



**NOTES OF MEETING WITH MINISTER FOR SCHOOL STANDARDS, NICK GIBB MP**  
Sanctuary Building, Westminster

**Wednesday 14 December 2016**

**Present:**

Nick Gibb MP, Schools Standards Minister  
Ed Agar MP, Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Minister of State for School Standards  
Tony Foot, Director, School Funding Group  
Joel Solomon, Private Office  
Rory Gribbell, Teacher in Residence

Ivan Ould, Chair of f40 and Lead Member for Children & families, Leicestershire CC  
Vernon Coaker MP, Vice Chair of f40 (part)  
Andrew Harris, Headteacher KLB School, Gloucestershire  
Zahir Mohammed, Cabinet Member for Education & Skills, Buckinghamshire CC  
Margaret Judd, Sufficiency & Funding Team Manager, Dorset CC  
Doug Allan, Secretary to f40.

Apologies were received from Alex Chalk MP who was unable to attend due to parliamentary business.

The Minister thanked f40 for agreeing to meet him. He hoped that f40 would be pleased with the proposals. He suggested that the result should be seen as a victory for those who have campaigned for a fairer funding system. The government has decided to bite the bullet and deliver on fair funding via a new national funding arrangement.

(Much of the following discussion concerned elements of the announcement. It is not felt necessary to report in detail in this note as the announcement and consultation documentation presents all of the detail). However, relevant points follow.

IO thanked the Minister for delivering a fairer formula and said that f40 would obviously reserve further comment until it has examined the detail. He acknowledged that a change of the type being announced is always going to involve compromise and that there would inevitably be winners and losers. He hoped there would be significant gains for the poorest funded authorities, building on the £390 million previously announced and now baselined into budgets.

IO expressed concern about the fact that LAs will no longer be involved in school funding beyond 2019-20. He suggested that the local flexibility that LAs and Schools Forums contributed to the allocation arrangement would be a sad loss.

IO thanked Tony Foot for his willingness to engage with f40 over the years and expressed the hope that the constructive relationship might be maintained throughout the consultation period and beyond.

AH talked about the financial difficulties from a headteachers perspective. He was particularly concerned that the new funding formula should address historic funding anomalies and that the

Minister should recognise the cost pressures on schools. He expressed the view that a hard formula would create difficulties as it could not take into account the range of contexts in different local authorities. For example, an appropriate base budget might be different in a county with many small primary schools and large secondary schools than in an authority with larger primary schools and less variation in school size.

The Minister said that the danger of following a soft option would have been that the postcode discrepancies in allocations would continue and he wanted to avoid that as the government is committed to ending the 'postcode lottery'. He suggested that it would be possible to tweak the system after its introduction.

There was some discussion around sparsity and the lump sum and the danger that rural schools would have to close if the lump sum was set at too low a figure. The Minister suggested that the figure would be at a reasonable level.

The Minister explained that during the transition periods there would be a cap of 3% on gains in 2018/19 and 2.5% in 2019/20. For those schools which would have less funding, there would be 1.5% MFG protection in 2018/19 and 2019/20 and then cash protection at -3%.

ZM referred to the SEN situation in Buckinghamshire and the difficulties being experienced, particularly as a result of the age range expanding to cover 0-25 years. It has led to a 50% increase in caseload and a potential overspend of £3-4 million this year. Made worse by fact that the LA has no reserves left.

IO asked about Early Years and was informed that it does not feature in the fair funding consultation. Details had been announced separately on 1 December 2016.

In response to a question about growth the Minister said that growth is reflected in the new formula.

In relation to a question about LA responsibilities for things like school improvement, the Minister said that LAs will be able to charge schools for services on offer. There's also the £190m improvement fund – £50m of which will be available to LAs with the remainder going direct to schools.

MJ said the new system was introducing much more potential for high needs and LA costs to be pushed back on to schools. There will be tensions between the High Needs Block and ring-fenced funding. As LA central budgets and the high needs block are squeezed, this will inevitably lead to school budgets getting squeezed more and more but not necessarily fairly. Flexibility by LA to manage this in a fair manner would be better for schools in the long run.

In conclusion, the Minister pointed out that fair funding is about how the government distributes the pot – it's not about the size of the pot, which is a discussion for another day.

End