

Will you help protect your child's education?

A public statement by secondary Headteachers in the London Borough of Sutton.

Schools are having to make cuts to staffing and resources. This is because schools' budgets have been cut by 8 – 10% in real terms over the last few years as unfunded pay rises, increased pension and NI costs and "taxes" such as the Apprenticeship Levy have meant schools have less money. This means cuts in other areas of the school to fund these extra costs.

The future looks bleak. Next year sees more expenses for schools. Inflation is increasing too. Local Authority cuts means that schools are expected to do more with less. Schools haven't had an increase to help with extra costs for a number of years. In Sutton, the Local Authority is proposing to cut basic school funding next year to help meet other costs especially higher costs for students with high needs. We are close to crisis.

Schools will have to consider fewer teachers, larger classes, less choice, less support for students and families, fewer opportunities, trips or co-curricular activities. In some areas of the country, schools are already cutting school hours. Others are suggesting a four day week to reduce staffing demand and utility bills.

Headteachers are not known for their militancy. However this information, sent **to all parents of secondary age children in the London Borough of Sutton**, is a cry for help. We need you to help us signal to local and central government that school funding is in crisis. They are not listening to us and we hope they might instead listen to you.

We would not contact you in this way if the situation wasn't desperate. Please take a little time to draft an e-mail or a letter to those who you have elected to speak on your behalf and encourage all you know, in whichever part of the country, to do the same.

Funding cuts in the news

- National Audit Office assessment <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Financial-sustainability-of-schools.pdf>
- How my school is losing the battle with funding cuts <https://www.tes.com/news/school-news/breaking-views/how-my-school-losing-battle-funding-cuts>
- Cash strapped schools consider four day week <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/oct/03/cash-strapped-schools-consider-introducing-four-day-week>
- Heads Warn of 'extremely bleak' funding problems <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-38557843>
- West Sussex governors threaten strike <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-38798306>

How can I help?

Please write to your MP (his/her details can be found here – <http://www.ukpolitical.info/Finder.htm> – and express your concerns.

Seek assurances that:

- Schools will no longer be hit with unfunded increases in staffing costs
- Lobby for an exemption from the Apprenticeship Levy.

If you feel strongly against the proposed cuts by Sutton Local Authority which will have an impact on every single child, write to the Leader of the Council, Ruth Dombey, prior to their meeting on Monday 20th February 2017 – ruth.dombey@sutton.gov.uk

Background

Since 2012 we have accepted our duty to assist with the implementation of the cuts necessary to help stabilise the nation's finances. Whilst they have been painful, by and large we have kept our concerns to ourselves and done the best we can in the interests of the communities we serve. However the current situation and the prospects for the future are dire. As a group of secondary heads, we believe you have a right to know and a right to make your voice heard on the matter because it has an impact on your children.

The government repeatedly makes three claims in response to questions about school funding:

1. The National Funding Formula will end historic discrepancies and make the system fairer.
2. The government has protected core schools' funding "and it is now at a record level - more than £40bn this year".
3. There is significant scope for schools to make efficiencies

Source: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-38854276>, accessed 08/02/2017]

So let's deal with each of these in turn. The National Funding Formula does not involve an increase in school funding nationally, but rather a re-distribution of inadequate funding. In the second stage consultation which details how this new formula will be calculated, many schools in Sutton may benefit. But all this will do is **partially** offset other cuts.

'Core school funding' is a clever turn of phrase. It refers only to 11-16 education. There have been enormous cuts to per pupil in 16-19 (sixth form) funding since 2012, so that to educate a Sixth Form student we receive only £4000 per annum – hundreds of pounds lower than for a Year 7 student.

We do not contest that in a difficult economic climate efficiencies were necessary. Indeed since 2012 we have been making these efficiencies in every possible area of school spending. Make no mistake about it however, for most schools, the 'efficiencies' which the government now speak of can only mean much larger classes or loss of subjects as a result of employing even fewer staff.

Set out below, to enable you to unpick the rhetoric, is the full extent of the increases in costs and cuts that schools have been managing.

The detail

- Sutton Local Authority is currently suggesting that it will plug a hole in its finances by cutting 0.5% from the budget it devolves to all secondary and primary schools.
- Sixth Form funding has been reduced by 12%.
- In 2012 the government introduced a cap on public sector pay rises at 1%. These 1% pay rises are awarded each year but unfunded; this means that schools are paying more every year for the same staff and have to cut other areas of school life to pay for this.
- The government has recently introduced a 0.5% Apprenticeship Levy which applies to all institutions with a pay roll of over £3 million. This applies to most secondary schools and is unfunded. This means, again, we have to cut other areas of school life.
- The government has removed the Education Services Grant (ESG) going forward which was £77 per pupil to provide essential services. This is a straight forward cut.
- The government has increased employer contributions to National Insurance, the Teachers' Pension Scheme and Local Government Pension Scheme significantly. This is likely to continue. These extra costs for large secondary schools comes to over half a million pounds each year (compared to three years ago).

You will see that these cuts and increased costs are extensive and deep. As a result, we must solicit your support in order for us to champion your child's education and hence safeguard their future.