



September 29, 2021

Investment in education a priority as we come out of the Covid pandemic

Dear Secretary of State

I hope you are enjoying your new role as Secretary of State for Education and the enormous challenges it brings, not least as we come out of the pandemic and begin to look at how best we can bolster our education system to ensure young people reach their potential – despite the disruption to their learning.

We believe that in years to come we will be judged on how well we supported our children and how we invested in our schools, so it's vital that we act now to prevent irrevocable long-term damage.

As we await the Comprehensive Spending Review at the end of October, I hope you don't mind f40 sharing some of the key areas where we believe attention should be focused in the months ahead.

Covid recovery – We welcome the additional funding provided, however, more needs to be done to enable schools to provide extra support and learning to help pupils recover academically and emotionally from the pandemic. It has impacted widely, therefore, there is a need to ensure an appropriate level of support is provided to all children, including those in Early Years, where the greatest impact has been felt. The Recovery Premium Funding announced this month only caters to Pupil Premium children, so many will not qualify. Some schools will receive very little of this funding but still need to provide support to pupils.

SEND – This continues to be a major concern. The number of children with special educational needs, and their complexity of need, continues to grow, with demand far outstripping budgets. While we appreciate the increase in SEND funding during the last two or three years, significant additional funding is required for both mainstream and special schools. We urge Government to publish the long-overdue SEND review and to overhaul the SEND system to ensure it is fit for purpose.

Fairness – While Government is attempting to level up funding, the process is very slow and schools in some areas continue to receive far less funding than schools in other areas as many of the historic inequalities continue to be locked in. Many large rural communities and 'shire' local authorities still receive inequitably less funding, despite having sizeable pockets of deprivation. The basic entitlement should be enough to run a school, before extra money is added on for deprivation and higher area living costs. We would also like to see a National Funding Formula that is applied to a core element of spend across all schools, including MATs, with some local discretion allowed to reflect local need.

Increased funding - The pandemic has placed greater stress on already tight budgets. For a number of years, education funding has not kept pace with inflation, while the demands on schools and teachers have grown rapidly. In real terms, school funding is at 2010 levels. Education requires a substantial uplift to ensure schools are able to provide quality teaching for all.

Early years - Early Years has become a major concern throughout the pandemic, with the future of many providers hanging in the balance. Funding for free entitlement has received some support, but many providers have lost private parental income. The pandemic has also impacted on the readiness of young children to learn. Without additional funding, the effects will be felt for many years to come.

We would welcome an opportunity to meet with you to discuss these issues further.

Best wishes in your new role

James McInnes
Chair of the f40 group and Cabinet Member at Devon County Council

Cc Karen Westcott
Secretary of the f40 group