

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland  
Rt Hon Chris Heaton-Harris MP  
Erskine House  
20-32 Chichester Street  
Belfast  
BT1 4GF

6 December 2023

Dear Secretary of State,

Our children and young people in Northern Ireland continue to be let down by the increasing challenges resulting from over a decade of chronic underfunding. As the Chief Executives of the seven main education bodies we are writing to implore you to end this cycle and treat our children and young people equitably.

Our school system continues to experience ongoing industrial action, inadequate funding for the fabric of the school estate and an increasing demand for support for young people with Special Educational Needs. This is having an impact on all those in our schools but specifically the most vulnerable, marginalised and deprived.

In spite of these many pressures, staff right across the education system, both teaching and non-teaching, continue to deliver for our children. Their commitment and dedication to young people and wider school communities in the face of unprecedented challenges and difficulties is outstanding. Without these staff, our system would not operate. Our staff are the very bedrock of the education system ensuring that our children have the opportunity to attain the best start in life. It is essential that as a society we value and invest in the education of our children and young people and in future generations to come and collectively we strongly repeat our call for sustained investment, fair pay for all our staff and continued investment in the transformation of services.

A lack of investment in education, in the early years of our children's lives today, will have an ever increasing impact on the economy, justice system and health systems tomorrow. The under investment that has continued over the past financial year exacerbates an already unsustainable situation.

As Chief Executives, we are aware of our collective responsibility to drive forward efficiency and transformation measures, make the best possible use of available resources and strongly advocate for additional and sustainable funding. Steps have already been taken to reduce expenditure however our joint concern is that without equitable investment, outcomes for all our children and young people will be compromised. The Department of Education has had to make difficult decisions over the past year resulting in the removal of a number of programmes and funding streams that supported the covid recovery and alleviated the impact of the cost of living crisis on our children and young people. As we move into 2024 we would ask you, as you continue to oversee the financial allocation to and within Northern Ireland, to remember that education is not an optional extra but is the foundation upon which a peaceful Northern Ireland is built.

It is critical that education in Northern Ireland is funded equitably in line with other UK regions. We note with concern that £75m was allocated to Northern Ireland from the recent Autumn Statement via the Barnett consequential which is being used to reduce the previous year's overspend rather than the much-needed investment required in public services. This decision penalises the children of today and tomorrow. A child in Strabane should be entitled to the same level of investment as a child in Sunderland, Swansea or Stirling. We recognise that a decision on how the allocation of a further £110m announced as part of the Autumn Statement will be made early next year and would strongly call for education to be prioritised in deliberations.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you at your earliest convenience to discuss the significant challenges facing the education system which we anticipate will remain the position into 2024/25 and beyond. It is incumbent on us all to protect the education of our children now and for generations to come.

Yours sincerely,

**Maria Thomasson**  
Chief Executive, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta



**Mark Baker**  
Chief Executive, Controlled Schools' Support Council



**Eve Bremner**  
Chief Executive, Council for Catholic Maintained Schools



**Gerry Campbell**  
Chief Executive, Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment



**Roisin Marshall**  
Chief Executive, Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)



**Sara Long**  
Chief Executive, Education Authority



**Nuala O'Neill**  
Chief Executive, Governing Bodies Association NI

