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D. Hinds

Thank you to you, Maria Caulfield MP and Nusrat Ghani MP for coming to meet on 17 July regarding school funding in East Sussex. I am writing in response to the letter from East Sussex headteachers of 24 May, which you kindly passed on to me. I would be grateful if you could share this response with your colleagues in East Sussex.

School Funding

We discussed the differing levels of school funding received by different areas. The national funding formula (NFF) is designed to take account of the particular circumstances of every school across the country. That is why it provides different levels of per-pupil funding to schools with different pupil characteristics.

At the same time, we are also aware of the need to provide all schools with stability in their budgets. In recognition of that, we are ensuring that all schools, and all areas, will attract some additional funding over this year and the next, while providing for up to 6% gains, per pupil, for underfunded schools in 2019-20 – and more for some of the lowest funded. We think this strikes the right balance. In 2018-19, East Sussex schools have attracted 2.5% more per pupil compared to their 2017-18 baselines, equivalent to £108 per pupil.

The headteachers' letter raised the issue of the level of basic per pupil funding, known as the AWPU (Age-Weighted Pupil Unit). We increased this basic amount that every pupil will attract in 2018-19 and 2019-20 under the NFF compared to our original proposals, reflecting views received during the consultation process. We are also targeting funding to the lowest funded schools through our new minimum per pupil funding level, which will ensure every secondary school attracts at least £4,800 per pupil through the formula in 2019-20, and every primary school attracts at least £3,500 per pupil. East Sussex has set a Minimum Funding Guarantee of 0% in their local formula, so no school in the area will have seen its per pupil funding reduced this year compared to last year.

The NFF also provides additional support for small rural schools. The formula provides a lump sum of £110,000 for every school; the purpose of this is to contribute to costs that do not vary with pupil numbers. This will give schools (especially small schools) certainty of attracting a fixed amount each year, in addition to their pupil-led funding. The lump sum under the NFF is smaller than the lump sum East Sussex used for primary schools in their 2017-18 local formula. However, we have reflected that funding in each school's NFF baseline, so the increase in funding described above, which every school attracts under the NFF, will build on what small rural schools have been funded in the past.

We also recognise some schools are necessarily small because they are remote and do not have the same opportunities to grow or make efficiency savings as other schools. That is why the formula includes a sparsity factor, which targets funding to these schools. A small primary school can attract up to £25,000 through the sparsity factor. When the sparsity factor is coupled with the lump sum, we are confident that this provides sufficient support for the small and remote schools that play an essential role in rural communities.

Support to Manage Cost Pressures

We recognise schools have faced cost pressures in recent years, and we are providing extensive support to schools to deliver the best value from their resources. Further details of the support available can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/HUTWG36>.

This includes support and guidance to schools to improve how they buy goods and services. For example, our services provide quicker access to recommended deals on the things that schools buy regularly, including savings of up to 40% on printers and photocopiers. You can find further information on national deals here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/buying-for-schools/deals-for-schools>

We have published school workforce planning guidance to help school leaders think through the deployment of their staff in a structured way – with a series of prompts and questions, linking through to available evidence (for example from the Education Endowment Foundation) and benchmarking information, covering:

- whether the school has the right mix of staff to meet its objectives;
- whether staff are deployed in the most effective way; and
- whether they have the right appraisal policies in place.

It is estimated that £60 - £75m is spent on recruitment advertising by schools, and it is clear why senior leaders see this as a real problem that needs addressing. That is why we are introducing Teaching Jobs, an entirely free service for state schools to directly publish teacher vacancies. The service is being piloted in Cambridgeshire and the North East, and over the coming months, we will work with more schools and teachers to test, iterate and deliver a free national service to support recruitment needs and drive down recruitment costs.

Apprenticeships

Schools can spend their apprenticeship levy in a number of ways, to support both new and existing staff development. High-quality apprenticeship standards specific to schools are increasingly available, including Teacher, School Business Professional and Teaching Assistant apprenticeship standards. Schools can also use more generic standards, such as Senior Leader, Assistant Accountant, and Digital & Technology Solutions Professional. A number of apprenticeship standards for early years staff are in development, which will be ready for use soon. My department recently published an updated guide about apprenticeships for the school workforce. This guide explains the benefits of apprenticeships to schools and local authorities, with details of how schools can use apprenticeships, and includes a list of all available apprenticeships that schools can use. It is on GOV.UK, and can be accessed here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-guide-to-apprenticeships-for-the-school-workforce>.

High Needs

The headteachers' letter raised concerns around funding for pupils with high needs. High needs funding has risen from £5 billion in 2013 to £6 billion this year, the highest level on record. Local authorities will see an increase to their high needs funding in each of the next two years, subject to changes in their pupil numbers. Under our high needs NFF, East Sussex received £50.6 million in 2018-19, 1.2% more than they planned to spend in 2017-18.

Last year we also provided a high needs strategic planning fund of £23 million, so that local authorities could review their special and alternative provision and decide how best to spend their high needs funding. We are continuing to review the effect of the high needs NFF on local authority spending decisions, and keeping the overall amount of funding under review.

Sixth Form Funding

I recognise the particular pressures that post-16 funding has been under. Having listened to feedback, including correspondence from sector representatives, my department is actively considering the efficiency and resilience of the further education sector, and will be assessing how far current funding and regulatory structures support the delivery of high quality, world-class, provision.

Overall, the government plans to invest around £7 billion during 2017/18, to ensure there is a place in education or training for every 16 to 19-year old who wants one. Additional funding was announced in the autumn budget for the Advanced Maths Premium – an extra £600 for every additional student taking level 3 maths, which will be paid for the first time in 2019/20 – and the GCSE maths re-sit pilot.

Capital Funding

We have allocated £5.6 billion since 2015 to maintain and improve school buildings. In addition, the £4.4 billion Priority School Building Programme

(PSBP) is rebuilding or refurbishing school buildings in the very worst condition across the country, covering 537 schools, including five schools in East Sussex. This funding supports our priority of ensuring the school estate is safe and supports a high-quality education.

In 2018-19, East Sussex was allocated £4.1 million in School Condition Allocations (SCA) to invest in the schools for which it is responsible. Voluntary-aided schools received over £750,000. This does not include School Condition Allocations to multi-academy trusts, which typically allocate funding across local authority boundaries.

The Condition Improvement Fund (CIF) is open to smaller and standalone academy trusts and sixth form colleges. While more academies are now eligible for CIF, the size of the funding pot is calculated formulaically, so has risen in line with that increase.

Since 2015, my department has allocated school condition funding on the basis of consistent condition data on our school estate. We have begun a new school Condition Data Collection, due to complete in autumn 2019. This will provide updated data on the school estate and enable us to better understand how it is changing over time.

The coalition government closed the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme, which was overly bureaucratic and costly and was not focused on the condition of the school buildings. We are now building schools based on what works in terms of good design to support education needs, and timescales involved in beginning building work on site have been slashed by up to two years.

Thank you for writing on these important matters.

Yours ever
Damian

Damian Hinds
Secretary of State for Education