



CPSMA

Catholic Primary School Management Association

Pre Budget Submission 2013

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CPSMA Pre Budget Submission in regard to Budget 2013

Introduction

The Catholic Primary School Management Association (CPSMA) is a recognised school management organisation. It represents boards of management of in excess of 2,900 primary schools. It provides a wide range of services to its members including advising on a multiplicity of issues, a website that is constantly updated, publication of regular newsletters, a Handbook and training on issues of relevance.

GRANTS

Capitation Grant & Minor Works Grant

For the school year 2009/2010 the capitation grant per pupil was €200. This has now been reduced by €22 to €178 per pupil – an 11% reduction. Cuts have also been made to the grant for children with special educational needs. In the case of a school with 100 mainstream pupils and five pupils with special educational needs, this is a total loss of €2,715. Schools must now survive on less than a euro per school day per pupil.

- The minor works grant was paid annually to schools and was used for ongoing maintenance issues such as replacing panes of glass, windows & roof repairs, re-painting and re-decorating. Crucially, it was a source of funding to cash starved schools in November/December when the capitation grant had long since been exhausted. It enabled schools to stay afloat until the payment of the capitation grant, part of which is made in February and the remainder in June. In a national survey, carried out on behalf of CPSMA in November 2012¹, 46% of schools reported a deficit in their last financial year, while a further 22% reported a break even situation, at a time when the minor works grant was still being paid. The removal of the grant will potentially lead to 68% of schools going into a deficit.
- Currently many schools are experiencing serious cash flow problems. The minor works grant was paid at a flat rate of €5,500 with a top up of €18.50 per mainstream pupil and €74 for pupils with special educational needs. Thus, a school with 100 mainstream pupils and five pupils with special education needs

¹ Amárach Research, November 2012

received a grant of €7,720. CPSMA has been inundated with calls from schools regarding the dire financial situation in which the removal of this grant will place them.

- When the reduction in the capitation grant and the removal of the minor works grant are combined, it means that a school with 100 mainstream pupils and five pupils with special education needs has lost a staggering €10,435, representing 20% of its funding.
- Overdrafts are an ever increasing reality for many schools. Primary schools are now asking what happens when the school cannot pay its bills and many have indicated that they cannot turn on the heat due to the cost of same.

CHARGES ON SCHOOLS

Schools as businesses

- Schools are treated as businesses in regard to the purchase of gas, oil, electricity etc. Almost one third of utility bills can be attributable to standing charges, which arise even when schools are shut for holiday periods. An Post has also charged schools to retain post during the summer months.
- Water rates have placed enormous burdens on many schools. In several cases the costs are attributable to leaks not of the school's creation, nor within its control. Some schools only discovered underground leaks when they received a very large bill and queried same. One school has indicated to the local authority that it cannot afford to pay a bill in excess of €20,000.00 (The school was unaware there was water wastage due to leaks under the building).
- Schools must also pay the usual bills that businesses encounter e.g. bin charges, cleaning materials, office materials, photocopying, bus hire, insurance, annual fire certificate costs, the costs of monitoring alarms etc. which can run into thousands of Euros.
- Schools never received additional funding to defray the costs outlined above. Their funds have instead been drastically reduced, which leaves Boards of Management with the worst of all worlds facing ever increasing bills and a decreasing income.

MAINTENANCE

ICT

- Between 2009 and 2011, the Department of Education & Skills sponsored ICT Initiative equipped classrooms with a computer, data projector/interactive white board, wireless mouse & keyboard etc. to the tune of €1,700 per classroom. The ongoing maintenance of this equipment, which would normally have been covered by the minor works grant, is financially onerous. A classroom care package can cost €2000. Projector bulbs vary in price between €250 and €350.
- The ongoing maintenance of such a valuable ICT resource, apart from creating a financial burden on boards, may result in the equipment lying unused and unusable, due to lack of foresight in regard to the withdrawal of the minor works grant. The Programme for Government (p.41) refers to the aim of ending the treatment of ICT in education as a standalone issue integrating it across education policy. The removal of the minor works grant, which assisted in the maintenance of ICT equipment in schools, seems to indicate a lack of joined up thinking or forward planning.
- In the recent survey conducted on behalf of CPSMA, 72% of schools indicated that the minor works grant **is absolutely essential**.
- In many situations (14%) the works being carried out are required to address health and safety issues in school buildings and/or grounds.
- It is also worthy of note that in 85% of schools surveyed, the use of the minor works grant supported local businesses, so there is a knock on effect to its abolition for local communities.

