

High and Upper School Headteachers
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The Right Honourable Nick Gibb MP
Minister of State for School Standards
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
Westminster
London
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10 October 2018

Dear Mr Gibb

Thank you for your letter dated 30 June in response to our letter regarding the national funding formula, which was signed by the headteachers of twenty high and upper schools.

In your response, you wrote: "One of the core principles of the national funding formula is simplicity, and we, therefore, did not distinguish between high and upper schools and other secondary schools when designing the minimum per pupil funding levels in the formula. For the 2018-19 and 2019-20 national funding formula, we believe that a single minimum per pupil funding level for secondary schools is correct, taking into consideration the small number of schools affected by this."

We understand the rationale behind the principle of simplicity. However, simplicity should not be at the expense of fairness. It is unfair to apply a secondary minimum funding average, determined with three Key Stage 3 year groups taken into account, to high and upper schools with only one Key Stage 3 year group. It may be the case that the number of schools affected by this is small, but the impact on these schools is hugely significant in these times of general funding challenges.

We note that in the July announcement, despite your argument about simplicity and not distinguishing between high and upper schools and other secondary schools, the formula was amended for Key Stage 4-only high schools, from £4,800 to £5,100. Also, there has been an increase in minimum per pupil funding for Years 7 & 8 in middle schools from £4,200 to £4,600 (but still not the full £4,800 that the same year groups attract in secondary). While the increase in the minimum level for Years 7 and 8 in middle schools will be welcomed by them, it misses the point about where the funding anomaly exists.

The increase for Key Stage 4-only schools is 'correct' insofar as £4,600 for Years 7, 8 & 9 and £5,100 for Years 10 & 11 averages at £4,800 for Years 7 to 11, i.e. the secondary average. However, there is no change for high and upper schools which have Year 9; we appear to be the only category of school that is now missed out of the formula. Instead of £4,800, the minimum level for our schools should, using the new £4,600 and £5,100 figures, be £4,933 to achieve parity. As an example of the impact of this, high and upper schools with a published admission number of 300 are adversely affected by up to £120,000 per year.

To recognise and address the inherent unfairness of the previous arrangement of the formula for Key Stage 4-only schools but not for high and upper schools with Year 9 appears to us to be an indefensible and unreasonable position for the Department for Education to be in.

In your letter dated 30 June, you also wrote: "If local authorities believe that this element of the formula does not work for schools in their area, they are able to reflect this in their local formulae." While this is technically correct, it is not a workable solution. You will be well aware that changing the local formulae to address the anomaly for our schools would mean disadvantaging other schools in our respective authorities. Clearly we are arguing for the aggregate pot to be greater to address the unfairness, not for others to be penalised.

The current stance adopted by the Department for Education as it affects high and upper schools remains unfair. We request that you commit now to addressing this in the arrangements for 2020-21, as you did for Key Stage 4-only schools for 2019-20. We await your response.

Yours sincerely

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Astley Community High School

Steve Wilkes
Acting Headteacher
Berwick Academy

Simon Ascroft
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Biddulph High School

Alun Harding
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Maurice Hall
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Phillip Jones
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Helen Loughran
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Hugh Robinson
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