



# **CPSMA Survey on School Finances Report**

**May 2024**

CPSMA carried out a survey of its member schools in May 2024, investigating the financial situation of schools in 2024.

### **Survey Information**

The survey was completed via online link.

The survey consisted of both quantitative and qualitative elements.

In order to ensure all schools had the opportunity to participate, the survey remained open from May 7<sup>th</sup> to May 17<sup>th</sup> 2024.

1440 schools responded to the survey in total. This represents approximately 50% of CPSMA member schools.

A broad spread of responses were also captured from schools of varying sizes, as reflected in the data on school enrolment.

### **Results**

The results of the survey provide a stark reality of the bleak financial situation in primary schools in the Republic of Ireland. Survey results indicate that, in the past 12 months 70.51% of schools have run at a deficit due to insufficient grant funding, and as a result, have had to rely on cash reserves to cover the running of the school. Schools have pointed to unsustainability of this model, stating:

- *“We don't have savings to continue doing this. As a board, we are now forced to consider dropping the school alarm and monitoring service, not increasing insurance to match inflation, delay calibration of fire extinguishers etc. These are unacceptable choices being forced on us.”*
- *“Having always been able to meet costs, BOM was shocked when the 2022/23 accounts showed a deficit of €72000. This resulted from an average increase in all costs of approximately 20% while overall grant allocation decreased, despite the one 'Cost of living' grant. While the big bill examples in this survey are important, the cumulative effect of increases in smaller running costs (trips, buses, day to day resources and purchases, repairs etc.) also made a significant impact. Insurance alone is now absorbing 20% of total capitation. Savings made during Covid closures enabled us to meet costs last year but this is not sustainable going forward. We run a tight ship but are now planning significant cut-backs and the return of voluntary*

*contributions. I have had to write to parents explaining all this. All grants need to be increased by approx 20% to enable us to meet a similar percentage increase in running a school.”*

### **Cost Increases Experienced by Schools**

Schools have highlighted significant cost increases in utilities and essential items over the past 24 months. Increases indicated by respondent schools include:

- Heating costs increasing by an average of 37.38%. Schools have highlighted the inadequacy of grant funding to cover the increase in costs:
- Electricity costs increasing by an average of 35.28%
- Insurance costs increasing by an average of 18.92%
  - *“Insurance is 52% of capitation Light, Power and Heat combined account for 53% of capitation This means that Insurance, Light and Heat accounts for 105% of overall capitation which means the school has overspent on these 3 overheads before any other expenditure, including other essential utilities such as refuse, cleaning, sanitation etc. Consequently, there are no remaining funds for crucial operational costs necessary to sustain the school, implying that ring-fenced grants are not only aiding cash flow but are also absorbed into the school's operational expenses. Contrary to the assumption that other grants support cash flow throughout the school year, the school's ongoing deficits in capitation expenditure indicate that these grants, initially designated for other purposes, have been utilised to maintain the school's operations.”*
  - *“Costs are increasing exponentially and there is little we can do to reduce usage as it is already at a min with only a couple of hours of heating used at intervals during the day.”*
  - *“The school is cold, we live in a hilly area in \_\_\_\_\_, it is a long cold winter and we have to be very cautious with the heating. We have spent the year firefighting and putting off one person that we owe a bill to at the cost of paying another more urgent one.”*
  - *“Heating is used minimally and impacts staff and pupils”*
- Due to the lack of sufficient funding, 53.07% of schools indicated they had to fundraise to cover basic utilities. Schools are reporting the immense pressure they are under to

just keep the school open. They have highlighted that the lack of sustainability with current financing practices:

- *“Our accounts were at an all time low and PA fundraising came to our rescue to keep us afloat. We had to leave invoices pile up and left businesses waiting for payment. This has affected morale and I have had to be even more stringent with staff requests for basic items. This is not sustainable.”*
  - *“Considerable amount of principal time has gone on fundraising to allow for funds to run the school.”*
  - *“Funding is a constant source of stress. The never ending need to fundraise makes for a fraught work environment.”*
  - *“As principals, we are responsible for teaching and learning along with the well being of pupils and staff. This is an impossible task as much time is taken from leading teaching and learning to fundraise to keep the school afloat. Staff morale is difficult to keep afloat, when the constant message to staff is to tighten the belt, don't ask for extras and certainly there is no extra funding for staff development”*
  - *“Due to insufficient funding and the rising cost of running the school on a daily basis, we have had to supplement on a regular basis from our school fundraising account to meet the cost of outstanding bills such as electricity, school insurance etc.”*
  - *“Teaching and Learning resources are not being bought in order that basic running costs, insurance costs and cleaner paid for. Capitation grant does not cover these basic costs. It makes no sense that on one hand parents are gratefully receiving free books and free hot lunches for their children and on the other hand the school community has no choice but to ask the parents to contribute and support school fundraising activities.”*
- 35.39% of respondent schools also highlighted other cost increases, with the most common increases cited, being
    - Increases in transport costs ( reported by 19.3% of schools)
      - This significant increase in cost has resulted in schools having to limit educational experiences for pupils:

