

TPM⁴Schools Newsletter

Summer 2015

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“Whatever happened to Education, Education, Education?”

As we begin the new five year term of the next government, Peter reflects on the challenges we face in education, how we got here and what we can hope for.

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www.tpm4.com



Welcome to the TPM⁴Schools Summer Newsletter

This issue contains topical news and items of interest as well as announcing our new On-line system (See page 4)

DBE Services is here to help

DBE Services and the development of TPM⁴ Schools was an initiative of a group of educational charities to pool their resources and expertise to give schools access to the support they need to deliver a high quality education to the community they serve. The Charities themselves support over 800 schools and a further 300 jointly through DBE Services.

A lot of the guidance issued to schools today fails to differentiate between what must be done and what would be best practice, if resources allowed. TPM⁴ Schools has vast experience and a proven track record over many years, which enables us to provide all schools with independent advice. In a world of tight budgets and limited financial or other resources we can, by working in partnership with a school, ensure best value and help make meagre resources go further.

We know from the 300+ schools we serve that we are very competitive on price and service. Sometimes schools say they want to save money by ‘doing it themselves’ and of course this is their prerogative but if all the costs are taken into account; staff, admin, communication, out of hours cover, etc. we are still able to offer best value.

We support 800 schools with capital work providing consultants who make no charges unless the school decides to go ahead with a project and funding is provided and the project delivered. We know of no other organisation that provides this level of service at total risk of the project not being funded and delivered.

Over the next months you will hear a lot of rhetoric from the new government. We want all schools to succeed and provide the best possible educational experience to the communities they serve. We see our role as being there in the background to offer help, support and guidance as and when you need it.

We are simply there for you as and when you need us. We are only a phone call away.

Do you know where your Water Stop Cock is?



Water can do a lot of damage and no matter how quickly we can get a contractor out the most important action is to turn the water off.

We have recently had a number of incidents when the school did not know where to shut the water off. We would urge all schools to identify isolation points for water and also gas and electricity.

To ensure that we have easy access to that information we are going to create a file on the new portal for the information to be stored.

Whatever happened to Education, Education, Education?

Peter reflects on what the next five years might bring

For many of you, the return from the Easter break will bring a new financial year. For those of you who are academies, you will have that to come at the start of the new school year in September. Despite the rhetoric that education budgets have been protected from the cuts, that is not how it looks to the majority, when they look at the level of funding they have for the coming year.

No matter who forms the next government, further real cuts in public funding is inevitable. I am not alone in dismissing the promises of all parties to protect health and education spending as undeliverable rhetoric. Even if funding is protected, Heads and Governors will be faced with difficult decisions in order to balance the books, with static funding, rising employment costs and building infrastructures which are beginning to fail and in need of significant capital investments. Whoever forms the next administration will have their own policies and initiatives and, as far as they are concerned, the formula to transform the education system - every government has. They will shuffle the funding to make it appear there is money for their new initiatives but ultimately that will mean funding in other areas is reduced or removed.

At DBE Services we have been raising concerns about the long term funding of education for many years, whilst helping and encouraging schools to maximise the opportunities the funding offered. We cautioned from the beginning of Labour's second term in 2002 that funding levels were not sustainable and we were building up major issues for future Heads and Governors to deal with. We also set about putting in place strategies to help schools cope when the inevitable happened.

By the 2007 election we were not alone in expressing concern about where the government were finding the level of funding they continued to plough into education. Despite the political rhetoric, it was obvious that the prolific building would soon have to stop; the programme for secondary schools, Building Schools for the Future (BSF) and the launched, but never started, Primary Capital Programme (PCP) were simply too expensive to deliver. Yet, despite the continued need to improve school building stock, most of the money was spent on cosmetic measures rather than improving the basic infrastructure.

From 1997 to 2007 the real level of recurrent school funding rose over 50%; 35,000 extra teachers; 172,000 more support, admin and teaching assistant posts; and a 20% real rise in salaries. Yet it was very clear, long before the last Administration walked in to the Treasury to read the now infamous note "there is no money," that Heads and Governors would soon be faced with difficult decisions to balance the budget when the bubble burst. No longer can they look to the Local Authorities for additional financial support with difficult decisions, as they have also been subject to savage cuts and can no longer help as they once did.

Perhaps I have spent too long in education and have become very cynical about 'government policy'. Actually I think my cynicism is healthy. I passionately believe in schools being free to provide every child with the best opportunity to learn in the context in which they find themselves. There is no doubt that the best teachers, heads and governors I have been privileged to know, understood the limitations of government policy but always believed in themselves to provide a superb educational experience for all the children in their care.

Everything we have is a product of the past; we can't change that and we have to live in the here and now. So we continue to nurture young minds and no matter what politicians, OFSTED or others say or do, good schools and good teachers will be able to look back and see what their vision, inspiration and drive has meant for so many young people in their care.

The decisions of politicians and the policies of governments will impinge on the lives of all in our care but when they look back they will not remember government policy, just the people who walked with them and encouraged them on their way.

Display Energy Certificate Advisory Reports

We are always very keen on anything which can save energy both from an environmental perspective and a financial one, although it is unclear how much DEC's add to the conservation agenda.

The legal reason for having a DEC is contained in the EU Energy Performance of Buildings Directive which the UK adopted from October 2008. Every building which can be accessed by the public and is more than 500m² is required to display an annual certificate. The directive also contains a requirement that, as well as an annual certificate, there needs to be a new advisory report every seven years (or 10 years if the building is less than 1000m²). Not having one can lead to a fine. The enforcing authority is the Local Authority so those schools for which the LA continues to provide this service can probably rest easy in that it would seem unlikely that the LA would take action to enforce something they should have been providing in the first place.



