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Dear Ms Smith,

I am writing on behalf of National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum (NALDIC). NALDIC is the subject association for English as an additional language (EAL). It is dedicated to promoting the learning and achievement of bilingual pupils in schools and draws its membership from those who work in this field in schools, universities and other educational institutions.

Working closely with professionals who teach children learning English as an Additional Language in schools around England, we were surprised and dismayed to find that the recent Standards Fund allocations revealed that that the Department for Education and Skills has reduced the level of funding allocated to the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) from the indicative levels it had previously announced would be available for 2006/7 and 2007/8.

After several years of effectively reducing EMAG funding levels by making no allowances for inflation or increased on-costs of employing staff, the proposed increase in funding announced in September 2004 promised to begin to address the historic under-funding of work in this area. The announcement also offered a level of stability in contrast to the annual uncertainty of funding levels for local authorities and schools which have beset this field of education for many years.

We were therefore dismayed that the December 2005 announcement reduces sums from the indicative levels previously announced and offered no sense of stability about either national or local funding.

At this time, it is apparent that there are considerable numbers of new pupils, particularly from Eastern Europe, with little or no experience of English entering the education system in both rural and urban local authorities. At the same time, the Primary National Strategy is focussing on the needs of more advanced bilingual learners. This focus is an important and welcome acknowledgement that the needs of these learners must be addressed in order to raise achievement. However, without adequate funding it is proving difficult to maintain any consistent development of effective work with EAL learners at later stages whilst the more visible and immediate needs of new arrivals require increasing time and attention from the dwindling pool of expertise available in schools and LAs. Indeed, it is clear that there is inadequate provision available to meet the needs of many 'beginners' enrolled in both urban and rural schools which have little or no history of working with bilingual

youngsters and no additional funding. Given these pressing needs, it is very disappointing that the additional 'indicative' funds previously announced are no longer available .

We would also like to clarify the basis on which the reductions in funding from indicative to actual have been made. Whilst it is obvious that the failure to deliver the additional 'indicative' funding must result in shortfalls for some LAs, it is unclear exactly how this has been managed. It would appear that some LAs have been awarded more than indicative funding whilst others are having to bear significant losses on the funding they were expecting, Birmingham for example. We would like to clarify whether these adjustments are simply the results of running the formula or whether the formula has been changed in some way. If the adjustment is solely the result of re-running the funding formula, it leads us to ask whether the formula is adequate. One of the advantages promised when a formula led distribution was announced was that it would help reduce year on year fluctuations in funding so that LAs and schools could more effectively plan their work. This does not however seem to be the case. It would therefore be very helpful if the situation regarding the discrepancies between anticipated and actual funding could be clarified so that there was a clear and transparent rationale to explain the 'gains' and 'losses'.

Overall, this funding announcement is disappointing and frustrating. Whilst we acknowledge the overall increase in funding nationally from 2005/6 to 2006/7, the fact that it is only approximately 2.9% instead of the £10 million proposed only a year ago is very discouraging. This will severely erode confidence at every level, particularly among members of different communities, that the Government is serious about addressing the educational needs of minority ethnic pupils. The continuing uncertainty and instability of funding for this area has already resulted in the loss of specialist expertise in both schools and LAs, added to which there is little incentive for younger teachers to specialise in a field which appears to offer no short or long term prospects. Given that inter-country migration between EU member countries is a daily reality and that it appears that the UK will need to continue to recruit health, transport and construction industry workers from other countries, is it not time for the Government to establish a coherent long term policy which will address both the needs of pupils from established communities as well as those who are arriving and will continue to arrive in the future?

Our concern for the well being of these young people in our education system continues to grow, particularly with the possibility that in the near future, funding will no longer be ring-fenced to be used particularly to meet their needs. As we are sure you are aware, the recent experience in Northern Ireland is that the removal of ring fenced funding led to the collapse of the EAL services in four of five of the local boards with the consequent loss of support for EAL pupils in those areas. Questions have been asked about the equality impact of these changes with reference to the Northern Ireland Act 1998. This has heightened our concerns that future similar policy changes in England may have far-reaching negative implications for the well being and achievement of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds.

We look forward to your clarification and to hearing your views on this matter.

Yours sincerely

Steve Cooke
Chair of NALDIC