



We, the East Down Primary Principals' Group, are deeply concerned about how the current state of educational funding in Northern Ireland will affect our children. The recent financial cutbacks have left schools struggling to provide the necessary support and resources to meet the needs of the families and communities we serve.

Despite already facing a 1.2% in-year decrease in our budget, we have now lost crucial funding for the Healthy Happy Minds programme. This was specifically established to support pupils with their emotional needs which were heightened by the Covid-19 pandemic. This initiative had a significant positive impact on our students, and its removal is a detrimental blow to their future mental health and wellbeing.

Moreover, the Engage programme, which was providing critical support to our most vulnerable learners, has also lost its funding. We fear further cuts to school budgets, including the reduced funding for Special Educational Needs which will immediately impact on those with the greatest need. The challenges that these funding streams targeted still exist in our schools today.

'It is with regret that I am writing to inform you, that in light of the significant budgetary pressures facing the Northern Ireland Block in 2023-24 and in the absence of a budget allocation to the Department of Education by the Secretary of State, no further funding will be available for the Healthy Happy Minds pilot and the Engage Programme and these programmes will cease at 31 March 2023, as previously advised.' (Claire McClelland Director of Raising Aspiration, Supporting Learning and Empowering Improvement DE 297630-03-2023)

School budgets have been continuously squeezed for many years with no investment in real terms. It is worth noting that Northern Ireland currently spends less money per child on education than any other part of the United Kingdom. Despite this, the expectations from the Department of Education (DE), Educational Training Inspectorate (ETI), Council of Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), Controlled Schools Support Council (CSSC) Educational Authority of Northern Ireland (EANI) have only grown.

Now due to an absence of an Executive in Stormont, no government financial plan and anticipated crippling cuts in 2023/2024 these vital programmes have been ended by DE. We implore the Department of Education to reflect on their actions and recognize that their commitment should be to the children in our schools.

The financial crisis is not just felt within the walls of our schools, but it also has an adverse effect on the wider community. It is our concern that the quality of education and support that our pupils need and deserve will suffer without adequate funding.

In conclusion, we strongly urge the Department of Education to take immediate action to address the current crisis in education finance in Northern Ireland. Our pupils deserve the best possible education, and we implore DE to act promptly and provide the necessary funding to meet the needs of all our pupils.

Sincerely,

The East Down Primary Principals' Group

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John-Paul Magee (Secretary)

Kevin Burns (Committee)

Declan Murray (Committee)

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St Francis' Primary School, Drumaroad

St Nicholas' Primary School, Ardglass

St Mary's Primary School & Nursery, Newcastle

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St Mary's Primary School, Kircubbin
St Mary's Primary School, Portaferry
St Matthew's Primary School, Magheramayo
St Michael's Primary School, Finnis
St Patrick's Primary School, Ballygalet
St Patrick's Primary School, Ballynahinch
St Patrick's Primary School, Burrenreagh
St Patrick's Primary School, Legamaddy
St Patrick's Primary School, Saul