



f40 MPs' briefing in Westminster on the need for educational reform, investment, and fairer funding

April 23, 2024

Chaired by Sir Gary Streeter MP
Conservative Vice Chair of f40

	Name	Constituency	Comments made	Response from f40
1	Rt Hon Graham Stuart MP	Beverley and Holderness (Cons)	The information presented here about the SEND crisis is shocking. What can we do to help resolve it, apart from more funding?	Alex Dale, Chair of f40, said the group recognised that no matter which party is in Government after the next election, significant extra funding may not be forthcoming. He said members of the f40 Executive had looked at the key policy reforms they believed could have a big impact on the SEND crisis. He went on to outline some of those reforms, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Investing in mainstream schools to ensure they are better equipped, trained, and resourced to support inclusion.• Greater clarity on ordinarily available SEND support in mainstream schools.• Reforming SEND funding in mainstream, including the notional £6k, to ensure it supports inclusion and is ring-fenced.

			<p>Suggested f40 focus more on fairness than SEND or increased funding. He said f40 should be focusing just on the fairness of funding.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A SEND funding strategy that aligns to the SEND and AP Improvement Plan and better targets funding and focuses on early intervention. • Making schools more accountable for their inclusion, including through a greater focus on inclusion during inspections. • Better regulation of the independent SEND sector to ensure quality and value for money. • Significant additional one-off capital funding to enable every LA to expand its specialist provision. <p>Chair Alex Dale said fairness of funding continued to be a key focus for the group, and f40 was still committed to campaigning for fairness and was still regularly in talks with the DfE about levelling up. However, he said the group would take Mr Stuart's comments on board and discuss them. Alex said the SEND crisis was the biggest existential threat to LAs right now, and many discussions centred around the need to resolve the SEND crisis. He said as f40 was an LA membership group, it followed the concerns of its members.</p>
2	Rt Hon Robert Buckland KC MP	South Swindon (Cons)	<p>Said there were some excellent special SEND schools available. He said he believed there was a way forward and f40 had had some success. Believed this was a spend-to-save argument. He said by putting funding into SEND support when children were young, it would save the country more when they were older and enable people to reach their</p>	

			potential. "If this is saving us money down the line and giving life chances to people, it must be done."	
3	Kim Leadbetter MP MBE	Batley and Spen (Lab)	The system is utterly broken. People are on their knees. My area is in the bottom three for levels of funding. Schools and LAs are doing their best. These issues have not happened overnight. If we can't have the extra money, what can we do?	<p>Phil Haslett of f40 said the key things to solving the SEND crisis would be focusing money on early intervention and supporting mainstream schools to offer quality SEND support, along with additional capital funding to enable local authorities to provide more specialist provision to children with the greatest need. He said at present, LAs were spending too much on costly independent provision purely because they did not have the spaces to provide provision themselves. While it would be an initial outlay of funding for capital projects, f40 had calculated that it would instantly enable local authorities to save millions – an example is £19.5m funding for a new special school for 200 pupils would save around £6m a year when compared to what it would cost to place those children in independent provision. The school would have paid for itself in three years.</p> <p>Emily Proffitt of f40 also said there should be better transition between primary and secondary school, which would not have to cost a lot of additional money.</p>
4	Dean Russell MP	Watford (Cons)		
5	Rachael Maskell MP	York Central (Lab)	The big challenge is that there are insufficient places in special schools, so some children are not in school at all. What can we do about that?	Jackie Fieldwick of f40 said we needed more flexibility and urgency in the system to enable local authorities and providers to work together to provide additional places. She said the current system, where LAs had to bid for funding and schools were provided through the Free Schools programme, was slow and bureaucratic.

				<p>She said capital funding needed to be done very differently. She said schools should have more freedom to expand and provide support in ways that better suited pupils.</p> <p>Alex Dale, Chair of f40, said too much capital funding was being distributed through the Free School bidding process, and every area needed additional capacity in their SEND provision. Alex said the bidding process was slow and only served to further delay local authorities from decision-making around additional provision. He said more capital funding should be fairly distributed to all LAs as they knew best how additional money should be spent to meet need in their local area. For example, he said large rural counties may not want to build one large new special school and may decide, instead, to expand current SEND places across the county, both in specialist and mainstream settings.</p>
6	Sir David Davis MP	Haltemprice and Howden (Cons)		
7	Sir Jeremy Quin MP	Horsham (Cons)		
8	Sarah Dyke MP	Somerton & Frome (Lib Dem)	<p>Agreed that it was a perfect storm in SEND provision right now. She said she was concerned that SEND provision was increasingly being divided between those parents who fought and who had the money to pay for advice and support, and those who didn't. She said she was concerned about the increase in parents paying for private advocates to help them fight for specialist provision for their children.</p>	

