



NEWS RELEASE

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Current education funding formula is flawed argues poorest funded authorities and schools

The group representing the lowest-funded education authorities in England, is to present its case for fairer funding for education to an All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry on rural services.

F40 Group is one of several special interest groups concerned about the delivery of rural services and the threat to the funding of rural schools that has been invited to provide expert witnesses to the Inquiry sitting in the House of Commons on Tuesday 23 February 2010.

Several f40 Executive Committee Members will be witnesses offering evidence and background about the unfair funding of education in many parts of the country to an eminent panel of Parliamentarians and rural advocates.

Former head teacher and current financial adviser to the f40 Group, Lindsey Wharmby, will lead the f40 delegation. She said: "The f40 authorities are concerned that the true cost of running rural schools is not reflected in the original, now dated, Education Standard Spending Formula (ESSF) and our rural members are looking for responses to some important issues in the government's Funding Formula Review, which is due to report shortly.

"The ESSF, which underpins the present Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) is flawed, particularly in its estimate of the basic entitlement and its distribution of Additional Educational Needs (AEN) funding.

"We will be arguing, therefore, that it is of dubious validity to look at present patterns of expenditure as a means of determining need – authorities can only spend the amount they are given. If the distribution is unfair the patterns of expenditure can only reflect this unfair distribution.

"For example, it is unreasonable simply to look at the present subsidy given to small primary schools and assume that it is sufficient. It may be that the amount is all the individual education authority can afford, but its sufficiency should be determined by a more robust look at what the school can afford to provide as an educational entitlement for all its pupils.

North Yorkshire representative, Rev Francis Loftus, will also give evidence. He is concerned about the fact that the importance of small rural schools is being overlooked. He said: "Small schools cost more per pupil to run but are essential in rural areas, both

as a community focus and to ensure pupils do not spend more time travelling than being educated.”

Rev Loftus is also keen to point out that any small additional needs group within a small school becomes an even smaller ‘super sparse’ issue. “Both pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who are exceptionally able need additional challenge and opportunities. Providing for these additional needs is more costly in rural areas because of the diseconomy of scale.”

The f40 team will also flag up the fact that central costs are generally higher in rural authorities. This includes the recruitment of teaching and supply staff, which can be extremely difficult, and travel costs, including paying for the time it takes to travel, which is often not taken into account.

The final point to be raised concerns curriculum choice, such as for under-5s provision or diplomas in secondary schools. F40 will highlight the fact that choice in rural communities costs more and any choice creating small groups will come up against the ‘super sparsity’ problem. More bussing of pupils around the countryside is certainly not the answer to any rural issue.

Ends

For further information and comment please contact Doug Allan, f40 Secretariat on 07785 223707 or via email – doug@dtw.co.uk

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. F40 is a campaign group fighting for a more equitable allocation system for education funding. It is seeking a fairer share of school funding for all schoolchildren in areas of the country where funding has fallen short in the past. This includes shire counties, unitary council areas and metropolitan council areas of all political persuasions. Please see our website for education funding information – www.f40.org.uk

2. The Rural Services All-Party Parliamentary Group is currently running a short inquiry into the funding formulae for health and education in rural areas. The evidence session to be attended by f40 Group will be at 11.30am on the 23 February in Committee Room 5 at the House of Commons. The Inquiry panellists will be:

- **Philip Dunne MP** (Con, Ludlow) – Chair of the APPG and Opposition whip.
- **Graham Stuart MP** (Con, Beverley & Holderness)
- **Dan Rogerson MP** (LD, N Cornwall) – APPG committee member and Lib Dem CLG shadow.
- **Rt Hon Sir Alan Beith MP** (LD, Berwick)
- **Baroness Gibson of Market Rasen** (Lab) – Unite member and APPG committee member.
- **Lord Cameron of Dillington** (Crossbench) – Former CLA president and Rural Advocate.

4. Secretarial services for the All-Party Parliamentary Group Inquiry are being provided by Matthew Hill, Policy Officer, Commission for Rural Communities.

Contact numbers: 0300 068 6449 or 07900 608299.