

JWH/xst/ESCMay2018

8 May 2018

Robert Halfon MP
Chair of the Education Select Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA



Tanbridge House School
Farthings Hill, Guildford Road,
Horsham, West Sussex, RH12 1SR

Dear Mr Halfon

Thank you for setting up a timely inquiry into school funding.

You will be aware that the Worth Less? campaign group has significant scope and reach. Accordingly, we are able to gain access to the views of head teachers working “at the chalk face” across three of the main sectors of state education – special, primary and secondary.

Worth Less? now represents 38 counties, stretching from Cornwall and Devon through to Suffolk and Norfolk and then to Cumbria and parts of the North West. We have, therefore, a unique ability to provide unvarnished and salient information on crucial areas of school provision – most notably, school funding and the impact of the recently introduced new National Funding Formula (NFF).

In response to your four lines of inquiry, we set up a national survey for members of the Worth Less? group to respond to. The questions set were aligned to your committee’s main areas of interest. It is acknowledged, of course, that in-depth analysis of such lines of inquiry is required. We believe, however, that the views of head teachers are critical to your Committee’s understanding of the current financial situation that the vast majority of schools are facing.

The results gained are significant. Firstly, we have over 1500 responses direct from head teachers. The views are free from any political input and the size of response is unprecedented.

The results themselves, provide a vital ‘up to the minute’ snapshot into the current experiences of head teachers and their schools. We are unsurprised that they confirm the ongoing concerns that Worth Less? and many others have raised over a sustained period of time.

We hope, very much, that you and your Committee will scrutinise our findings in detail. The online results provide widespread quantitative and qualitative data in the areas you are most interested in:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/summary/SGE8pIBdzaa1XQempQE_2F2z9YfbdJyX10g6FxceSWrap2fmlLw_QGOTDuYBkYgx56D

User: THSRH12

Password: funding2017

Some important headline data is as follows:

- To make budgets balance in 2018/19 **60% of schools reduced staffing by one or more teacher(s)**
- To make budgets balance in 2018/19 **80% reduced TAs / support staff by at least one – over 50% by 2 plus**

- 90% of heads stated that under NFF they have no financial certainty for ‘meaningful financial planning’ beyond 1 year
- **90% of schools use at least a portion of Pupil Premium funds to ‘prop up core budgets’.** Half of the respondents use 50%+. **In other words, heads are stating that money targeted for the poorest and most needy families is actually having to be used to keep the school budget afloat**
- 92% stated that the DfE ‘has no realistic idea of how much it costs to effectively run a school’
- 80% of schools that contribute to the Apprenticeship Levy don’t get any benefit from it
- 15% of schools think that in real terms they are better off under NFF. **60% state that they are worse off.**

In terms of your four lines of inquiry, we have drawn some basic conclusions:

What the Department for Education’s priorities should be for the next Spending Review period as they relate to schools and colleges

The overwhelming thrust of all of the responses suggests that the most obvious priority under the Spending Review must be to ensure that schools are adequately funded. Cuts in teaching and support staff, books, equipment and our curricular offer, clearly indicate that there is simply not enough money in the system for schools to adequately deliver what is expected of them.

It is interesting to note that 95% of head teachers believe that the DfE does not have any ‘realistic idea’ of how much it costs to adequately run a school. We urge the Committee to look again at the suggestions made by F40: <http://www.f40.org.uk/f40-proposal/>.

The data on provision cuts should be set alongside the comments made by head teachers. Cuts in support (teaching assistants et al) for our most vulnerable and needy students are a reality, whilst extra-curricular provision in all of its guises is under massive duress.

Whether the spending review cycle is the best mechanism for determining overall expenditure on schools and colleges, and what that level should be

Responses here suggest that head teachers have little opportunity to make financial plans much more than a year or two ahead. Continuity of provision and effective strategic development is, therefore, compromised.

In short, we have no idea what will happen to the NFF after 2020 and crucially, the NFF is not aligned with rising cost pressures. How, for example, will recommended pay increases for teaching and support staff across the sectors be paid for?

STRB and NJC pay recommendations come during the middle of our financial year and further undermine the ability to make realistic future financial planning decisions.

The effectiveness of targeted funding such as the pupil premium, and its relationship to core education funding

In general, school leaders welcome additional targeted funding for the most disadvantaged students, but this funding will only reach the intended recipients if there is overall sufficient funding within the system.

90% of head teachers confirm that they are spending at least a portion of their Pupil Premium funding to 'prop up' their core budget. This has obvious implications for many disadvantaged students and their families. The Sutton Trust has also confirmed this worrying trend. Groups such as the F40 and others have provided significant detail which calls into question the current balance of deprivation and Pupil Premium funding.

Of course, simply looking to re-adjust the percentage of overall funding spent on a core budget ahead of other pupil led factors such as deprivation (and then Pupil Premium) is not good enough. A larger percentage of a small cake may be worse than a higher percentage of a larger one...

The practical implementation of the national funding formula

The introduction of a new transparent formula is not controversial. The arbitrary caps (and increments) within the current incarnation do, however, significantly undermine NFF. Vast differentials of per pupil funding remain in place. This is neither desirable, equitable nor sustainable.

We urge the Committee to press the DfE to explain and justify how the average per pupil funding in areas such as Barnsley and Bury can lag Hackney by over £3,000 per pupil. A single class of 30 will receive, on average, £90,000 more (or less) depending on the area that you live in.

The majority of schools confirm that they are worse off under the NFF. The government must stop saying that it is spending more on education than ever before, when it simply ignores rising pupil numbers and increasing costs.

This well-worn government mantra is causing great resentment across our profession.

The detailed online survey provides far wider information. As you know, representative head teachers from the Worth Less? group would welcome the opportunity to explore this information with your Committee in person. We have a track record of being informative and "relentlessly reasonable".

We would like to present ideas about how matters could improve in both the short and longer terms. Cost pressures could, for example, be alleviated if future recommended pay rises were fully funded. We have also identified potential cost savings within the DfE's own budget. These amount to hundreds of millions of pounds.

We would welcome your acknowledgement of our contribution to your inquiry and the opportunity to meet as promptly as possible.

Yours sincerely

Jules White
On behalf of the Worth Less? campaign group