

**Councillor Dick Walsh
Leader**



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**Mr John Swinney
Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for
Finance, Constitution and Economy
The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
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Our Ref: DWWB

Your Ref:

Date : 19 February 2015

Dear John

TEACHER NUMBERS 2015-16

Thank you for your letter of 5th February 2015 in connection with the above.

As you will now be aware, the Scottish Government proposal set out within your letter was considered in detail at a Special CoSLA Leaders meeting held on Friday 6th February. The meeting agreed the following motion:

"It is difficult to see how the Scottish Government's letter to all Council Leaders can be described as fair or equitable with regard to financing targets and sanctions on the issue of teacher numbers. Only collective discussions at a national level can resolve the inherent unfairness of the deal. Therefore, CoSLA call upon the Scottish Government to re-engage in national discussion. Further it is imperative that no council is sanctioned as a result of workforce planning issues".

I would strongly urge you to consider the request made by CoSLA and to return to the negotiation table to seek a mutual agreed resolution to this issue through the recognised collective bargaining arrangements. I believe that both sides have a common interest in ensuring the quality of education services in Scotland are of the very highest however this must be done within a balanced budget and I welcome your recognition regarding the very real financial pressures being faced by local authorities. I also hope that the process of negotiation ensures that there are no unintended consequences arising from this proposal that unfairly impact on some local authorities.

You may be familiar with some of these potential consequences through recent negotiations however I present them within this letter for information:



- a) Agreement to a national ratio of 13.5 pupils per teacher should be achievable for Argyll and Bute given our current position however, if this is applied to overall teacher numbers, this will have an impact on the ability of the Council to balance its budget in future. Clarification that the commitment to overall teacher numbers would be calculated excluding natural changes as a result of pupil roll changes would be helpful. The council's proportion of the additional £10m on the normal distribution formula would be around £170,000 equating to only approximately 4 FTE teaching posts.
- b) All authorities are at different starting points in relation to these targets. For example an authority that has made significant reductions to its FTE teacher numbers in previous years and have a high ratio may not be penalised if they maintained teacher numbers in line with 2014-15 levels whereas an authority that has kept its ratio low but planned to implement reductions in 2015-16 would be penalised even if they still had a lower ratio than the first authority. Argyll and Bute would fall into the latter category. I would urge consideration is given to meeting the target ratio rather than on overall teacher numbers
- c) Linked to the above point, clarification is required that the proposed maintenance of overall teacher numbers is applied after the changes in staffing associated with the natural change related to increases or decreases in school rolls as in previous years. This would have a further impact on authorities like Argyll and Bute which have projected reductions in school rolls in 2015-16.
- d) The teacher census figures need to take some cognisance of partnership arrangements between schools and FE colleges or other training/ education institutes. Following Government policy direction, many Argyll and Bute schools have a curriculum that features input from colleges and use their resources to buy such support and this improves the educational experience and outcomes for our young people. This has the effect of reducing the number of FTE teaching staff directly employed by the Council. To fail to recognise this approach, will penalise authorities that have been pro active in designing an education system that is designed around the needs of its learners.
- e) Many authorities including Argyll and Bute have experienced difficulties in recruiting teachers which links to national workforce planning. I would request that the count relates to posts and not teachers in post as many authorities would be unfairly disadvantaged due to their inability to recruit.
- f) The ability of local authorities to reduce its staffing may also be variable – in Argyll and Bute despite significant reductions in pupil numbers, this is not always able to be matched by a reduction in teacher numbers. For example a school that had a single class with 14 pupils two years ago and 6 pupils this year still has the same staffing requirement. The council could be doubly affected as the reducing pupil roll results in a lower per capita grant aided expenditure (GAE) allocation for pupils.
- g) There is almost universal agreement that input measures are not a good single measure for education quality and work on a wider educational

outcomes framework needs to be progressed as a matter of priority. There is no similar protection in place for any other local government employees which introduces an inequity between groups of employees and I would hope that a commitment is secured that this would be the last year that these targets are solely linked to the financial settlement.

If there is no agreement to continue collective negotiations through CoSLA despite the widespread support for this approach, I write to confirm that Argyll and Bute Council will accept the terms of your revised offer. In doing so it would be helpful to have your consideration of the factors outlined above and the clarifications requested by CoSLA in their submission on 2nd February 2015.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dick Walsh', written in a cursive style.

Dick Walsh
Council Leader