



What will fair funding for schools and academies look like?

The f40 group of local authorities has been campaigning for fair funding for schools for over a decade. Between 2010 and 2012 there has been extensive government consultation concerning the mechanisms of school and academy funding and the operation of new distribution formula at LA level. Academies and schools in an LA area will be subject to simplified distribution rules from April 2013.

In the White Paper *'The Importance of Teaching'* attention is drawn to the unfair system with the statement "... inequalities in the funding system lead to huge variation in the money similar schools receive. We compared 72 secondary schools outside London, with similar size and intakes, and found a variation in funding per pupil from just below £4,000 to well over £5,500". The White Paper also states, "We will consult on developing and introducing a clear, transparent and fairer national funding formula based on the needs of pupils, to work alongside the Pupil Premium."

In May 2012 the document *'Next steps towards a fairer system'*, states, "The current system is opaque, inconsistent and unfair with huge differences between areas." Notwithstanding assertions that revision of local funding distributions will allow for the introduction of fairer national distribution, a decision concerning this key issue has been postponed to beyond 2015.

It is clear there is significant emphasis on the funding process rather than the outcome at school and academy level. The introduction to *'Next steps towards a fairer system'* states, "And, above all, I want a system where children in similar circumstances living in different parts of the country will attract funding on the same basis." F40 believes it is the outcome of the distribution that will make a difference to the lives of school-children and not necessarily the similarity of the basis.

The outcome of any funding distribution can only be fair at school and academy level if all pupils in the country have access to a basic minimum entitlement commensurate with high quality education that would be recognised as at least 'good' under the September 2012 Ofsted framework.

This means that schools and academies in different areas of the country facing widely different costs and challenges will need to receive sensible, justifiable and reasonable adjustments to base funding levels if they are to have equality of opportunity to deliver at the required standard. These funding differences should be for clear and acceptable reasons, based on clear empirical evidence and not rooted in historic allocations.

The difficulties of funding necessary small schools in sparse areas, in seeking to support special cases whilst not encouraging financial inefficiency and the political difficulty in having to consider the reference link between funding level and school activity, should not be underestimated. These issues will not go away.

F40's aim is simply to achieve fairer funding for all children. This means that wherever they live, all children with the same needs should have the same access to:

- teacher and teaching assistant time and attention
- the national curriculum and a wide range of other activities
- up to date resources and equipment
- extra help for special needs to ensure inclusion and personalised learning
- well managed and serviced schools.

We believe all children would then have the best opportunity to fulfil their potential and nationally attainment would rise and the gap begin to close.

F40 remains committed to working with whichever political administration is in power to achieve this long awaited outcome.