Repairs

- Schools have contacted CPSMA asking how exactly they are to manage repairs to alarm systems, floors, carpets and oil tanks. How can they provide for parking, address security problems, tree felling, painting, roof repairs, dampness etc. in the absence of the minor works grant? The survey highlights a further problem, in that, in more than half of all cases (52%), the buildings to be maintained are in excess of 50 years old.
- Schools with decreasing enrolments have to make the much reduced capitation grant (reduced by reference to reduction in amount per pupil and again reduced due to drop in pupil numbers) stretch to cover a large building, some of it

unoccupied, yet the building has to be maintained, cleaned and insured. In short, these maintenance costs have remained the same or increased, while the funding to cover such costs has been drastically reduced.

VAT

- Even though schools have to pay VAT, they cannot offset same against purchases.
- Schools are treated as businesses when it suits but reap none of the benefits.

BOARDS OF MANAGEMENT IN CRISIS

Reality

- Boards of Management must meet the basic needs e.g. light, heat, cleaning, insurance, water rates, bin charges and must pay insurance.
- Sourcing money elsewhere by asking parents to pay voluntary contributions, so that essential bills like heat and light can be paid, is not realistic. According to the survey, 43% of schools indicated that they sought voluntary contributions to defray costs. Parents, who want to support their schools, find themselves unable to do so, either due to unemployment, or though not unemployed, no longer being able to afford to contribute towards school running costs. Once again, the most vulnerable will be hit hardest. Schools serving disadvantaged areas do not have the luxury of fundraising available to them. One school has reported that, for the first time, cheques drawn on Vincent de Paul are coming in as payment for pupil requisites. For the 86% of schools, who indicated that they engage in *ad hoc* fundraising, the prospects are indeed bleak.
- Parents in many instances face increasing transport costs to and from school as well as increases in the cost of living.

PUPIL TEACHER RATIO (PTR)

Effect of increase in PTR

- Increasing the Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) may yet prove to be the most costly way of addressing the financial crisis.
- Any increase in PTR in the primary school sector negatively impacts all children and disproportionately affects the most vulnerable e.g. those with special educational needs and those with learning or other difficulties. The Programme for Government in its statement of common purpose (p.3) commits the

government parties to *'protecting the vulnerable'*. Increasing the PTR leads to greater problems for pupils at primary, second and third level education, as well as potentially placing a burden on the tax payer in the longer term.

- The Programme for Government further states that *'even in our country's crisis we can make progress in education and protect frontline services (p. 39)*. Increasing the PTR is a direct hit at frontline services.

Principal Teacher Workload & Moratorium on Promoted Posts

- The workload of the principal teacher has increased dramatically in recent years, particularly with the moratorium on promoted posts and the large numbers of teachers retiring. With voluntary boards of management in place totalling almost 18,000 volunteers, middle management has a crucial strategic role in the management and leadership space. Its diminution leaves the workload on the shoulders of the principal, is short sighted and militates against the creation of future leaders on the educational landscape.
- The Programme for Government states in regard to empowering schools and improving standards *'that school leadership will be fundamental to furthering this aim'* (p. 39) and goes on to say *'We will give greater freedom and autonomy to school principals and boards to raise educational standards by devolving more responsibility locally, with greater freedom to allocate and manage staff with required flexibility and to delegate management responsibilities to teachers as school priorities require'* (p. 39). The diminution of the middle management structure in primary schools flies in the face of such a desirable aim.
- The Programme for Government, in making literacy a national cause notes: *'the responsibility for achieving [these] outcomes will be vested in the school principals.'* In order to be effective, the principal needs to be facilitated to operate a shared and instructional leadership role. Removing the incentives and the support at school level by increasing the PTR and diminishing the role of middle management, is counterproductive in this regard.

