



A Simple Outline of Devolved School Management

What is Devolved School Management? 1)

Devolved School Management (DSM) is the scheme which gives head teachers control of at least 80% of their school's budget. However, their freedom on how they spend the money is very limited. The education authority passes control of the budget to the head teacher through a detailed scheme which lays out clear spending requirements. In turn, these local schemes have to conform to general principles laid out in Government guidelines, so there are very definite rules on what spending freedoms head teachers actually have. Although, for example, head teachers have control of staff appointments, they do have to make sure that they have the staff to meet any legal requirements and to deliver a proper education to the pupils in their school. They cannot decide to save money by having classes of forty pupils.

So what is included in the school budget?

In general head teachers have control over monies which can be clearly seen as being spent at the school. This means items like: -

- | Costs of teaching and non-teaching staff employed at the school
- | Furniture, fixtures and fittings
- | Property related costs - e.g. fuel bills and some building maintenance costs (except in PPP schools)
- | Supplies and services i.e. books and equipment

What is excluded from the devolved budget?

Education authorities have a right to exclude costs which are associated with particular pupils and which should more properly follow the pupil. These costs include support for pupils through free school meals, clothing grants, and transport as well as the costs involved in supporting pupils with special educational needs.

Authorities also have control of capital expenditure which covers major development works at schools.

Are all schools treated the same?

The reason education authorities have the power to draw up local schemes is that this allows them to draw up schemes which suit their particular schools and also to have different schemes for different types of school. For example there can be one scheme for big secondary schools and another for small rural primary schools although the same types of schools within the one authority should be treated the same.

How does the head teacher decide?

The Government guidelines make it clear that the head teacher should make his/her spending proposals in consultation with the school staff and school board. The school board does not have a power of veto as it does over the money spent on books and equipment, but it does have a right to be consulted and express a view.

What flexibility does the head teacher have?

The head teacher has to ensure that the school is properly run and that all legal requirements are met so, for example, regulations on class size have to be observed, the school must be properly heated and there must be proper provision of the curriculum.

Staffing

However, the head teacher can still make very important decisions. For example, in primary schools head teachers can decide which specialist teachers they wish to employ. In secondary schools, head teachers can decide how many teachers they need for a particular subject e.g. they can decide to employ more computer science teachers and fewer home economics teachers if that would meet pupil demand better. In some cases the head teacher might decide to employ support staff rather than an extra teacher.

Head teachers also have responsibility for appointing all their staff and local DSM schemes should allow school boards to be involved in these appointments if they want to be. This is in addition to the powers given to school boards to be involved in the appointment committees for head teachers and promoted members of staff.

Does the head teacher pay staff salaries?

One of the good aspects of the DSM scheme in Scotland is that teachers are still employed by the education authority and have their salaries paid by the education authority. The staff budget which the head teacher controls is made up of average salaries and if a teacher earns more or less than the average, the necessary adjustment is made by the education authority. This means there is no pressure on the head teacher to employ the cheapest teacher - s/he can continue to employ the best.

What about different heating costs?

Again, the Scottish scheme means that schools can be given heating budgets which are realistic and take account of the type of fuel which they use.

Transferring funds - the benefits of DSM

The real benefit of DSM is that head teachers can decide to move money from one budget area to another. For example a drive to be careful with electricity might save money which could be spent on books and equipment. Or, if there is a delay in appointing a new member of staff, then the head teacher can use the money saved on the salary for something else. The outcome of this is that spending patterns in schools are becoming more varied with some schools even finding extra money for redecoration

1) For further information see SOEID Circular 6/93 "Devolved School Management: Guidelines for Schemes"

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