will be achieved.

In 2015/16 £72m was removed and it is intended that the remainder will have been removed in the 2017/18 allocation. The DfE expect this will be managed through increased efficiency and the ending of responsibilities. In regard to the latter, the paper is clear that school improvement will cease to be a funded LA responsibility from April 2017. The paper indicates that there will be an announcement on the future arrangements for school improvement and its funding in the near future. The DfE ask in the consultation if there are other responsibilities that could be ended to assist LAs manage without the ESG. The reduction will also apply to the equivalent ESG allocated to academies.

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The paper states that LAs will have continuing responsibilities in three main areas:

- **Securing that sufficient school places are available**, ensuring fair access through admissions and working with schools to develop local transport policies, and taking a lead in crisis management and emergency planning.
- **Ensuring the needs of vulnerable pupils are met**: identifying, assessing and making provision for all children with SEN and disabilities; promoting attendance; and making sure that alternative provision is available for children and young people excluded from school or otherwise unable to attend a mainstream school; leading on safeguarding for those pupils in un-regulated settings, educated at home, tracking children missing education as well as those at risk of extremism; working with schools to ensure they understand and discharge their safeguarding duties; acting as a corporate parent for looked-after children and those adopted from care.
- **Acting as champions for all parents and families**: listening and promoting the needs of parents children and the local community; supporting parents in navigating the system and ensuring children do not fall through the gaps; supporting children, young people and parents to navigate local SEND arrangements (such as providing information, advice and support); and championing high standards locally.

The DfE recognises that LAs may have insufficient funding to fulfil these responsibilities and that it may need to agree with maintained schools a top slice of their DSG in order to contribute to the costs of these responsibilities.

Given the loss of funding will be significant there is to be a transitional period for academies that ends in August 2020. During that period academies will not lose annually more than 3% of their total funding through the cut in ESG. In the case of LAs they will have until August 2017 to plan and implement necessary changes and will have funding up to that point in time.

Comment

If LA influence over schools is reliant upon its role in funding arrangements and the responsibility for the performance of schools then this consultation, in announcing the introduction of a national funding formula and the ending of LA role in school improvement by August 2017, should pave the way for the realisation of the Chancellor's statement of removing local government from the running of schools.

The Stage 1 consultation is large on principles most of which it is hard to disagree with but light on what the consequences of agreeing to them are. The overall thrust that funding should be designed to address need in order that opportunities for our young people is maximised is surely right.

The nationalisation of schools' funding may not have been the desired consequence of what some campaigning for a national funding formula for schools had wanted. The focus of the funding principles around maximising opportunities for all and in particular those with higher needs presents the possibility for some low funded areas with low needs continuing to be low funded. In this respect, the data promised by the DfE in the Stage 2 consultation will be of significant interest.

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The creation of a central expenditure Block for LA responsibilities within the DSG is a sensible tidying up given the proposals to end ESG. However, it does assume that all LAs restricted their relevant spending on responsibilities to the value of the ESG and treated it as a ring fenced grant. It was not ring fenced and by moving the rump of it to the DSG it will become so. It also provides the opportunity to claim that all LA responsibilities should be funded from the non-schools blocks and that the Schools Block can be isolated from it and the other blocks. Unfortunately, the decisions made by schools can impact on the expenditure pressures on the High Needs Block and could impact on the future central expenditure block. Currently, schools have an interest in making decisions that do not push up spending on other blocks as they may have to pay for it to ensure the DSG balances locally.

Formula Factors

In terms of the components of the formula itself these will be very familiar to anyone who has been involved in school funding allocations whether in schools or LAs. The proposals as to what formula factors are used contain little that would be contentious but there are some exceptions, the bigger issue is going to be the weight and value that is attached to each of them.

The DfE proposals around managing growth in pupil numbers suggest that past expenditure is a good indicator of future need. In the investment world past performance is not a guarantee of future performance and nor is it here. LAs have clear knowledge about their budget allocations for growth and these are based on lengthy conversations with the willing and unwilling on contributing to meet the pressures of demographic growth. If the DfE are to fund business rates on the basis of actual costs, then it would be possible and sensible to consider the same approach with growth.

On the lump sum proposals, an objective assessment of the value of the relevant cost drivers should be possible as the factor is unlikely now to be part of achieving a formula best fit. A proposal on what the appropriate cost drivers to reflect in a lump sum could have been produced at this stage.

On PFI costs all schools and authorities will have figures on the unitary charges after the RPIX factor is taken account of and again there is no reason to rely on past expenditure for future allocation of funds.

As regards the pupil led allocation, the proposals on recognising each key stage should not be too controversial but relativities between Key Stages 1 and 2, and Key Stages 3 and 4 will be. Currently there is a wide range of values, and where it is near parity for funding the primary and secondary stages this is a result of local decisions about investing in the earlier years of statutory education. Determining a national ratio could see a disinvestment in primary education in some areas with unknown consequences for future secondary performance.

On additional needs factors there is an important issue about the use of IDACI in conjunction with FSM data. The use of both strengthens the indicators for funding purposes but the latest five-year review has challenged confidence in it and the DfE intention to bring forward amendments to the banding of the IDACI scores is to be welcomed. However, some data sharing to improve wider understanding of the factor might restore some schools' faith in it.

