



October 31, 2022

Invitation to meet with f40 to discuss future of education

Dear Secretary of State

Congratulations on your appointment to the role of Secretary of State for Education. We appreciate the position comes with enormous responsibility and challenges, especially as we come out of the pandemic and face a cost of living crisis unlike anything we have seen for decades, so we know you will be extremely busy.

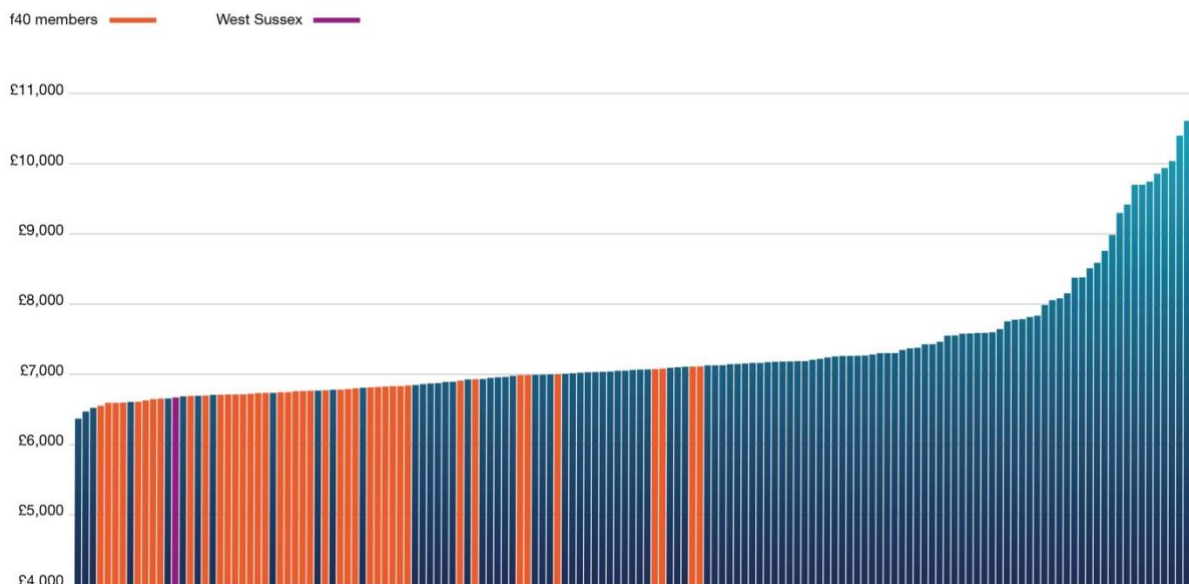
As MP for Chichester in West Sussex, you will be aware of the work of f40 and how we campaign for fair and increased funding for education, including for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Indeed, West Sussex County Council is a member of f40 as schools in the county receive the 14th lowest Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funding across England – amounting to around £4,000 less per pupil than the highest funded schools. This, we feel, is grossly unfair. However, it is not untypical for many of the f40 local authority areas and is something we would like to see addressed as quickly as possible.

We would like to meet with you to discuss the unfairness of funding, along with the need for significantly increased funding in education, and the crisis in SEND, and to share some of the ideas and solutions we have.

You can see the variation in DSG funding for local authority areas in this graph below. West Sussex is marked in purple. While we appreciate there will always be some variation, it is the extent of the variation that we believe is wrong.

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



We appreciate Government has recognised the unfairness and 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. The financial burden on the poorer funded schools will be even greater.

We urge Government to act more quickly and make urgent changes to the National Funding Formula to make it fairer, more transparent, and proportionate. Education, as a whole, requires significant additional investment if all children are to reach their potential.

Schools are very good at managing to balance 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 the teaching and support staff they require, and to offer the full curriculum and extra activities.

For some schools, this means being unable to replace key staff when they leave, such as deputy headteachers, reducing support staff, 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 for schools 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.

Increases to the Living Wage and teachers' pay awards, 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 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.

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 over a £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 would welcome an opportunity to meet with you to discuss these issues further.

Best wishes in your new role,



Cllr Alex Dale
Chair of f40, and Cabinet Member for Education at Derbyshire County Council

Cc The Rt Hon Nick Gibb
Education Minister

Cc The Rt Hon Robert Halfon
Education Minister

Cc Karen Westcott
Secretary of the f40 group