

Attaching conditions to the Local Authority School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant Government consultation

Response of the Association of School and College Leaders

A. Introduction

1. The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) represents over 21,000 education system leaders, heads, principals, deputies, vice-principals, assistant heads, business managers and other senior staff of state-funded and independent schools and colleges throughout the UK. ASCL members are responsible for the education of more than four million young people in more than 90 per cent of the secondary and tertiary phases, and in an increasing proportion of the primary phase. This places the association in a strong position to consider this issue from the viewpoint of the leaders of schools and colleges of all types.
2. ASCL welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation.

B. Key points

3. We are aware that the purpose of this consultation is to seek views on the impact on Local Authorities (LAs), schools and pupils of the government's intention to attach conditions to the payment of the Local Authority School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering grant, reflecting the urgent national priority of ensuring the successful and sustained return of all pupils to school and in addressing any adverse impacts of the pandemic on their education.
4. We are concerned to note that, from October 2021, funding will revert to being based on per school funding levels in 2017, and that the consultation does not include any modelling to demonstrate the impact of this.
5. We acknowledge that the number of maintained schools has reduced since 2017. However, three out of five mainstream primary schools remain maintained¹, and therefore any reduction in funding would have a disproportionate impact on the primary sector.
6. Evidence indicates that those regions with higher proportion of Ofsted 'requires improvement' and 'inadequate' grades² contain local authority areas that were among the lowest funded in 2017/18 (this funding year pre-dates the national funding formula).

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/open-academies-and-academy-projects-in-development>

²

https://public.tableau.com/views/Dataview/Viewregionalperformancevertime?:embed=y&:display_count=yes&:showTabs=y&:showVizHome=no

This means that local authorities with the highest level of need for school improvement may also see the biggest reductions in funding.

7. ASCL is extremely concerned that any cut in grant funding could result in an increase in the de-delegation amount levied on maintained schools to subsidise school improvement across the area.
8. The proposals include a clear statement about the importance of taking active steps to support the successful and sustained return of all pupils to schools and in addressing any adverse impacts of the pandemic. We would support this approach. However, to do so in the context of a reduction in targeted financial resource is utterly counterproductive. We urge the government to continue to align funding available with the current school funding levels.

C. Answers to specific questions

Question 1: We intend to attach a condition to the payment of the grant that the grant must be used exclusively to support LAs' SI functions for which the grant is paid.

What would be the impact of making this change for LAs, in particular for schools and pupils, and on LAs' ability to deliver their SI functions? Please provide evidence where possible.

9. It is right that schools should feel confident that all available funding is targeted at school improvement. However, these proposals do not include any detail on how the government will assess adherence to the new condition. We would like to see more information on how the process will be quality assured, particularly when the penalties are potentially damaging to the capacity of the LA. It is difficult to see how increasing levels of bureaucracy will improve outcomes for children and young people.
10. Feedback from ASCL members indicates that there is a need for greater transparency in some LAs. For example, it is not always clear to schools what the statutory responsibilities of the LA are, and therefore schools do not feel able to properly assess their entitlement.

Question 2: We intend to attach a condition to the payment of the grant that, in fulfilling their existing SI functions, LAs in receipt of the grant must take active steps to support the successful and sustained return of all pupils to school and in addressing any adverse impacts of the pandemic on their education.

What would be the impact of making this change for LAs, schools and pupils, in particular on LAs' ability to deliver their SI functions? Please provide evidence where possible.

11. ASCL is concerned about the impact of broadening the conditions of grant on the capacity of LAs to deliver and support schools' needs. The statutory powers relate to a broader range of school improvement issues rather than solely around addressing the adverse impacts of the pandemic. There will clearly be some overlap, but schools must have equity of access to school improvement whether support is required as a direct result of the pandemic or due to other factors. Closing the disadvantage gap must remain the priority, and access to support must not be pre-determined by a demonstrable link to the pandemic.

Question 3: We intend to attach a condition to the payment of the grant enabling the Secretary of State to take action to enforce the conditions referred to in questions 1 and 2 in the event of non-compliance, including as a last resort, the right to claw back grant or withhold future funding where appropriate on a case-by-case basis.

What would be the impact of making this change for LAs, schools and pupils, in particular on LAs' ability to deliver their SI functions, and how can we help to mitigate any negative impacts? Please provide evidence where possible.

12. We support the principle of ensuring that the grant is used for the purpose intended. However, the introduction of this punitive measure seems unhelpful, given the scale of the task in hand. At this time it is not possible to fully understand the breadth of interventions and support that will be required in supporting the successful and sustained return of all pupils to school, and in addressing any adverse impacts of the pandemic on their education.
13. It is also important that we do not assign a timeline for achievement that aligns with any grant payment / claw back cycle. The proposals state that government does not consider that the imposition of conditions on the grant will create a 'new burden' for LAs. We think that the threat of claw back does create additional burden. Imposition of this measure will act as a distraction for LAs, when building trust and partnership with their schools should be the main objective.

D. Conclusion

14. We hope that this response is of value to your consultation. ASCL is willing to be further consulted and to assist in any way that it can.

Julia Harnden (Funding Specialist) and Tiffnie Harris (Primary Specialist)
Association of School and College Leaders
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