

Dear MP

We write to you as concerned members of CWASH (Cheshire West Association of Secondary Headteachers).

You will know that in December the government announced the second stage of the consultation into the National Funding Formula for schools. As a consequence we must express our concerns regarding the implications of this proposal for secondary education in Cheshire West and Chester.

Following years of historic underfunding compared to other Local Authorities, we were delighted to receive a £9.4m uplift in 2015 – 2016 which was allocated by the government to bring poorer funded LAs closer to the national average; however, the new proposed formula takes away over £4m of this funding. This reduction comes at the same time as the National Audit Office confirmed that the inflationary pressures on schools throughout the lifetime of this parliament will be over 8%. The previous parliament also saw schools suffering real terms cuts.

The position for schools with sixth forms (approximately two thirds of secondary schools in CW&C) has also been adversely affected over the past five years with average per student funding decreasing by at least 12.5% since 2011.

There appears to be some fundamental flaws in the methodology used for the NFF:

- Firstly, no account is taken of the true cost of educating a child with no additional factors (such as disadvantage, EAL, etc.). The proposed formula in the consultation documents would mean for CW&C students a reduction of £141 for each Key Stage 3 student and £186 for every Key Stage 4 student. It is our view that basic AWPU amounts are simply not sufficient to provide for the sustainable education of such students. It is right that schools with higher proportions of students from disadvantaged backgrounds should receive higher levels of funding; but this should not be at the expense of basic funding for all students.

The currently proposed weighting given to additional needs rather than basic entitlement needs to be addressed - too much funding is directed towards deprivation and, when Pupil Premium is also taken in to account, this could be considered as double funding. Clarity is required between the differences as to what the deprivation funding in the main funding formula and pupil premium are supposed to support.

- Secondly, the lump sum in the formula bears little relation to the fixed costs of operating a school; this can be seen most clearly in the difference between the proposed primary and secondary lump sums. Quite simply, it suggests that little thought has gone into the real costs of providing education. For secondary schools in CW&C this represents a reduction of £65 000 per year.
- Thirdly, one of the key principles set out in Stage 1 of the consultation was that students of similar characteristics should attract similar levels of funding wherever they are in the country (allowing for area cost adjustment). When the funding formula to be implemented is deemed fair, it should be applied to all schools on a consistent basis. However, the proposed 3% funding floor "locks" in some of the historical differences for those schools which have been overfunded for several decades. Equally the cost of this protection limits the redistributive impact and will result in the continuation of different funding levels for students across the country. Stability for schools in funding is important, but not at the expense of never reaching a fair formula and outcome.

Maintaining and improving standards will be threatened if the proposals of the consultation go ahead. Given that schools have had to become more efficient in recent years due to existing real terms cuts to budgets it is inevitable that the only way of meeting further reductions will be to reduce staffing. This will mean larger classes, greater contact time for teachers and less non-teaching staff support for students; this directly risks the improvements we have seen at the secondary level over recent years – improvements that have seen significantly more CW&C students in good or outstanding schools than nationally.

We recognise that this is currently a consultation. We will be encouraging our governing bodies and parents to respond to the consultation accordingly. We feel it is vitally important that you, as our Members of Parliament, are aware of our concerns and the implications for your constituents.

Yours sincerely

CWASH HEADS