

Slough Schools Forum

16 January 2017

Rt Hon Justine Greening MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

Dear Ms Greening

We are writing on behalf of maintained schools and academies in Slough at the request of the Slough Schools Forum to raise urgent concerns, in particular regarding the lack of funding for new school places.

Draft budgets presented by the Local Authority to the Schools Forum for 2017/18 include several changes, not to the factors in the local formula itself, but to the flow of funding from central government as well as top slice proposals at local level.

All of these will impact adversely on schools' budgets. However, the issue of utmost concern relates to the funding of new school places.

Slough has frequently featured amongst the top ten Local Authorities in terms of the rapid growth in pupil numbers. As a Schools Forum, we have, year on year, created a Growth Fund of circa £1 - £1.5 million by top slicing the Schools Block element of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). Schools in both primary and secondary phases have made exceptional efforts to support the provision of school places by being willing to have bulge classes, provide additional places above PAN and by working collaboratively to open Free Schools.

For 2017/18 we understand that, quite apart from the DSG meeting the cost of the Growth Fund, a further 361 new school places in opening / growing free schools will not be funded by the DFE and are planned to become a liability for the existing DSG. This will take a further £1.75 million off the DSG and this will therefore come directly from the budgets of other schools in Slough.

One of the fundamental tenets of the Government's 'Fair Funding' proposals is the principle of equitable funding for every area and every child, including the provision of a 'Basic Entitlement' for every child in every school. There are significant numbers of pupils in Slough schools who are not being funded by central government - a position which is now untenable.

We therefore request that, in areas of ongoing high levels of pupil growth, the places in new schools be fully funded from day one and not subsidised from other children's entitlement.

The negative impact of this ongoing erosion of schools' budgets is very real. There are schools in Slough that have been on the minimum funding guarantee for five years and this, coupled with cost pressures identified by you at the DFE of between 10 and 12%, in a cash level environment, has already led to redundancies, contraction in curriculum breadth and larger class sizes. The impact of these are being felt in teaching and learning and in the ability to respond fully to the increasing needs and complexity of children and young people with SEND.

Chair	Maggie Waller	c/o Holy Family Catholic School, High Street, Langley, Berkshire SL3 8NF	07974 571522	maggieeducation@aol.com
Vice-Chair	John Constable	c/o Langley Grammar School, Reddington Drive, Langley, Berkshire SL3 7QS	01753 598356	johnconstable@lgs.slough.sch.uk

These pressures are coupled with further proposals from the Local Authority to top slice the Schools Block to move money to the High Needs Block. This is to deal with historical overspends incurred prior to the Slough Children's Trust being put in place and to support the recovery of services to an acceptable standard.

As Slough was identified as a Local Authority causing enough concern to warrant the intervention of a Trust, then it should also be recognised by central government that it may well need extra financial support to address those concerns. We would welcome a clear explanation as to why requests by the LA for such support have been turned down – this refusal has led to the proposal to top slice the DSG which will have a negative impact on children and young people across Slough.

In addition to the issues raised above in terms of the overall DSG, we are also concerned about the impact of changes to IDACI and the reduction in social deprivation funding. Compared to 2015-16, over 3,500 children in Slough no longer receive deprivation funding following the adoption of the 2015 IDACI; the circumstances of these children have not changed, and the reality is that there are increasing numbers of new arrivals and vulnerable children and families in Slough who need early intervention and support.

Schools Forum genuinely believes that the situation in Slough will no longer be tenable into 2017/18. Children in schools in Slough achieve well and the schools are at the forefront of creative solutions to meeting the need for new school places and taking on the responsibilities of a school-led self-improving system. However, this creativity and innovation come at a cost – a cost not being met by central government.

Voicing our very real concerns in this letter arises from a genuine belief that the situation schools and academies face in Slough simply cannot continue. We ask that this letter is taken seriously as a formal request for the funding of the 361 new school places to be met and for the concerns raised in this letter to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Maggie Waller
Chair of Slough Schools Forum

John Constable
Vice-Chair of Schools Forum

To:

Nick Gibb MP, Minister of State for School Standards, Department for Education
Lord Nash, Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Department for Education
Peter Lauener, Chief Executive and Accounting Officer, Education Funding Agency
Andrew McCully, Director General, Infrastructure and Funding

Cc

Fiona Mactaggart, MP for Slough
Roger Parkin, Interim Chief Executive, Slough Borough Council
Jo Moxon, Interim Director of Children's Services, Slough Borough Council