			She requested a private meeting with f40 to discuss the issues in more detail.	
9	Andrew Lewer MP	Northampton South (Cons)	We are at a 70-year high for tax and we attend briefings for education, health, and housing etc, among others, where sectors are saying they are in crisis and need more money. What does a re-set in education and SEND look like? Is it about looking at the different levels of SEND need and how we distribute the funding, depending on the need?	Phil Haslett from f40 said investment in mainstream education was critical. He said investment in early intervention was crucial and it must be targeted funding, so that it improved the quality of provision. He said funding needed to be placed in the areas where it could have the biggest impact, and supporting mainstream schools to be more inclusive, and to help pupils when challenges were first recognised, would lead to the greatest outcomes for the crisis in SEND.
10	Peter Aldous MP	Waveney (Cons)	I have been coming to f40 meetings for 14 years. We still have not managed to get the cake distribution right. It's very difficult if we need to have a larger cake to get it right. The battle goes on.	
11	Justin Madders MP	Ellesmere Port and Neston (Lab)	Said the worst thing he had seen was independent schools paying legal fees for parents (who were fighting to get their children into independent provision). He said he understood that parents were fighting a system that was not working for them, but it also showed what local authorities were up against.	<p>Alex Dale, Chair of f40, said the group wanted to see better regulation of the independent sector. He said it could make a big difference without the need to spend too much.</p> <p>He said the independent sector was currently not regulated and there was no guarantee that independent provision was providing quality education, the level of support required, or value for money.</p> <p>Jackie Fieldwick for f40 said there was enormous demand in the SEND sector, and it was a huge industry, which had many businesses within it. Unfortunately, she said, some organisations would use the situation to their advantage and would be opportunist.</p>

12	Sally-Ann Hart MP	Hastings and Rye (Cons)	<p>Concerned that EHCPs have doubled and about the increase in autism diagnosis, speech and language issues for young children, and around young children not being prepared to start primary school. She said she was concerned that children were more anxious and not as resilient, which was leading to mental health challenges. She questioned whether both children and parents being over-exposed to screens for long periods of the day was impacting on children's sensory needs and their development and was resulting in children not having the crucial learning and development time with their parents.</p> <p>She also raised the issue of Multi-Academy Trusts 'top-slicing' the budgets of their schools, whereby they take a percentage of a school's budget to pay for centralised services. She questioned whether it left some schools worse off than others and asked how a MAT generally agreed and carried out its top-slicing procedure?</p>	<p>Jackie Fieldwick for f40 said those things were of huge concern and SEND needed a re-set. She said teenage boys accounted for the biggest cohort of people diagnosed with autism – she said a large proportion of children in her special schools had autism. She agreed that many young people experienced mental health issues and anxiety, and did not have the same resilience, but also said these were issues that increasingly also impacted on adults in the workplace, too.</p> <p>Phil Haslett said 'top-slicing' was a concern to f40 because it meant that MATS were not following the National Funding Formula, which dictated the distribution and level of funding for schools, which could leave some MAT schools with less than others. He said the likelihood was that every MAT would have their own formula for top-slicing school budgets.</p>
13	Charles George (for Steve Tuckwell MP)	Uxbridge & South Ruislip (Cons)		
14	Mark Gilmore (accompanying Sir Gary Streeter)	South West Devon (Cons)		
15	Aaron Horsley (on behalf of Keir Mather MP)	Selby & Ainsty (Lab)		
16	Ed Lidington (on behalf of Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP)	West Suffolk (Ind)		

17	Elliott Banks (on behalf of Rob Butler OBE MP)	Aylesbury (Cons)		
18	Will Elliott (on behalf of Daisy Cooper MP)	St Albans (Lib Dem)		
19	Jack Logan (on behalf of Ann Marie Morris MP)	Newton Abbott (Cons)		
20	Robyn Briggs (on behalf of Sharon Hodgson MP)	Washington and Sunderland (Lab)		
21	Harry Coulson (on behalf of Rt Hon Julian Smith MP)	Skipton and Ripon (Cons)		