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Dear convenor,

Thank you for your letter of 22 March further to my predecessor's evidence session on the 2023/24 budget at the meeting of the Education, Children and Young People Committee on 22 February. I am delighted to be appointed to the role of Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and I very much look forward to working with the Committee in due course.

Ms Somerville offered to provide written details to the Committee on the agreement made with COSLA in relation to the additional £145.5 million funding given to local authorities in 2022/23 for teachers and pupil support assistants. Please find my response below.

The Committee has asked for the strategic intent to be set out for the use of the additional annual funding of £145.5 million, particularly given the differing circumstances in local authorities and demographic changes across the country if this is not delivered. The overarching intent for the use of this funding is to ensure that the number of teacher and pupil support assistants are maintained at the level reported in the September 2022 annual census, as published in the Official Statistics Summary School Statistics in December 2022 and March 2023.

I note the Committee's points that there should be an element of flexibility in how the funding can be used. I appreciate that, across thirty-two local authorities, there will be different contexts, demands, nuances, pressures and financial challenges. More generally, one of the strengths of the Scottish education system is the flexibility afforded to local authorities and schools to focus on local circumstances and needs.

I am, however, also clear that a reduction in teacher numbers will not support continuous improvement in education. Balancing these arguments, therefore, and in assessing whether these

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conditions have been met, we will consider any mitigating circumstances individual councils may wish to put forward. In assessing any such claims, Ministerial judgement will be applied. However, if overall numbers across the country have been maintained – which I stress remains the overall intent with this policy - then there will be no need to consider any mitigations.

The Committee has also asked for an update on their recommendation: *“that the Scottish Government works with local authorities to examine and monitor the impact of the tapered reduction in funding on the challenge authorities and reports its findings to the Committee, along with any proposed action to mitigate any detrimental impact and how this funding model is being measured.”* As the Committee is aware, the new funding model was developed in consultation with education partners, including local government and headteachers and agreed by COSLA. The new model provides a fairer reflection of the numbers of children impacted by poverty than the previous model. We do, however, recognise that this change requires careful management by local authorities which were previously Challenge Authorities. That is why we ensured that the redistribution of Scottish Attainment Challenge funding is taking place over four years, supporting authorities to transition to their equitable share over time and providing certainty to aid planning.

Through the refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge programme the Scottish Government has regular engagements with Local Authorities, ADES and COSLA to examine issues relating to the programme. Local Authorities have known about these funding changes for more than a year and the confirmation of Strategic Equity Funding Allocations over four years is helping them to plan accordingly. Education Scotland too, through their team of Attainment Advisers, is providing support to Local Authorities to help ensure SAC funding is being maximised to best effect to help support efforts to close the poverty-related attainment gap.

Turning to your points around monitoring the use of the £145.5 million. It is important that SG, COSLA, local authorities and other stakeholders, including parents and the wider public, are able to trust the statistics used to inform potentially difficult decisions regarding the reduction of funding. I can confirm that COSLA has now agreed that monitoring whether our conditions have been met will use the September 2023 annual census levels, which will be published in the Official Statistics Summary School Statistics in December 2023 and March 2024. However, I appreciate that teacher numbers do fluctuate, which is why we will introduce an additional monitoring period in April/May. This supplementary information will be used by my officials to assess progress and inform where further discussions may be required with individual councils, for example where they appear to show a potential reduction in teacher numbers.

Regarding the Committee’s question on the non-recurring funding of July 2020, August 2020, and March 2021 to local authorities to support the recruitment of additional teachers and support staff, monitoring of this funding took place quarterly. The Scottish Government provided three tranches of funding during this period: £80 million in 2020/21; £70 million in 2020/21, which was allocated in two tranches (£45 million and £25 million); and £60 million in 2021/22. It should be noted that £45 million of the £70 million tranche could be used flexibly by local authorities to purchase additional digital devices, to recruit additional staff and to provide additional family support. During this period monitoring of temporary or permanent status was not undertaken, as the priority was to ensure additional education staff were recruited to aide education recovery during the pandemic.

The numbers of additional teachers and support staff recruited with this funding is set out in the table below.

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Funding	No of Teachers recruited	No of Support Staff recruited
£80 million	1,423	246
£70 million	826	314
£60 million	1,036	434
Total	3,285	994

The Committee has also enquired about progress on the commitment to reduce class contact time for teachers by 90 minutes per week by the end of this parliamentary term. We will continue to explore with the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT) how we might progress this commitment which is, at least in part, linked to the commitment to recruit additional teachers. In doing so, we will need to be cognisant of financial sustainability given the requirement to fund the recent pay deal for teachers. We will keep you informed of our progress.

Finally, with regards to the publication of the school support staff statistics. I am sure the Committee will agree that a (1.9%) increase on last year is good news. The number of pupil support assistants has increased since 2018 and the £145.5 million we are providing this year will continue to support this recruitment.

Year	Pupil Support Assistant (FTE)
2018	13,803
2019	13,909
2020	15,263
2021	16,299
2022	16,606

I hope this information is useful to the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

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Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

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