

NGA's response to the government consultation on reforming how local authority school improvement functions are funded

Background

This consultation took place from 29 October 2021 to 26 November 2021. It sought views on the government's intention to remove the School Improvement Monitoring & Brokering grant ('the grant'), currently allocated to local authorities to support school improvement activities and make provisions within the School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations for the financial year (FY) 2022- 23 to allow local authorities to fund all of their school improvement activity via dedelegation from schools' budget shares.

Respondents were asked whether they agreed that instances of councils exercising formal intervention powers remain relatively low, and that since its introduction, this grant has primarily supported improvement functions such as early support and challenge to improve individual school performance, which overlaps with wider (non-core) improvement provision.

NGA's response was that it was not placed to agree or disagree as we do not have sight of the evidence. Furthermore, it appears to us that the proposals lack evidence and transparency.

Respondents were asked to provide a view on the proposals to (i) remove the grant (Proposal 1), and (ii) enable councils to dedelegate funds via their schools forum to ensure they are sufficiently funded to exercise all of their improvement activities, including all core improvement activities.

NGA's view is that schools need systems that hold and support them. It is of concern to us that these proposals do not recognise vital leadership role local authorities perform for approximately four million pupils in our education system, ensuring their wellbeing and good academic outcomes. We do not agree that, taken together, these proposals will allow councils to continue to ensure they are adequately funded for core improvement activities, because in reality £50 million is going to disappear. With it more of the capacity in every local authority in the country. This does not serve the interests of children and young people. Also, it does not support governing boards to consider in an objective way, whether joining an academy trust will achieve their educational vision and improve teaching and learning. It forces them to start from the position that only trust leaders can lead school improvement despite there being evidence to the contrary.

Respondents were asked whether, bearing in mind Proposals 1 and 2, if are there any aspects of DfE guidance to councils on their role in school improvement which could usefully be clarified to aid understanding of what councils are accountable for with respect to improvement and how it should be funded?

NGA has said for some time that greater clarity is needed over the role of different players operating in the accountability system operating in the middle space between government and schools. For example, a clearer system for issuing warning notices when there are issues with leadership and governance in schools.

Conclusion

NGA does not support these proposals in their current form.

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