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F40 authorities to continue fight for fairer funding of education

Representatives of the worst funded education authorities in England have agreed to continue their campaign for a fairer system of education funding and the removal of the current postcode lottery that impacts on children's education in many parts of the country.

Directors of Education and the f40 Groups Executive Committee met in Worcestershire at the weekend to agree the best approach to persuading the Government that the formula for education funding is still not fair and equitable.

“ Last year the government responded to pressure from across the country and changed the formula for funding education...and even pumped more money into the system as a whole” said f40 Chair Peter Clarke, who is also Leader of Gloucestershire County Council.

“But the extra funding has not lifted the position of the worst funded councils, who in the main continue to be at the bottom of the funding league, nor did the change in the funding formula correct the inequities and unfairness of the funding system.

“Whilst we have welcomed the extra money allocated to education, we deplore the fact that the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' has got bigger and that there has been no agreement about the basic entitlement for each pupil. That means that the postcode lottery, that sees pupils in some areas receiving massively greater funding than in others, continues to operate and creates a situation that parents in the worst funded areas are no longer prepared to put up with.

At the meeting it was acknowledged that f40 has successfully positioned itself as an influential group that is listened to and is having an impact in Whitehall's corridors of power. However, as f40 is just one group amongst many lobbying to be heard, it is clear that it must take a more focused approach to achieving beneficial changes in the future.

As the current formula has been set for a three-year period from 2003/04 it was agreed that future campaigning effort must be timed to influence the education settlement from 2006/07 onwards. Between now and then the Group will develop practical models for determining basic pupil entitlement that relates to real costs in f40 schools.

Recent work by the local Secondary Heads Association and the Council for assessing per pupil costs in secondary schools in East Riding of Yorkshire will be adopted and developed by a dozen other member councils to test its validity in a range of different geographical situations, both rural against urban. A working group of authorities, to take the project forward, will report back to the f40 Executive Committee in June.

Peter Clarke added: “The key messages coming from this meeting are that we wish to positively engage with the Government to find a solution to one of the most unfair funding anomalies in the education system and we want to see a simpler, more transparent, but most of all, fair system which gives a basic entitlement to every child in the country, no matter where they live.

“To achieve this we will engage the Government in a very positive way, and we will use all the parent, governor and teacher power available to us to ensure our case is heard and acted upon.”