

Fairer finding for schools

I along with MPs with similarly placed constituencies urged the Coalition government to narrow the large gap between the money going to schools in some parts of the country and the much smaller sums going to schools in places like West Berkshire and Wokingham. Conservatives were not able to get agreement in coalition, but did put a commitment to fairer funding in the Conservative 2015 Manifesto.

Ministers have since been working on a scheme. This is currently out to consultation. The request for people to write in on the "National Funding Formula" was first issued on 14 December. The closing date is 22 March. I am writing to remind those interested as they might like to send in their thoughts.

I have put the case to Ministers along with other MPs on several occasions. I will be having another meeting with the Secretary of State shortly about it again. The case is very simple. The main cost of education for each pupil is similar around the country, as it is based on teacher pay and other staff wages paid at national rates. Of course there should be extra money for pupils that require more support, and to recognise problems in deprived areas. There also needs to be some recognition of higher property and support costs in expensive parts of the country. The current gap between the highest and lowest funding, at more than 100% of the lowest level, is too great.

I have asked for the introduction of a new system as soon as possible, and for further transitional increases in money whilst we are awaiting a fair funding answer. The total support per pupil needs to be sufficient for decent provision. Individual schools may have other budget problems. If a school is unable to recruit sufficient pupils then its total funding will drop, and that may force it to reduce the number of subject options as it adjusts its teaching numbers to the lesser number of pupils.

In 2014-15 the per pupil funding of English schools ranged from £8595 per head in the City of London to just £3950 in the lowest funded authority. The average was £4550. Wokingham received £4125 and West Berkshire £4367.

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