



Wednesday 20th March 2024

Dear Parents and Carers,

YCA is an organisation representing primary headteachers in Swansea. Members are appointed from each cluster across Swansea to represent the views of headteachers in a wide range of discussions with the Local Authority. We are writing to bring to your attention the significant challenges that our primary schools are currently facing in relation to our budget and the subsequent impact on the services we provide.

Over the next few years, the financial constraints and budgetary position for all primary schools in Swansea is going to prove to be very difficult and will present significant challenges. There are a number of uncertainties and external forces at play which will directly affect our school's ability to maintain the high standards of education and support that we strive to offer all our learners.

External factors, including inflation, energy costs and increased staffing costs have resulted in a considerable impact on local government spending. While there has been a slight increase in the Welsh education budget, the extremely high rate of inflation has meant a considerable cut in real terms. The budget settlements for schools in 2024/25 and over the next few years are likely to be very challenging as public spending comes under increased pressure and continues to see cuts.

City and County of Swansea, are doing their best to soften the blow to schools. In 23-24, the Local Authority made a one off payment of £6 million to support a significant rise in energy costs in schools. In a bid to support schools further in 24-25, the Local Authority aim to find another £4.5 million. However, this will not cover the cost increase fully for schools and cannot be sustained in future years. While Swansea is working hard to support schools, it remains one of the worst funded Local Authorities for education in Wales.

Welsh Government grants, which schools have become accustomed to using as part of their 'core budget' are guaranteed for this financial year. However, in the near future, some grants have the potential to be withdrawn completely, or their value decreased considerably. In addition, energy costs, though currently protected, could potentially increase again in the future due to global insecurities.

These are unprecedented times as regards school finances and budgets. One of the most notable challenges we face is in maintaining a curriculum that meets the diverse needs of all our pupils. Reduced budgets often lead to limitations in resources, staff and extracurricular activities, which can diminish the breadth and quality of the education we aim to provide. This may result in larger class sizes, limited access to specialized courses, and a reduction in enrichment programs that foster holistic development.

The impact we will see in schools will vary from school to school, but is likely to impact

- Redundancies resulting in reduced staffing levels
- Larger classes

- Higher Level Teaching Assistants covering teacher absence
- Fewer trips and visits
- Support for pupils with additional needs will be seriously affected
- Less or no support for literacy and numeracy interventions
- Less support for pupils with behavioural needs, leading to more disruptions and exclusions
- Less support for pupils with complex needs in mainstream schools
- Fewer resources for all children to use
- Repairs and upkeep of buildings and grounds will suffer
- General health & safety in schools as a result of all of the above
- Negative judgements from Estyn as a result of reduced services and impact above

If cuts such as these occur in your school, we ask that you please remember that much of this will be out of the control of the headteacher and governors, but part of a wider financial shortfall.

Furthermore, the need to make savings may well affect the provision of essential support services within the school and those provided by the Local Authority. Counselling, additional learning needs assistance, mental health support, and pastoral care are integral components of a nurturing learning environment. However, with constrained resources, we will find it increasingly challenging to provide these vital services at their current levels of provision.

As headteachers, we will always do our very best to maintain the core provision in our schools and protect teaching and learning. We would also reassure all parents and carers that we will give the utmost consideration to any decision to cut back on the provisions and services available in our schools. However, we believe it is inevitable that, at least in the short term, we will not be able to provide and sustain the same level of support and services across our schools.

Your support and understanding during these challenging times are invaluable. We encourage you to advocate for education funding and support initiatives that aim to safeguard the quality of education for all learners. Additionally, your involvement in our school communities through volunteering or fundraising initiatives can make a significant difference in overcoming these challenges.

We are genuinely proud of what we achieve in Swansea. We are grateful for the ongoing support we gain from Swansea Local Authority, who alongside Swansea headteacher representatives have made representations locally and nationally to prioritise education. As schools we remain committed to providing the very best possible educational experience and support for all our learners despite the obstacles we face. Your continued trust and partnership with us is, as always, deeply appreciated as we navigate these challenging financial constraints together.

We will certainly continue to update you and keep you fully informed, as the situation becomes clearer following National/ Welsh Government announcements as they become available.

Yours faithfully,

Swansea Primary Headteachers.