



CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

Pre Budget Submission

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CPSMA Pre-Budget Submission in regard to Budget 2019

OVERVIEW

CPSMA (Catholic Primary Schools Management Association) is a recognised school management organisation. It represents boards of management of over 2,800 Catholic primary schools. The organisation provides a wide range of services to its members including advice on a broad range of issues of relevance to primary school management.

The issue of school finance continues to rank highly as an area of concern for the boards of management of primary schools. CPSMA submits that boards of management be afforded the opportunity to govern their schools with the required resources to target primary school education. Investment in education yields significant returns. Investment in the earliest years of a child's education gives all pupils an equal opportunity to maximise their educational potential from the outset.

CPSMA's priority in this budget is the restoration of the Capitation Grant to 2010 levels, i.e. €200 per pupil.

CPSMA SUBMITS THAT:

1. Capitation Grant funding be raised to at least 2010 levels as a priority for Budget 2019, with a schedule of increases provided for on an annual basis thereafter.
2. The Minor Works Grant be paid in a timely fashion.
3. The Ancillary Grant be increased and paid in a timely fashion to ensure that all schools would have adequate support of ancillary staff.
4. Leadership and Management posts be immediately restored to pre-moratorium levels. Furthermore, DES should continue to increase the number of release days to ensure that teaching principals have a minimum of one release day per week to assist in the management of their workload.
5. Research be undertaken into the issue of teacher supply.
6. That the DES continue to support the sustainability of small school communities.

1. Capitation Grant

In theory, primary school education in Ireland is free. The Constitution is unambiguous as Article 42.4. states;

The State shall provide for free primary education and shall endeavour to supplement and give reasonable aid to private and corporate educational initiative, and, when the public good requires it, provide other educational facilities or institutions with due regard, however, for the rights of parents, especially in the matter of religious and moral formation.”

In practice, however, new research from Grant Thornton (February, 2018) shows that the capitation grant which is meant to pay for the day to day running costs of schools and the provision of educational materials, on average covers just over half of school running costs. Already hard-pressed parents are contributing over €46m a year to keep schools solvent, the lights on, water in the taps and heating oil in the tank not to mention educational materials.

For some time, CPSMA had been aware of growing complaints amongst principals and boards of management that the capitation grant was not covering the core costs of running a school. Therefore, CPSMA requested Grant Thornton to undertake an analysis of the financial accounts of a representative sample (5%) of Catholic Primary Schools for the years 2015 and 2016.

Based on the figures contained in the sample accounts CPSMA requested Grant Thornton to provide an estimate of the total contribution of parents and local communities to local schools. Grant Thornton estimated the total contribution at over €46m (€46,572,352).

Since 2010 the capitation grant has been cut by 15% but the consumer price index (CPI) has risen by 4.5% indicating that the day to day running costs schools have risen over this period. The nature of education and the level of technology has also changed schools now have to pay for connectivity and ICT maintenance for example.

However, schools are now also facing increases in insurance and energy costs as inflation returns to the Irish economy.

In addition, policy changes such as GDPR, and the forthcoming Parents and Students Charter will impose costs for the secure retention of data, responding to data access requests and arbitration (which while very worthwhile is not inexpensive). Finally, litigation involving school is becoming more common and this is adding to the financial burden faced by schools. As a long-term strategy for funding primary school education, the current model is unsustainable. This matter is now urgent as many schools have exhausted limited contingency funds and some are running deficits.

Therefore, CPSMA request that the Department of Education and Skills identify the raising of capitation grant funding to at least 2010 levels as a priority for Budget 2019 and to provide a schedule of increases thereafter so as to meet the real running costs of primary schools.

2. Minor Works Grant

CPSMA strongly welcome the announcement that both the Minor Works Grant and the Summer Works Scheme will now be part of annual grants calendar for all primary schools. This announcement was made on 14th September 2018, by An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar T.D., and the Minister of Education and Skills, Richard Bruton T.D., as part of their plan for Investment in Education as part of Project Ireland 2040. This grant is a critical element of school funding which provides schools with an opportunity to address outstanding maintenance issues which were financially prohibitive in the absence of this critical funding. CPSMA strongly commended the Minister for Education and Skills for his commitment to restoring these grants on a permanent basis as uncertainty as to their payment had caused great stress at school level.

