



October 28, 2022

f40 urges Government to make education and SEND a priority

Dear Prime Minister

Congratulations on your appointment as Prime Minister. We are confident that your appointment will lead to a period of stability in Government and will enable us to meet the undoubted challenges ahead of us.

I am contacting you as the Chair of f40 – the cross-party fair education funding campaign group. As the MP for Richmond (N Yorks), you will, I'm sure, be well aware of f40 and how we campaign for fair and increased funding for education, including Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

We have serious concerns about the growing financial hardship of many schools across the country, which are struggling to make ends meet during the current cost of living crisis.

We know that in the coming weeks you will be focusing your attention on budgets, and where savings can be made, and we are urging you to bolster education funding, not to reduce it.

A lack of funding in education during the last ten years has led to a crisis in both schools and SEND, and we are urging you to reverse this trend and to make education your priority during your tenure as Prime Minister.

Schools are very good at balancing their books, but that does not mean they have sufficient funding. They have cut back in all the areas they can to make their budgets stretch and are now struggling to afford a basic curriculum and the teaching and support staff they require. Some schools and MATs could be insolvent within two years if this continues.

For some schools, this means being unable to replace key staff when they leave, such as deputy headteachers; reducing support staff, which includes much needed pastoral and SEND practitioners; cutting back on activities; being unable to replace materials or repair the building; and relying more heavily on contributions from already-stretched parents.

The basic funding should be enough to run a school before add-ons for specific school and pupil needs. If the basic level of funding was enough, there would be no need to have the Minimum Per Pupil Funding Level (MPPFL), which adversely impacts many small and rural schools – many of which will be struggling in your own constituency.

Increases to the Living Wage and to teachers' pay, which we support, have presented an additional burden to schools, particularly special schools that require a higher number of support staff. Some schools are reporting a 10% rise in support staff costs alone this year, which are not being supported through additional education funding. Schools are also struggling to recruit teaching assistants and are unable to compete on pay.

f40 continues to be concerned about the fairness of funding. For those schools in receipt of the lowest funding, their problems are exacerbated even further during the cost of living crisis.

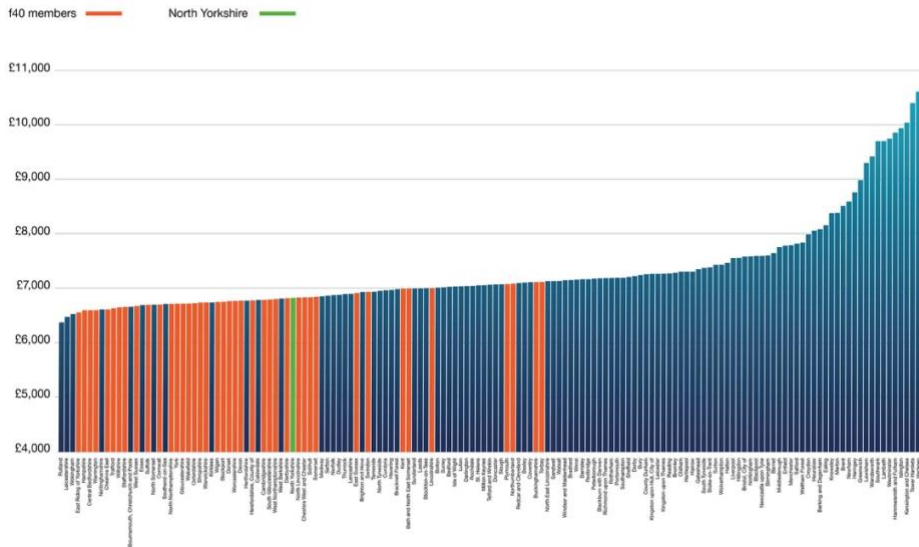
We appreciate Government has recognised the unfairness and, with the National Funding Formula, is attempting to level up – without reducing the funding provided to the better off schools – however, progress is extremely slow. At the current pace, it will take 15-20 years for the gap in funding to close. That is the education of more than a whole generation of children at stake.

We do not wish to see money taken away from the better funded schools, but we do wish to see more provided to those that are poorly funded. With the current cost of living crisis, schools are facing greater pressures than ever, and many may struggle to pay their energy costs this year.

We urge Government to act more quickly and make urgent changes to the National Funding Formula to make it fairer, more transparent, and proportionate.

You can see the variation in Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funding for local authority areas in this graph below. While we appreciate there will always need to be some variation, it is the extent of the variation that we believe is wrong. North Yorkshire DSG funding is highlighted in green.

Gross DSG allocation per mainstream pupil by local authority (July 2022)



f40 is also very concerned about the deepening SEND crisis, which requires bold and urgent improvements, as well as more funding, to ensure the most vulnerable young people are provided with the best education and support. The SEND Green Paper has many good intentions but, we fear that without significant funding, it will have no short or long-term impact.

At present, SEND funding is based on historic need and does not take into consideration the growing number of children with SEND or their increasing complexity of need. Funding has not kept pace with need, resulting in more than £1 billion overspend in local authorities across England, which is expected to rise to £2.4bn by March 2025. A copy of a letter we have sent to the SEND Review Team and Department for Education is attached here for your information.

We appreciate there are many financial pressures on Government but believe the nation's children should be a priority, and we would urge you to ensure that the impact of the cost of living crisis on education is at the forefront of your mind when making the difficult decisions that are to come.

We support the Government in its ambition to level up the country, but we strongly believe that it must start with education funding.

Best wishes in your new role as Prime Minister

Cllr Alex Dale
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Cc The Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
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