

News story: More support to help schools with costs

A new toolkit to help schools save money to ensure every pound possible is being spent in the classroom has been published today by Education Secretary Damian Hinds.

The School Resource Management Strategy provides schools with practical advice on how to reduce the £10 billion non-staffing spend spent across England last year. It is estimated schools could save up to a billion pounds through better procurement and buying strategies.

The strategy includes information on how to work collaboratively with other schools to drive down costs on things like stationery, energy and water bills, as well as supporting schools with staff recruitment and retention.

Between 2014/15 and 2016/17 schools saved £106 million on non-staff spending and a nationwide network of Schools Resource Management Advisers, who work with schools to use every pound they spend effectively, is helping to build on that success.

Today's announcement follows a pledge by the Education Secretary to work with schools and bear down on cost pressures so every pound counts in the classroom.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds said:

I want to help schools use their resources as effectively as possible. This strategy equips head teachers and school business professionals with the practical advice, resources and support they need so that they can focus on what they do so well – delivering high-quality education for their pupils.

There can be no great schools without great teachers to inspire and motivate children, so it's absolutely right that we help schools to maximise the money they have to spend in the classroom by working together, making sure they're getting the best deals and are not being overcharged for services.

Earlier this year, Mr Hinds unveiled plans to clamp down on agencies charging schools excessive fees to recruit staff and provide a free platform for schools to advertise vacancies, which costs on average £75 million a year.

A national network of buying hubs which offer procurement support to schools, a register of recommended best value deals and an online utility bill comparison tool are among other steps which have already been taken by the department.

The register of recommended deals has helped schools save £21 million since April 2018, with one school – Belmont Community School in Durham – £30,000 better off by simply switching to a better printing and photocopying deal. Another eight deals will be added to the register today.

The strategy has been welcomed by The Institute of School Business Leadership.

Stephen Morales, CEO of the Institute of School Business Leadership, said:

ISBL welcomes the Department's guidance on excellent school resource management. We believe that the effective review of the school's resources by the whole leadership team across pedagogy, governance and business will help to ensure that schools reach appropriate recommendations for the effective use of their resources. We would recommend that school leaders use this guidance to help to steer and focus their discussions when considering how to reduce cost pressures and optimise the use of available resources.

This strategy is the latest in a series of steps taken by the department to help schools deliver the best value for money and ensure resources can be targeted at the frontline. It includes:

- Introducing a new deal for teacher recruitment agencies by publishing a register that will set out agency mark ups so schools will know up-front what they are paying for. This will help schools avoid agencies which charge fees for making temporary staff permanent. These fees can be as much as 30% of an annual salary;
- A toolkit for schools to help reduce unnecessary workload. This provides free online training materials, audit tools, practical examples and model policies – developed and tested by school leaders and teachers;
- Recommending deals to schools that could save money on things they buy regularly – including new deals on books, ICT solutions and software licenses; and
- Increasing the number of School Resource Management Advisers to provide support to more trusts and schools to help them ensure they are getting the best value for every pound they spend.

The strategy also underscores the Department for Education's commitment to investing in the school estate, to work with schools and local authorities to reduce running costs, and to ensure school places are available in the areas that need them.

Today's announcement builds on the Education Secretary's commitment to work with the profession, unions and Ofsted to strip away unnecessary workload and to champion the teaching profession.