

STATEMENT FROM:



# BILLY ARMSTRONG MLA

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## **Armstrong blasts funding for Irish Medium Schools whilst over 800 empty places exist in that sector**

Mid-Ulster MLA Billy Armstrong has blasted the Education Minister Catriona Ruane's decision to approve funding for four new Irish Language schools – including one in Magherafelt – at the same time as over 800 school places in that sector remain vacant and so soon after she claimed not to have money in the budget to fund the rebuilding of Magherafelt Primary and Nursery Schools.

The Ulster Unionist MLA said:

“Only last month Catriona Ruane, the Education Minister, announced that numerous new school builds and improvement schemes would not go ahead because 'we simply cannot build schools without money'. One of the projects affected by the £300 million backlog in maintenance for our existing schools is the rebuilding of Magherafelt Primary and Nursery Schools here in Mid-Ulster, yet she has managed to find the money to fund a new Irish language school in Magherafelt.

The pupils of Magherafelt Primary and Nursery School and their parents will also be shocked to learn that the Education Minister has managed to find the money to increase the capital budget of the Irish Language sector by a factor of five in the past two and a half years, in spite of the fact that there are 830 vacant desks at schools in this sector.

This whole situation is absolutely outrageous. Whilst I and the Ulster Unionist Party respect the right of parents to educate their children in Irish, we are convinced that the most efficient and effective way to do this is through Irish Medium Units attached to mainstream schools.

The facts are that the Minister spends £2,911 on the average Primary School pupil in Northern Ireland, but £3,024 per pupil in Integrated Schools. For those in the Irish Language sector it is £3,371 per pupil. So much for equality!

Bearing in mind the current economic crisis and the impact which it is having on the Education budget, the Minister must demonstrate that she is capable of taking hard and fair decisions as to how to allocate scarce resources in a way that takes account of the needs of society in general rather than following her own narrow agenda.”

ENDS