- *“The price of hiring buses has also increased and we are no longer able to avail of some educational trips and tours which themselves are free due to the cost of hiring a bus.”*
    - *“Our children have not been to outside activities (blitzes, school tours etc) as we have not had the funds to subsidise buses”*
  - Alternatively, schools have had to pass these increased costs onto parents:
    - *“As a DEIS school we are also limited in the amount of fundraising we can do, and are thus doubly compromised ... We have asked parents to contribute but cannot continue to do so”*
    - *Due to insufficient funding and the rising cost of running the school on a daily basis, we have had to supplement on a regular basis from our school fundraising account to meet the cost of outstanding bills such as electricity, school insurance etc. This is therefore then increasing the cost of extra curricular activities/buses etc for our school parents as we would normally try to supplement the cost for our parents for activities from the school fundraising account as much as possible.*
- Increases in the cost of classroom resources, stationery and photocopying ( indicated by 23.6% of schools)
  - These increases have meant that schools have had to forego purchasing classroom resources, resulting in pupils education being impacted:
    - *“Teaching and Learning resources are not being bought in order that basic running costs, insurance costs and cleaner paid for. Capitation grant does not cover these basic costs.”*
    - *“The lack of funding impacts every facet of our school community. For the pupils, it means compromised learning environments with fewer resources, impeding their ability to thrive. Our hardworking staff also face the challenge of*

*delivering quality education with limited resources, which is affecting morale and job satisfaction”*

- *There's a persistent concern about providing quality education while managing budgetary constraints, often leading to tough decisions about resource allocation and prioritisation. The constant pressure to meet academic standards and ensure the overall well-being of students amidst financial challenges is personally causing me huge stress .”*
- *“A lot of my time and efforts as principal are spent dealing with suppliers, coming up with cost cutting measures, fundraising and penny pinching for resources. The bottom line is the grants do not cover the costs on the ground.”*

- Schools (21%) also indicated a significant increase in the cost of cleaning materials and the cost of hiring contract cleaners, noting that the cost had increased during the Covid-19 pandemic and had not returned to pre pandemic levels, rather remaining static or increasing since.
  - Schools highlighted that the covid cleaning grants allowed for schools to be adequately cleaned for the first time: *“We put in place 'enhanced cleaning' during the Covid period, which is the level of cleaning which schools should have in any case ... we have yet to return the so called non-used Covid funds as we are still paying extra cleaning staff for what should be standard cleaning.”*
  - Schools have highlighted that have had to make difficult decisions with regard to spending on cleaning, due to insufficient funding: *“during Covid additional cleaning funding was allocated. Schools for the first time had money for sufficient cleaning that is now gone with a resultant reduction in the cleaning hours and a marked decline in the cleanliness of the school. Staff are unhappy with this decline but there is nothing that I can do, reduced funding = reduced cleaning.”*

## **Ancillary Grant Funding**

Schools have also highlighted significant financial issues related to ancillary staff and the Ancillary Services Grant.

- 73.24% of respondent schools have indicated that they will not have enough money from the Ancillary Services grant to pay ancillary staff, with the average deficit between grant paid and monies required being €7165.79
  - Schools have indicated that they are under huge strain to attempt to honour ancillary staff wages:
    - *“The March ancillary grant was always a good financial bridge or stop gap between Jan. and June capitation grants. Now that this is not being received we are under pressure financially and have to spread out and prioritise the payment of bills. Presently my priority is to have enough money to honour the cleaner' s wages.”*
    - *“Schools are under funded and under staffed. Schools need ancillary staff, who are paramount to the running of a safe, successful school. Revenue and employment costs are crippling. Waiting for grants and not know when they will come in is exhausting and stressful”*
    - *“This is additional stress that I as a school leader and our voluntary board does not need. Capitation grant is €12000 short, Ancillary service grant €6000 short, no IT grant last year, unsure minor works grant.”*