Teaching and Learning Time

- There are other areas of potential savings that remain unexamined. How much teaching time is removed from learners and from the system in the current GAM/EAL arrangements?

- What is the travel cost involved in local/clustering arrangements?
- Why were schools allocated permanent posts when part time appointments would have served children's needs best, reduced costs to the State in terms of travel and increased time on task for children?
- What is the cost in time that a Principal and/or other staff member/s have to put into chasing resource hours, SNA support etc., "fighting the case" for children who are the most needy and the most vulnerable?

BUILDINGS

Renting premises

- Renting of prefabs is still a concern, as 35% of those schools surveyed continue to use prefab accommodation, potentially costing 20% of a schools budget and the State's money in support of same. To what extent is prefab rental part of the public procurement policy to encourage greater value for money, as promised in the Programme for Government? (p. 41)

VFM STUDIES

- VFM studies have been carried out over several years. What savings have been effected as a result of the outlay in time, personnel and money on such studies?

BOOK RENTAL

Hidden Costs

- Textbooks are a very significant cost for parents. Schools want to ameliorate this by introducing book rental schemes. 84% of schools surveyed indicate that they operate a book rental scheme. There are however significant set up costs. Boards receive €11 per pupil in relation to the book grant; however this goes nowhere near the costs of setting up or maintaining a book rental scheme.
- Worryingly, schools in contact with CPSMA have indicated that the book grant money has to be used to pay utility bills due to dwindling cash flow.
- Book rental schemes should be properly funded.

ROYALTY PAYMENTS

- Schools should be exempt from photocopying and other royalty payments.

INEQUALITIES IN THE SYSTEM

- Funding appears to depend on school sector. Some schools have to fund raise to pay for ancillary staff, whereas this does not apply to other schools. Thus certain parents may be disproportionately affected, depending on where they live.
- The primary sector, in its management structure, delivers for the State to the tune of several million Euros per annum. All monies received by primary boards of management go to frontline service for pupils.
- Children with special educational needs who are entitled to a level of resource hours must now cope with a reduction of 15% in that allocation, as well as reduced resources arising from reduction in funding and/or access to an SNA. Anecdotally, schools are reporting that there are junior children exhibiting more challenging, serious behaviour and accessing help for these children is an ongoing time-consuming issue. In some cases, there are health and safety issues arising for staff and other pupils. In one case, a child with very challenging behaviour comes to school hungry on a regular basis. The school provides food before the pupil goes to class. This is not an isolated case in the current economic climate.

CONCLUSION

- Schools are doing their utmost to keep costs down. A number of schools have pointed out that the drastic cuts to school budgets have meant that some of the means by which costs can be reduced are no longer possible e.g. the introduction of a book rental scheme, as outlined above.
- It is becoming increasingly clear that monies, for whatever purpose provided, will have to be diverted to addressing the basics and therefore all pupils will ultimately suffer.
- CPSMA is extremely concerned at the number of schools contacting it who are in financial difficulties. Schools are concerned that they will go bankrupt – a very real prospect based on the recent survey results, indicating that 46% of those surveyed are in a financial deficit situation and a further 22% are only breaking even.

CPSMA submits

1. That the DES not increase the PTR any further. In fact it is already too high.
2. That the DES not reduce the capitation grant any further as schools can no longer sustain themselves.
3. That the DES restores the minor works grant, as all schools need to be maintained in the medium and longer term. There are particular schools in greater need e.g. those in older buildings and those faced with dropping enrolments. The inability to maintain ICT support in a knowledge economy is also a major concern as we look towards the future and hope for economic recovery.
4. That children with special educational needs receive their entitlement to the resources required for their education rather than a reduction to same.

Even in times of plenty, primary schools were seen as a low priority in terms of funding and have been hardest hit by cuts, despite all indications supporting the view that resources should be targeted at the earliest years of a child's education, in order to achieve the best outcomes for the child and society generally.

Fiscal policy impacts on all aspects of school life and cannot be seen in isolation from its longer term effects on the pupils in our schools and ultimately on the future of the country. It is in times of crisis, that the education system needs to plan and respond strategically.