For schools for which we provide the service it seems sensible, given it is seven years since the directive came into place, that we should provide a new advisory report this year along with the certificate. This will then keep schools compliant until 2022. If your school is less than 1000m² and you would like to wait until the tenth year you will need to let us know the date of your last advisory report. We will then note on your ASC the date you need a new one.

Contractors and "best value"

We have over 300 contractors on our approved list, all checked to ensure that they have all the necessary insurances and competencies to carry out the work they have tendered for. In tendering we ask them to specify the areas in which they are happy to work and can provide a call-out service which meets with our service targets. In vetting contractors for our approved list, we also apply a proportionality test.

The level of insurance and number of operatives will depend on what it is we are asking the contractor to do. If they service boilers they need a high level of insurance and the ability to turn out early on a Monday morning should the school discover its boiler has not fired. If we are checking out somebody who has been recommended as a painter who is happy to paint a classroom for example we would be happy if they carried a lower level of insurance.

Having done our checks, contractor prices are balanced against the level of service we require, to give us a best value rating. Best value is a balance between price and service. We are sometimes asked if we can find a contractor nearer the school and happily make enquiries or follow up on any school recommendations. However, we do become concerned when we have to leave several messages before we get a response to our request simply to see if they would like to work with us. That does not bode well should we need to use them for an urgent call-out. The TPM scheme is completely bespoke so we will use any contractor a school requests but if we have concerns we will share them with the school.

Call-outs If we have to call a contractor out there will be a charge for attending. The call-out charge covers the contractor attending site and usually up to one hours work. Most jobs are completed on the first visit. Often the work can be completed very quickly and we are asked why there is a charge for the first hour when the job only took ten minutes. Contractors have to cover the cost for attending and there is normally a minimum charge. If the job can't be completed because the issue needs a quote, then you still have to pay the call-out charge. This is no different from when you have to call out a central heating or washing machine engineer at home.

Quotes If we request a company to quote, there will be no charge. We will often discuss with you what the issue may be so we can establish if the best course of action is to get a quote before any work is done. However, it should always be noted that we cannot request a quote and then ask for a 'quick fix' to be done at the same visit. If any remedial actions are required at a quote visit, the call-out charge will automatically be applied. Similarly, if detailed investigations are required by a specialist engineer in order to provide the quote. this will be chargeable.

Gas pipe work

The gas soundness test checks that equipment and its gas supply is safe. The recommendation from the industry and some LAs is that the gas pipe work should be examined every three years. However, there does not appear to be a statutory requirement for this, it is just deemed good practice.

We have decided that during this year contractors will be asked to extend the gas soundness test to include an overall check of the pipework. This we will then repeat every third year. Only if schools request us not to do this will we simply do a gas soundness test.





Requesting a call-out where the work is under guarantee

If you believe the reactive work you are requesting may be covered by a guarantee, we need to be told this when you make the request. It is important in those circumstances that we call out the company that supplied/fitted the item in the first place. Also, if similar work has been carried out in the last twelve months we need to know so we can get the same company to attend - unless for some reason you want a different company.

Once a new company has worked on a repair, no matter what they report is the issue, it is virtually impossible to get the original company to accept any liability and it will almost certainly invalidate any long term guarantees.

NEW SERVICE – Your own on-line filing system from TPM

Between May and July we will be making available a NEW electronic portal to help with the management of documentation relating to the school building, from plans to service sheets. Every school within the TPM scheme will be provided with login details so they can access a portal which will contain everything related to regular servicing and remedial work for their school.

In addition to holding the servicing programme and all related service sheets and reports, it will also provide a place for DBE Services to lodge reactive invoices, which the school needs to pay. This will remove the need to email invoices to schools and hopefully reduce the number that get "lost".

Access to the portal will be via our website www.tpm4.com

An added benefit to this new service is that schools may upload any documents relating to the management of the building, whether arranged by DBE Services or direct with other contractors, giving schools the advantage of having everything in one place - always of benefit when inspections are looming!

When we add new material to the portal the school will receive an alert at the end of the day identifying additions during the day.

Schools will receive their unique login and instructions shortly and may begin to use the system immediately.



How urgent is urgent?

If a reactive job is urgent, we aim to get a contractor out to you within 4 hours. Naturally, every job has a degree of urgency attached to it and we appreciate that all schools would like everything dealt with in 4 hours. However, often when we seek further information from schools, they agree that although the job is important it may not necessarily require an urgent 4 hour response and 'tomorrow would do'.

The key to providing the best service possible is in obtaining the best information from the school on what the problem is and what may be required. Only then can we assess if the work is mission-critical i.e. without urgent attention the school will have to close or, important but non-critical i.e. normal school business may be disrupted to a degree until the work can be completed.

We always do our best to meet the operational needs of the school when arranging call-outs and the majority of our contractors will be able to attend on the same day, even when we give them a 1-2 day window. Thus schools should not feel the need to ask for a 4 hour response for less urgent jobs. You can rely on us to get the fastest response available to meet your needs.

We have a target of placing urgent 4 hour jobs with the contractor within 30 minutes of receipt to ensure a 4 hour response can be achieved. We have good relationships with our contractors and we know from experience those that will bend over backwards to meet our needs. Where we can tell them how and why the work is mission critical, we can ask them to attend very quickly and well within the urgent 4 hour window. So, our plea is a simple one. When placing your reactive maintenance job requests, please consider how urgent it really is. Must it be done within 4 hours otherwise school business will be severely disrupted, or would tomorrow do?