

89. One solution cited a number of times was to allow the local authority's contingency fund to be used to support schools with falling rolls.

Approach for 2014-15

90. We want to ensure that good schools with short term falling rolls receive sufficient funding to deliver an appropriate curriculum and to avoid the need to take costly steps to reduce their capacity, when the demographic data shows that their capacity will need to expand again in the near future. It would be inefficient for example to make redundancies because of short term falling rolls, only to need to employ staff again when rolls increase. We therefore intend to allow some additional support for schools in this situation from 2014-15. We have developed a solution which can be simply managed and which offers a safeguard for all school types. **We will enable local authorities, using top-sliced DSG funding, to create a small fund to support schools with falling rolls in exceptional circumstances.**

91. We will expect the use of the fund to be considered at planning area level and Schools Forums will assess applications. As with the basic need growth fund, the criteria and amount must be agreed by the Schools Forum and applied fairly to academies and maintained schools. We are clear that we do not intend that this funding is provided to support schools which have falling rolls because they are unpopular or of low quality. Therefore we will ask local authorities to apply criteria which restricts use of the fund to schools that are considered by Ofsted to be good or outstanding.

92. The operational guidance sets out the criteria which will be applied to the falling rolls fund.

Schools Forums

Approach in 2013-14 and Review Findings

93. The new Schools Forum regulations came into effect on 1 October 2012. These have improved the transparency and independence of Schools Forums.

94. We asked in the February consultation document whether Schools Forums were now operating more democratically and transparently and if not, what further steps the Department could take in order to improve this.

95. The majority of responses suggested that either the changes had not altered the operation of the forum as it was already working well and in line with the new regulations, or that the new regulations had led to improvements in democracy

and transparency.

96. There were a number of concerns which were expressed. Where respondents felt their Schools Forum was not working as well as it should, this was largely due to representatives not cascading information among their constituents or not having time or a sufficient level of understanding to play an active part as a member of the forum.
97. We also heard views from institutions providing education for students between the ages of 14 and 25 (such as further education colleges) that have an interest in local decisions regarding high needs funding and funding for pupils who are educated in further education provision from age 14. They were concerned that, despite this, there is no statutory place for such institutions.

Approach for 2014-15

98. We are clear that Forums must operate transparently and fairly. We will continue to monitor Forums to ensure that they are implementing all aspects of the revised regulations. We will also re-issue the good practice guide. If we find that local authorities have not been adhering to the regulatory requirements (which include publishing papers on websites), then we will consider taking further action.
99. We will be making one change in relation to the Schools Forums regulations in 2014-15 (on which we will consult). **We will require that all Forums include one elected representative from an institution (other than from a school or academy) providing education beyond age 16 (but may also be providing education for 14-16 year olds). This will replace the current requirement for a representative from the 14-19 partnership.** We will make this change at the same time as we revise the School Funding Regulations.