CPSMA also welcome the increase in the school building budget which will positively influence the experiences of pupils in many of our schools. The Minister summarised the value of education in his press release by stating that, "it is essential to breaking down barriers and enabling people to fulfil their full potential". CPSMA agree that education is crucial to the holistic development of children and believe that schools should be centres of teaching and learning, not pressure zones for fundraising.

CPSMA contends that the Minor Works Grant should be paid in a timely fashion to afford school management the autonomy to plan effectively for the maintenance of school buildings. The restoration of the Minor Works Grant is very welcome. However, it is important to note that without an increase in the Capitation Grant, schools will continue to face cashflow issues during the school year.

3. Ancillary Services Grant

Over the last number of years, the demands on Ancillary Services have grown exponentially through a requirement for increased secretarial support in schools and prescribed wage increases for ancillary staff. Coupled with the aforementioned Capitation Grant cuts, the insufficient funding of these services has placed considerable financial and staffing pressures on Boards of Management. CPSMA submits that the ancillary grant be increased so that all schools, particularly small schools, would have adequate support of ancillary staff. Furthermore, CPSMA calls for the provision of full-time secretarial support in all primary schools.

CPSMA calls on the DES to ensure that the Ancillary Services Grant be paid in a timely fashion to alleviate the cash flow difficulties being experienced by a large number of primary schools.

4. School Leadership

CPSMA welcomed the partial restoration of Leadership and Management Posts (formerly Posts of Responsibility) in primary school provided for by Circular 0063/2017. However, given the continual workload increases placed upon school principals, leadership teams and Boards of Management, we call for the immediate restoration of Leadership and Management posts to pre-moratorium levels (Circular 07/03).

CPSMA welcomed the Department of Education and Skills' announcement of extra release days for teaching principals and the provision of 50 principal release cluster posts, for 2018/19 school year, which allows for schools to formally cluster their principal release days to ensure continuity of substitute cover. This is particularly welcome in areas where principals were unable to access their release days due to a lack of substitute teachers.

Teaching principals perform a dual role in their schools – as both a full-time teacher and principal. These release days are required to allow teaching principals to undertake key leadership and management roles within their schools. CPSMA believe that the DES should continue to increase the number of release days to ensure that teaching principals have a minimum of one release day per week to assist in the management of their workload.

On a broader view, CPSMA believe that the Department must examine the issue of initiative overload in schools and the role which this has played in significantly increasing the administrative workload on even the smallest of schools. CPSMA look forward to constructively engaging with the Department on this issue and recognise that it is of common concern.

5. Teacher supply

Teacher supply was demonstrated to be an issue of concern for all schools during the 2017-18 school year.

In October 2017, CPSMA conducted a survey on the availability of substitute teachers during the first two months of the academic year 2017-18.

The results of the survey stated that almost 90% of schools were experiencing difficulty sourcing a substitute teacher. 83.23% of schools stated that it was more difficult to source a substitute teacher in 2017-18 than it had been in previous years. The feedback from the survey also indicated that there were a significant number of days when children in our schools were not taught by a qualified teacher.

CPSMA welcomes the publication of the Teaching Council Technical Working Group report, *Striking the Balance*, and calls for the immediate implementation of the report's recommendations. The planning for and development of an accurate model of teacher supply is an essential element of the report recommendations.

An in-depth understanding of the matter of teacher supply and demand is essential, on both a national and regional level (in particular in Dublin and along the Western seaboard). Research and investigation is urgently required to examine the extent of and reasons for: teacher attrition, teacher emigration, teachers returning to the profession. While a lot of focus in recent media commentary has been on incentives such as pay, other factors need to be examined in understanding teachers' motivations to leave the profession and/or the State and also the factors which are acting as a disincentive to their return to the profession or to return to the State from abroad.



A motion passed at CPSMA conference in Spring 2018 called for the establishment supply panels for substitute teachers. We warmly welcome the establishment of the Specialist Group on Teacher Supply by the Minister. The establishment of this group is a very positive development in addressing these issues. We look forward to continuing to work with the education partners to develop practical solutions to help alleviate these challenges.

6. Continued support for sustainability of small school communities

CPSMA welcomes the commitment of the DES to support small school communities and submits that the commitment to facilitate small schools who wish to amalgamate should be underpinned with appropriate protocols for the amalgamation process to ensure that the Boards of Management in question receive the appropriate support – both advisory and financial.



CONCLUSION

Primary education has remained underfunded and undervalued by successive governments.

CPSMA submits that primary education be prioritised to ensure that society in general will ultimately benefit from the best educational outcomes for our young people.