## **School Issues around current model of Grant Funding**

Respondent schools are highlighting many interconnected issues in how schools are financed in this survey, with the main sentiments being the inadequate value of grant funding being received. Schools have highlighted ever increasing expenditure, while payment of grants remains at best static, and more often than not reduced. Additionally, schools have also highlighted the current phased system of the payment of grants as being woefully inadequate and outmoded. They highlight the irony of being asked to budget at the beginning of each academic year, while not knowing when, or if they will receive grants, or the value of same:

*“We are being drip fed grants and we have no idea when the next one is coming!! What other organisation could possible manage in the same circumstances. It portrays the Board of*

*Management as poor managers unable to budget when in fact it is impossible to budget on the unknown and on so little."*

*"The lack of clarity around the receipts of grants is absolutely crippling in terms of school life and makes a complete joke out of planning in terms of school budgets on an annual basis. To have to sit down at the start of every school year and have so many grant areas where we don't know whether we will receive funding or not is simply not sustainable in the long run."*

*"The uncertainty of grant payments and the continuous requirement for the DES and the Minister to get "headlines" instead of funding schools adequately is becoming sickening."*

*"In Nov 2023 the BOM held an emergency meeting as we did not believe we would have enough funds to cover ancillary staff wages to Christmas. We had agreed to ask for voluntary contributions. The cost of living grant was paid the following day and this tied us over until Christmas. We did not have any prior knowledge that the grant was coming - much similar to other grants. This does not allow schools to budget or plan accordingly. Similarly, I emailed the FSSU to enquire when the ancillary grant - due in Mar - would be paid. FSSU replied that they did not know when the grant would be paid. This was just days before the grant landed in our bank account. How can schools plan and manage when we do not know how much we have to spend?"*

*"The lack of a plan for receiving grants is extremely stressful & worrying. Our BOM cannot budget."*

*"It is extremely stressful for principals and Boards of Management of Primary Schools at the moment. The uncertainty is extremely unfair. We should be given our grants in September for the year ahead to allow us to budget appropriately. The current system is not fit for purpose. The introduction of hot school meals and free books has coincided with reductions in other areas. Schools cannot cope with decreased funding at a time when all costs are increasing."*

*"The capitation amount is enough to cover costs in schools and sincere consideration should be given to increasing the amount per pupil drastically. While our school welcomes the implementation of free schoolbooks for primary schools it perhaps would have been a more efficient to use the money to increase the capitation grant. Instead of offering small reactionary grants the Department should consider overhauling the school grants system so that schools are given funding for the entire school year at the start of the school year and be allowed to manage their finances accordingly."*



## **Impact of School Financing issues on School Leadership**

Stress levels of school management resulting due to financial uncertainty have also been highlighted by the responses within this survey. It is worrying to note the high level of stress being caused by inadequate financing of schools.

*“They speak of wellbeing, they speak of managing and sharing workload, but finances in the school has been my number one source of stress this year, causing endless sleepless nights. No other profession would accept it.”*

*“I was appointed principal in 2005 and I can honestly say that the last 2 years have been by far the most stressful of my 19 years due to lack of adequate finances to run the school.”*

*“I suffer a lack of sleep from the stress of trying to manage the finances of the school particularly at times when there is a cashflow challenge due to the unpredictable timing of grants arriving in the school accounts.”*

*“It is another layer of stress for me as a teaching principal in what has become an unsustainable job. I can't plan budgets and plan spending. It is having a huge negative impact on my family life as many of these stressful issues have to be dealt with after school. The board of management have to restrict spending which does not go down well with staff.”*

*“Personally the financial crisis in our schools has caused me serious stress as I try to provide quality resources for the children and basic necessities and upkeep in our school environment on a shoestring budget. The Government needs to invest in the running of our schools and the upkeep of our buildings and not just in hot meals, STEM, free books and ICT. What good are these things to us if the children cannot learn in a warm, dry, clean and well kept environment.”*

The survey has highlighted many principals feeling burned out and dissatisfied with their role due to the financial constraints being placed upon them by inadequate funding, with some reporting considering leaving the role of principal due to the stress and worry associated with money:

*“Waiting for grants and not know when they will come in is exhausting and stressful. I intend leaving the role this year and one of the major factors is the stress of trying to spread so little*

*money across the school service. I work in an area of extreme disadvantage, our community does not have the capacity to support the school.”*

*“I don’t have capacity in my ever expanding job to manage finances as well. I am considering giving this job up on a daily basis”*

*“I am giving serious consideration to resigning from my position. This is my third year as Principal and the pressures and burdens of the job are severely impacting my health and wellbeing. I have always considered myself as being a hard worker and resilient but the pressures of this job are unsustainable. I had many a sleepless night in Term 1 worrying about whether I would be able to pay my secretary and cleaner at Christmas due to the poor financial situation our school was in.”*