

***The Standing Group for the
National Conference of Education Building
And Development Officers***

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Dear Johanne

Response to DfES' consultation "Every Child Matters: Primary Capital Programme"

As Chairman of the Standing Group for EBD OG I have been asked to respond to the above consultation on their behalf. We welcome the investment that is to be made through the Primary Capital Programme and are very pleased that it is to be allocated under a simple formula.

Whilst there are many similarities with the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme such as:

- Extra resources - £150m in 2008/09, £500m in 2009/10, £7.5bn in total over 15 years (subject to future public spending decisions)
- Ambition – transforming primary learning environment, schools fit for 21st Century, rebuilding or refurbishing at least 50% of schools.
- Strategic – support for key policy aims (personalised learning, Every Child Matters, ICT, extended services at heart of community), tackling deprivation and necessitating long-term integrated planning.
- Procurement – focus on excellent design, sustainability and efficient procurement, especially partnering with private sector.
- Inclusion – includes primary-age special schools.

The differences are welcome focussing on:

- Funding available to all Local Authorities (LAs) from Year 2 (2009/10)
- 5% of schools "in worst physical condition nationally" to be replaced
- 20% of "worst condition buildings in our most deprived communities" to be improved or removed
- importance of demography – emphasis on falling rolls and getting pattern right before investing; generating "additional resources through a well-managed reduction in surplus places"
- challenges of procuring efficiently over numerous small projects in 150+ LAs with an emphasis on partnering and inter-LA collaboration.
- Funding – likely to be grant (and possibly borrowing) but not PFI
- Voluntary Aided (VA) schools will need to pay their 10% (unlike BSF), however, it is important that VA schools are treated consistently in this process recognising that there will be added complications in terms of diocesan and trustee interests

Please see the appendix to this letter for a response to the individual questions.

Yours sincerely

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Q1 What are the most important ways that capital investment can help primary schools play a role at the heart of the community?

A1 Capital investment will provide appropriate space and facilities in a safe and welcoming environment. This will support the raising of standards, while enabling closer working with parents and carers as well as the wider community.

Q2 Do you agree with the proposal to allocated funding on a formulaic basis with every authority benefiting from additional funding from the second year of the programme?

A2 The proposal to allocate under a formula is welcomed and agreed. Other options would not facilitate the “step change” envisaged across a wide range of authorities. However, local authorities are currently struggling with a change in the revenue support of the cost of borrowing. As such this investment will be unaffordable for local authorities annual revenue budgets if it is given as credit approvals rather than capital grant, unless the changes made for this year can be reversed, or more properly the revenue costs of capital financing can be charged to the Dedicated Schools Grant and schools Budget, being legitimate direct cost of developing and maintaining schools.

Q3a Do you agree with the proposed framework of national targets, planning and monitoring?

This proposes that:

- **local authorities should plan longer-term and link capital investment to Asset Management Plans for condition, suitability and sufficiency as well as taking into account every school’s master development plan;**
- **Annual Performance Assessment will be used for monitoring delivery;**
- **Joint Area Reviews will look in greater detail at the impact of services across all partners and the effect of the capital investment;**
- **Other planning requirements will also be taken into account such as ICT, DDA; energy use;**
- **DfES will “sign off” the plans before releasing the funding and this will be against clear criteria to be published;**
- **local authorities will need to demonstrate that investment plans support the objectives of the programme;**
- **on line performance measurements with key performance indicators will be developed.**

A3a Yes, but there is a need to be clear about proposals for the DfES to release funding only when plans are signed off. Bureaucracy should be reduced and links established with other initiatives such as a possible Phase 3 Children’s Centre programme.

Q3b What are the barriers to joined-up planning and funding?

A3b One likely barrier may be the disparity between the local authority’s overall strategic role and the desires and expectations of individual schools and governing bodies, particularly where changes in status may be proposed. Another barrier may be where joining funding and policy is an issue at central government level.

Q4 Do you agree with the proposed approach for ensuring good, sustainable design in the primary capital programme?" The principal design features are:

- Curriculum – focus on personalised learning programmes
- ICT
- Inclusion
- Extended services
- Sustainability

DfES expects that these will be achieved through current Building Regulations, School Premises Regulations and non-statutory guidance through Building Bulletins, particularly BB99 Briefing Framework for Primary School Projects and BB77 for pupils with SEN.

A4 Yes.

Q5 Is this the best way to achieve efficiency and best value for money?

The DfES expects all involved to be committed to achieving best value for money over the whole project, joining up funding and projects to achieve cross-cutting gains including:

- rationalisation and removal of surplus places;
- targeting school buildings with high maintenance costs;
- standardisation of design and construction components/off site constructions;
- making the most of national and local frameworks;
- effective partnering
- better management of school facilities

A5 Yes – This will allow opportunities to join up programmes of work with other authorities

Q6 Do you agree with the aims and approach for ICT within the programme?

These are seen as achieving more through technology and its intelligent use. The DfES expects:

- wider use of ICT as personalised learning spreads;
- increased motivation and involvement for learners, parents, carers and the wider community;
- increased use of ICT to improve security;
- changes to the way in which technology services to schools are defined, procured and delivered;

A6 Yes.

Q7 What additional support is needed to build skills and capacity of those involved in making the programme a success?

A7 Skills and capacity available within local authorities will vary, across the country, as it will with experience in planning and delivering programmes of this nature. It will be important that the DfES acknowledge this and put some mechanisms in place to support local authorities where it is required.