

South Gloucestershire letter regarding finance; from Parents to MPs.

Dear

We are writing to you as parents of schools within South Gloucestershire, representing the needs of 39,030 pupils from Reception age upwards to and including post 16 in our schools, their families, school staff and the future potential of so many in this region.

As the 6th worst funded local authority, we greatly appreciate the move towards 'fair funding', but still have grave concerns over the state of funding for our schools and request an urgent review and response.

Any delay to move toward a fair funding formula continues to disadvantage all South Gloucestershire Schools and will lead to the need to greatly reduce the services they provide. However, with the actual funding projections for our schools now available, we still have grave concerns, particularly over the negative impact on so many of our small schools, which are likely to find it financially not viable to continue to serve their local, rural communities.

In addition, as is noted by the NAHT, "Although we agree that a new funding formula is the right thing to do, the truth is that it cannot be fair unless there is enough money to go around in the first place. The total size of the budget per-pupil in state schools is not enough. This undermines a manifesto pledge made by your party in 2015 to "continue to protect school funding".

Governing boards and school leaders are being forced to make impossible choices as a result of insufficient funding. They are doing their best to 'make do' but there are only so many financial efficiencies a school can find before reaching breaking point."

We believe that for many schools, 'breaking point' is already upon them.

Already, by the end of the financial year 2016-17, our local authority face an overspend of 7.7 million. The costs of this will be split between all our schools and academies, meaning that we face the financial year ahead with a range of real-time cuts in each of our schools, up to a maximum reduction of £102,000 in 2017/18, in any one school. This overspend is mainly due to the following factors; denoting the impact of government policy:

1. The high-stakes accountability framework, with emphasis on parental choice and a market economy within our schools, has led to the closure of one secondary school, with ALL schools sharing the costs of this.
2. The expansion of children's services to the age of 0-25, whilst ethically the right choice in providing a quality of support for vulnerable young adults, coming without any increase in real-time funding, has become financially unsustainable.
3. The high level of special educational needs for a number of our children has led to the need for specialist provision, not available within the state estate of schools. Whilst our local authority is seeking to find ways of addressing this, through the creation of more specialist provision, it is an issue much wider than our local authority.

These factors have brought about such a high level of deficit expenditure that, along with the increased staffing costs, against schools' budgets facing another year of no increase to match these, the impact upon our schools is immense and the possibility of continuing to provide quality provision against these levels of funding, completely unsustainable. The National Audit Office forecast an 8% real-terms reduction in per-pupil funding for mainstream schools between 2014-15 and 2019-20. We cannot continue in this way.

The likely impact upon our schools will be:

- A further reduction in staffing levels
- The end of many successful interventions, supporting many children in our schools in need of support.
- A loss of any 'goodwill' and extra-curriculum provision

- At secondary level, a loss of programmes of study and courses available
- Further deterioration in the fabric of school buildings and potential increase in risk to the health and safety of our children.

There is significant funding already earmarked and ring-fenced, which could be better spent in supporting high quality educational provision for all:

- Universal free school meals for key stage one, regardless of means
- Sports funding, which has had an impact in improving staffing competence and pupil enrichment through sport, which is sustainable if this funding is used more wisely.

We request an urgent consideration of the specific funding issues related to South Gloucestershire, along with the fair funding issues across all schools.