

Rt. Hon. Justine Greening, MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London. SW1P 3BT

22 November 2016

By email to: Sec-OF-STATE-Diary.PS@education.gov.uk
Cc: andrew.McCully@education.gov.uk

Dear Secretary of State,

We are writing to you regarding our growing concerns surrounding the removal of the Education Services Grant (ESG) from September 2017 and the absence of a strategy for building capacity and appetite in and amongst schools to devise and run a self-sustaining school-led improvement system.

The significant reduction in the ESG general funding rate was set in the context of the government's commitment to full academisation by 2020 and the development of a school-led system of improvement. As you will be acutely aware, the policy context in which we are now working has significantly changed since then – both a green and white paper have been published in the last 12 months and indeed you are now Secretary of State for Education.

We are deeply concerned as to how, if ESG funding is removed from local authorities and academies, an effective school-led system of improvement can be put in place by September 2017. We fear that schools and other partners are not sufficiently sighted on these plans at present, nor do they understand the full implications of the removal of ESG. They have other more immediate and pressing concerns to contend with, not least difficulties in teacher recruitment and retention and a shortage of school places. Further, we understand that there are no plans for DfE to fund schools to help grow the competence or capacity in a school-led market, without funding this task will be virtually impossible and inequalities in arrangements across the country is a very real risk.

Directors of children's services are clear that there can be no 'gap' in arrangements for school effectiveness and improvement that may jeopardise children's outcomes. At the very least we would ask you to consider a grant extension to 2018 to allow a statutory consultation to take place, the results to be properly analysed and a strategic plan to be drawn up to ensure there is the appropriate capacity and capability to support both schools and individual pupils. Otherwise there is a real danger of declining school performance as ESG funding is removed before improvement capacity in schools has been augmented. There is also a risk that this will be seen as an underhand way of achieving academisation by the back door.

The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd

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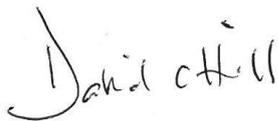
At present, the vast majority of school improvement offers in England involve a local authority - teaching schools, and teaching school alliances are not yet geographically coherent, regional schools commissioners are not in the business of school improvement and multi-academy trust arrangements are still in their infancy. On top of this RSCs and MATs do not have oversight of all schools – many academies standalone and an even greater number of schools remain in the maintained sector. The government's own policy, that good maintained schools cannot become teaching schools unless they convert to academy status, exacerbates these problems. You will be aware that there are areas of the country with no or very few academies or MATs. How will the schools in these areas continue to improve?

Further, the ESG not only funds school improvement functions, it also covers a range of essential services that contribute to the effectiveness of a school, including speech and language therapy, occupational therapies, truancy and education welfare services. These services play a vital role in supporting some of the most vulnerable pupils to achieve their educational potential, it is unclear if, or how, they will be able to access similar support if the ESG is removed. This is very worrying.

As your department continues its work on reviewing the role of the local authority in relation to education, ADCS members are clear that school effectiveness remains a fundamental part of their statutory duties and as such, we should continue to receive funding for this. We understand that the review and the work of the external advisory board, chaired by Alan Wood, is due to come to a conclusion in the coming weeks and that this will be followed by a period of consultation with the potential for subsequent legislation.

We reiterate our concerns that children's outcomes could be placed in jeopardy by a piecemeal approach and we would urge you to give consideration to extending the ESG until 2018 to allow for a national strategy to be drawn up and a carefully managed transition to new arrangements to take place.

Yours sincerely,



Dave Hill
ADCS President



Ian Thomas
**Chair, ADCS Resources &
Sustainability Policy Committee**

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