



Dear Parents

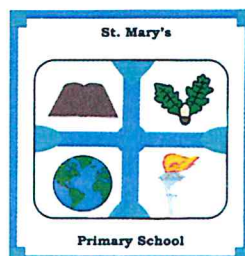
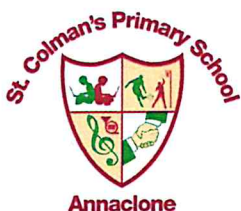
On 15 March 2017, Mr Gary Fair, Department of Education, wrote to schools to provide an update on the financial planning assumptions for the next financial year. While an actual budget for 2017-18 has yet to be agreed, we were provided with indicative budgets. It would appear that the AWPU (the number used for Dept of Education to calculate the amount of money each school should receive) for primary schools, upon which the indicative budgets are based, has been significantly reduced. This means that even where a school's profile remains unchanged since last year, significant budget cuts are anticipated. To make matters worse, Mr Fair's letter leads us to expect a further potential reduction of 2%, 4% or 6%. In April the Secretary of State for NI James Brokenshire put forward a proposed budget which would see the Education Budget reduced by 2.5% which is equivalent to a reduction of £50million. This is in light of our previous Minister of Education saying to the Education Committee that just to stand still schools required an additional £80million per year over the next 3 years. It must be clearly understood that these are reductions on a budget that was imposed last year; a budget which was already grossly inadequate and which will this year, if this budget is imposed, be some £130million short of what schools actually need.

As Principals we have been saying from last year that it was "... impossible for many schools to make further staffing cuts without seriously compromising children's education." Despite the fact that school budgets could not be signed off on last year, due to the large number of schools planning for deficits, the DE's response to this is to cut budgets further. This is untenable. Schools cannot deliver on these expectations.

As the Principals of St. Colman's Primary School and All Saints Nursery Unit (Annaclone), St. Mary's Primary School (Dechomet), St. Mary's Primary School (Rathfriland), St. Michael's Primary School (Finnis), St. Patrick's Primary School (Drumgreenagh), St. Paul's Primary School (Cabra), St. Ronan's Primary School (Newry) and in light of these savage cuts we have agreed that:

- we will continue to place the needs of our pupils at the centre of decision making;
- we will continue to exercise budgetary discretion and firm financial management within our schools;

However, it must be stressed that any further cuts to our school budgets will have lasting impacts on our pupils' education and well-being and consequently in light of what we have highlighted above we may find ourselves in deficit budget position within the next financial year.



We have the full support of our Boards of Governors.

Since the Education Authority is our funding authority and is supposed to be in place to support schools in the delivery of quality education to our pupils, we will be asking the Chief Executive, to make it clear to the Department and any future Education Minister, that the budgets being passed on to schools are grossly inadequate, even within the current climate of austerity. If the Education Authority is to justify the funds that are held centrally rather than passed directly to schools, then such advice must be strong, consistent and publicly vocal. We will also be asking the Chief Executive of CCMS to also support us for an increase rather than a decrease in our school budgets.

Further to this rather than insisting that small schools are a drain on the public purse we will be asking both Chief Executives to show their support for small schools especially rural schools and to celebrate the contribution they make to our communities. It is by having diversity in our education system that we are able to meet the unique needs of each of the communities our schools serve. We also call upon EA to abandon the aspiration of charging families and children to be transported to school. This goes against the principle of promoting school attendance and a universally free education system.

We are now also entering an election period. Even though education is a devolved matter it is important to ask all potential politicians, who call at your door, what are they going to do to ensure fair funding for education, especially primary education.

A copy of this letter is also being sent to:

- Chief Executive of EA
- Chief Executive of CCMS
- the Department of Education
- the Bishop of Dromore
- the Secretary of state for NI
- the leaders of our local political parties
- our council's
- our MP

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We look forward to their response.

Yours

Kr O'Neill

Sorcha Lyness

W D J

Declan Mason

Brian Doyle

Margaret McEnill

Donal McCaral