

Tim Loughton M.P.
East Worthing and Shoreham



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Justine Greening
Secretary of State for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

10th August 2017

Dear Justine

Fairer Funding for Schools in West Sussex

Together with other colleagues from West Sussex we have of course spoken at length with you, other ministers and officials from your department about the crisis in funding for West Sussex schools. Having been the worst funded shire county in the whole of England for many years now the cumulative effect has meant that most of our schools are 'running on empty,' have no further savings readily available and are facing damaging budget deficits.

The additional funding to be directed at schools you announced just before the recess was welcome but there are serious worries that it will not prevent real term reductions in funding, certainly on a per capita basis, for my constituents. In order to understand better the impact on those schools in my constituency I invited all the heads to a roundtable meeting to relay their concerns to me and discuss the very real challenges they are facing. Most of the schools accepted and in some cases chairs of governors attended too and the exercise took place over two dates.

Whilst it was acknowledged that overall funding will rise from nearly £41bn in 2017/18 to £43.5bn in 2019/20 the IFS has calculated that in real terms education funding will drop by 4% between 2015-2020 particularly taking into account the unfunded cost pressures from salary and National Insurance increases, apprenticeship levy and so on. It is difficult to extrapolate exactly at what level the funding per head will be after taking account of the additional funding announced so far and if it really did equate to £4800 per pupil as the headline figure from the DfE suggested this would be extremely helpful against the £4,198 level now. However that is not the case and I cannot express strongly enough how important it is for heads to have clarity about what exactly the per capita figures they physically receive will be and how they are made up, as soon as possible so they can plan accordingly.

These figures will of course be overtaken if the Government decides to lift the public sector pay cap and school funding from the DfE does not provide full cost replacement. In addition of course we are still awaiting the result of the consultation on the new fair funding formula proposals and I appreciate that it will take time to go through the 25,000 responses received properly. It has been suggested that you would be making an announcement when the House returns in September and again I must emphasise how important it is to resolve this long running anomaly. The delay in bringing in the formula has impacted significantly on West Sussex given that we have suffered from historical low funding over many years and this has been extended indefinitely. Despite our representations to you and other ministers our request for interim funding to help plug the considerable shortfall now until a new scheme is in place was of course not accepted, which added insult to injury.

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The East Worthing and Shoreham Constituency includes
Coombes, Fishersgate, Kingston Buci, Lancing, Shoreham, Sompting, Southwick,
and the eastern wards of Worthing: Broadwater, Gaisford, Offington and Selden.

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Aside from the overall general funding issues a number of important problems were raised at my meetings with head teachers which concern me and I wanted to bring these to your attention:

- Salary costs have become an overwhelmingly large part of school budgets. One primary school gave the example that in 2010/11 salary costs were 76.9% of budget whilst in 2017/18 the figure would be over 90%. This is despite the fact that 13 replacement staff were taken on at lower pay scales than those teachers they were replacing. Inevitably schools are having to downgrade the experience of their staff in order to make the books balance. More teachers are taking sickness leave due to stress yet absence cover has been static meaning more teachers have to do more to cover, causing more stress. There were several examples of senior staff having had to take pay cuts and do additional work to provide maternity cover.
- For example, funds available for premises development has fallen below 1% when it needs to be over 3% to avoid building up maintenance liabilities that will be more costly to rectify later. In the same school the level of budget for learning resources is down from 8% to 3% so there is no money for new books or replacing iPads. Several schools said that they were having to set unachievable budgets to mask deficits
- Several heads highlighted safeguarding concerns heightened by staff cuts and reductions in specialist support. In one primary school there were 40 children with safeguarding alerts and the Head is having to deal with 6 child protection issues a day on average involving a great deal of paperwork. When problematic high level need children are transferred from one school to another there is no additional support to pick up the extra challenges. No one thought there was enough EHCP support with more demand falling on teaching assistants whose numbers are falling. Heads and their deputies have to take on the responsibility for most of interventions required, stretching their time even more.
- The head of one very large primary school said that the provision of mental health support in the new year would fall from 120 hours to 20 hours. Learning support would be cut dramatically too. All this would inevitably put greater pressure on mainstream teachers and involve those pupils being held back. Most heads said that exclusion figures were rising because the support staff structures needed to intervene were just not there. Given the reduction in alternative provision places schools were not being helped sufficiently to deal with very challenging children.
- Interestingly a point was made that universal school meals provision was in some way masking real underlying deprivation which was in turn underappreciating the real needs of some pupils for which suitable provision is not being made available.
- The Government often asks schools to approach regional school commissioners for advice and support. However there was little support shown for school commissioners at the roundtable. Many heads saw the commissioners as unhelpfully critical without offering positive solutions and support.
- Heads referred to work being done by UNISON and the NUT to gauge the real level of comparative redundancy figures across schools in different parts of the country. It is difficult to work out the exact level of comparable 'fair funding' to schools in different parts of the country and it was therefore suggested that an independent review be set up to get to the heart of the issue and make recommendations. Without this heads thought it unlikely that any solution would be achieved that involved transferring real funding

- Several secondary heads said they had already had to reduce the number of options being offered in September for GCSE and in some cases reduce the number of GCSE classes for certain subject groups meaning much higher class sizes. They have also cut back on printing costs which means that GCSE revision papers are not now printed in the same volume which will affect standards. Decreasing departmental capitation in real term at a time when GCSE specifications are changing means that the cost of new books and resources for the new GCSE's will have to be met by departments as a priority which leaves them with much less money for training, stationary and equipment etc. they have also not been able to renew software licences which students would have been able to access at home to help with revision.

These are just a few examples of the very real impact on pupils now of funding constraints compounded by many years of West Sussex schools being at the bottom of the table for the levels our schools are funded. I hope you agree that this is unsustainable and that this will influence your thinking when designing a new system that is much fairer.

Yours ever,



Tim Loughton MP
East Worthing and Shoreham