The bigger issue for consultees is the weightings that should be given to the Building Blocks of the formula and in particular the additional needs and the premises factors. Should the additional

needs factors be more heavily weighted at the expense of pupil led funding? That would certainly be consistent with a thrust to ensure funding is targeted towards need.

Finally, on the formula itself the application of an area cost adjustment will generate discussion both in terms of which areas get it and how the factor is then calculated. Given the hybrid factor was used because GLM provided too much funding then it would seem appropriate consultees have the figures before being asked which they would prefer for this factor. The proposal that ACA is not applied to costs that are funded on an actual cost basis would appear to be reasonable.

Transition

The proposal that LAs are at the forefront of the implementation of the changes for the first two years would see them face the brunt of schools concerns that are raised by the national funding formula. It rather brings to mind the comment following the 2003/04 “funding crisis” when a national formula was mooted and it was suggested the Government would not want to kill-off the golden scapegoat.

It is not wholly clear whether in using their local formulae LAs will be able to adjust their use and values of their formula factors as well as vary the MFG to influence the speed at which schools reach their hard formula funding values? Perhaps more fundamental is why it is thought LAs and school fora would want to do this? The LAs may want the relevant finance staff focussed on High Needs Block and Central expenditure block where there are risks to the LA managed budgets.

The ending of LA / Schools Forum decisions on the split of DSG from 2017/18 pre supposes that the re baselining exercise has been successful and that the new formula is reflecting the changing pressures on the high needs block effectively. If this is not the case, there is a risk of over spent non-schools blocks and no mechanism to correct it. We would have a position where the schools block with least volatility has the highest levels of protection and security and the most volatile area has the least protection and security of funding.

The question of how fast to go is to be determined by the speed with which the DfE believes the losers can manage down their expenditure. There is also the vexed question of how the country or at least the NAO can be assured that the gainers will spend their increased allocations wisely. The key lever to reflect this process will be the minimum funding guarantee. If the MFG was to continue at anything like its current level then reaching the hard formula funding values is going to take a very long time although the announcement of £500m additional funds in the March budget statement should help with this. There is as yet no indication as to what the DfE thinks the rate of acceptable annual reduction is except that for the reduction of ESG for academies where the very well-funded academies are deemed able to lose no more than 3% of their total budget.

In addition to potential formula loss there is the matter of budget pressures around costs of employment, pension and NI costs in particular, that are estimated at 3%+ in 2015/16 and again in 2016/17. These cost pressures will be exacerbated by the further changes in employers’ pension costs announced in the March budget. The DfE suggestion is that future pressures should not exceed the 1% annual salary uplifts.

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Local Authority Responsibilities and ESG

The consultation trails a set of as yet unpublished proposals on the role of the LA and in particular with respect to school improvement. Ostensibly these changes will enable a reduced ESG to be managed. This is likely to refer to the Schools White Paper Educational Excellence Everywhere published on 18 March 2016.

It is interesting to note that while academies need up to three years to manage their reduction in ESG funding, LAs will be able to do this in 18 months! In this period LAs must design new services, consult schools on them and ask if they would like to contribute from their resources to the cost of them. Academies appear only to need to decide what expenditure to reduce to meet the change in funding. It is unclear what the haste is to reduce LA ESG so quickly to achieve the £600m saving if it is possible to wait for the academies contribution to that saving.

The funding of the Central expenditure block by formula is simple and straight forward but offers the prospect of providing funding to LAs that no longer have a requirement to spend those monies. That they should have the freedom to add those resources to other blocks would be appropriate in the soft formula funding period but it's unclear how that would be reflected in the hard formula funding arrangements. No transition period is proposed in Stage 1 rather this will come in Stage 2. It would not be unreasonable to expect a similar period to that allowed for schools to transition. In the discussion on the winding out of historic commitments there is an assumption that the money released is automatically added to the national schools block it might be prudent not to rule out an allocation to the high needs block.

The Stage 2 Consultation

The Stage 1 consultation has a six-week consultation period including the Easter holidays ending 17 April. In May there are local government elections in many parts of the country including that for London Mayor and the EU referendum in June. These events are likely to impact on the feedback and decisions flowing from the Stage 1 consultation. A July 2016 publication of Stage 2 proposals might feel optimistic given the scale of what will need to be included in terms of financial data and its implications. A July publication would present a significant issue in that the majority of stakeholders would be affected by the summer holidays thus reducing the effective period for deliberation and response. Also a second six-week consultation period would end before the beginning of the Autumn Term. Stakeholders in responding to the Stage 1 consultation may want to include comments about the timing of the Stage 2 consultation and the expectation that this would constitute a major consultation requiring a 12 week period.

External links

DfE Consultation website: [Schools national funding formula](#)


DfE: [Schools national funding formula: Government consultation – stage one](#)

DfE: [Schools and high needs funding reform: The case for change and consultation summary](#)

DfE: [School revenue funding Current funding arrangements](#)

DfE: [National funding formula: equality analysis](#)

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DfE speech: [Sam Gyimah: the importance of school funding reform](#)

Parliament website: [Funding for Schools: Written statement - HCWS584](#)

Related briefings

[Funding for disadvantaged pupils – PAC report](#) (October 2015)

[Fairer schools funding in 2015-16 – DfE consultation](#) (March 2014)

[Performance and Capability of the Education Funding Agency: NAO Report](#) (February 2014)

[Education Services Grant 2015-16](#) (August 2014)

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