

Autumn statement 2023 representation

Submission by the Association of School and College Leaders

A. Introduction

1. The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) is a trade union and professional association representing over 24,000 education system leaders, heads, principals, deputies, vice-principals, assistant heads, business leaders 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 children and young people across primary, secondary, post-16 and specialist education. 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 submit this representation . Our submission is based on the views of our members, obtained through discussions at ASCL Council, with relevant advisory groups, prompted and unprompted emails and messages, and by working collaboratively with other organisations across the sector.
3. The focus of this submission is on two specific areas of the funding landscape that we think are in a perilous state of inadequacy and that cannot wait until the next spending review to be addressed. We note that both of the areas we have chosen are also included on the DfE's own risk register, see paragraphs seven and fifteen.

B. Key asks

Key ask 1: Capital funding for the school and college estate

4. The safety of all school and college buildings must be of the highest priority to government, as it is to the responsible bodies which run and maintain them.
5. We welcome the government commitment to provide capital to fund emergency mitigation work needed to make buildings safe, and the expectation that all reasonable requests to cover revenue costs will be approved. However, we urgently need assurance that current capital budgets will not be diverted to cover the cost of RAAC mitigation work and, longer term, to the total eradication of RAAC in the school and college estate.
6. The [House of Commons briefing, School buildings and capital funding \(England\)](#) confirms that between 2009-10 and 2021-22 capital spending declined by 50% in real terms.
7. We are extremely concerned that [The DfE Annual Report 21-22](#) included the condition of school buildings as one of six significant risks, classifying the risk as critical and worsening. It said '*There is a risk of collapse of one or more blocks in some schools which are at or approaching the end of their designed life-expectancy and structural integrity is impaired. The risk predominantly exists in those buildings built in the years 1945 to 1970 which used 'system build' light frame techniques.*'

8. [In June 2023 the NAO](#) indicated that the Office of Government Property (OGP) had calculated that £7 billion would represent the best-practice level of annual funding required to maintain the school estate. Average planned annual spend for 2021/22 and 2022/23 on priority schools building programmes (PSBP) one and two, schools rebuilding programme and school condition allocations is around £2.6 billion¹.
9. We ask the Chancellor to use the opportunity that the Autumn Statement provides to deliver the shortfall of £4.4 billion.

Key ask 2: Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) funding

10. ASCL believes that reforms to the SEND system are essential to support the national objective to narrow the disadvantage gap. An adequately funded implementation plan will be necessary to drive the DfE's [SEND improvement plan](#) forward.
11. We call on the government to address the inadequacy of SEND funding, investing in a way that eradicates historic debt and supports the system to thrive. At the moment funding allocated to high needs is disappearing into the black hole of deficit recovery and is not getting to the frontline where it can make a difference and meet need.
12. Currently, significant sums are needed to meet existing deficit recovery commitments associated with the Safety Valve Programme (SVP) and Delivering Better Value (DBV) Programme. Both programmes are DfE interventions designed to support local authorities (LAs) on a journey back to financial sustainability. In March 2023, there were 34 authorities with SVP agreements and the DBV programme has capacity for 55 authorities where high-needs block deficit is a reality. In other words, over 50% of LAs have accumulated deficits that require intervention as they battle to meet increasing demands on their SEND provision.
13. ASCL understands and supports the principle that the education system must evidence value for money. However, we think that to be effective, agreed deficit management plans must deliver on both reducing debt and supporting the system to improve and children and young people to thrive. It is unclear to us how much of the funding available for SVP and DBV programmes is for investment in desperately needed system improvements, rather than deficit recovery.
14. Working alongside other organisations ASCL estimates that there is currently a £4.6 billion funding gap between available funding and what is needed to support increased demand and inflationary rises since 2015².
15. We are extremely concerned that [The DfE Annual Report 21-22](#) included High Needs cost pressures as a key risk, classifying it as critical and likely. It said '*Notwithstanding the additional funding allocated in 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23, in the medium term (2-5 years) high needs costs continue to increase significantly more than available*

¹ [Condition of school buildings \(nao.org.uk\)](#) , [School capital funding - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Using average planned spend 21/22 and 22/23 PSBP 1and 2, School rebuilding programme, school condition allocations.

² <https://skillsfunding.service.gov.uk/view-latest-funding/national-funding-allocations/DSG/2023-to-2024>
<https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator>
<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8419/CBP-8419.pdf>
<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/fast-track/982f48c3-03ec-48cf-a3ce-5f152e779e2d>

funding. This results in the SEND and AP system becoming unsustainable and threatening the overall financial stability of LAs'.

16. We ask the Chancellor to use the opportunity that the Autumn Statement provides to deliver the shortfall of £4.6 billion into the high needs block.

17. I hope that this submission is of value to you. ASCL is willing to be further consulted and to assist in any way that it can.

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12 October 2023