Funding cuts across almost all UK schools

Tom Pearce
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Conservative Education Secretary Justine Greening has unveiled proposals for a new "fairer funding" formula for UK schools. This was originally promised by former Prime Minister David Cameron, but was delayed by his resignation in the aftermath of June's referendum vote to leave the European Union.

In the Theresa May government's autumn statement, Chancellor Philip Hammond made no attempt to address the funding crisis wracking schools. Instead he pledged £240 million to expand grammar schools on the basis that selective education helped poorer children.

Under conditions in which many schools are struggling with declining revenue and increased class sizes, some are taking desperate action to avoid closure. Still, thousands of struggling schools are set to lose further money from their budgets as a result of the government's changes.

The new funding formula was announced on the same day the National Audit Office warned that schools in England were facing an 8 percent real-terms cut in funding per pupil by 2019-20 as a result of £3 billion worth of cuts. The proposals show the government's shakeup of school funding is just another attack in a long line of cuts to education. Rather than providing more money and bolstering budgets, the government's proposals shift funding from one county or city and redistributes it to other parts of the country.

More than 9,000 schools in England will lose funding, with money moving from London and other urban centres that have been well funded in the past, to schools in areas that receive less money.

It therefore means substantial cuts in funding across England. The cuts will be felt most in Inner London, where there is to be a -2.4 percent change in per-pupil funding. However, even the increased funding is miniscule, with the North-west of England gaining a paltry 0.1 percent, the West Midlands 0.3 percent and the North East and outer London 1.0 percent.

The areas that are set to "benefit" still only receive the smallest of increases in funding. These are in Yorkshire & Humber and the East of England at 1.5 percent, the South-west at 2.2 percent, the South-east at 2.3 percent, and the East Midlands gaining 2.5 percent more per pupil.

In her statement, Greening said, "Our proposed reforms will mean an end to historical unfairness and underfunding for certain schools." However, the impact of these changes actually means, according to Adrian Prandle, director of economic strategy at the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), that "around 90 percent of schools would see a real-terms cut to their funding."

Even in areas that are receiving a marginal increase, there are disparities, with schools in Barnsley, South Yorkshire, and Knowsley, Merseyside looking set to gain slightly while the large cities of Manchester and Liverpool will have an average cut of 2.2 percent per pupil. Calculations by the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and the ATL show that in the city of Salford in the North-west of England, school budgets face real term cuts of over £9 million by 2020. A loss of 252 teachers and £320 per pupil is forecast.

The government proposals come in the wake of a crisis of funding that has already had a detrimental impact across every aspect of education. Thousands of smaller primary and secondary schools in England are becoming financially unviable.

Last month, the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) released a statement that one-form entry primaries and secondaries with 600 pupils or fewer will "fall off a cliff" financially unless new funds are found. Malcolm Trobe, interim general secretary of the ASCL, said, "At some smaller schools, the funding will become such that they would not be able to support their teaching infrastructure. They will not be

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financially viable."

Schools across the UK have already cut support staff to balance budgets. In addition, the profession is struggling to hold onto new teachers. Schools Minister Nick Gibb revealed in a written parliamentary answer that almost a third of new teachers had left the sector between 2010 and 2015.

A joint statement from heads' and teachers' unions—ASCL, the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT), NUT, ATL and Voice—reiterated the situation, saying that schools "urgently need additional investment."

"We are already seeing job losses, increased class sizes and cuts to courses in our schools and colleges," it read, and schools "urgently need additional investment."

So fragile is the situation in some areas that several school leaders have suggested they might find solutions to funding issues by sharing specialist teachers with a group of neighbouring schools. Alternatively, they might choose to share some of their support services. Some local authorities are considering moving to a four-day week in order to keep their schools operating.

In response, the Department for Education continued spouting the fiction that education budgets have been protected. It stated, "[T]he schools budget has been protected and in 2016-17 totals over £40bn, the highest ever on record."

It claimed the "fairer funding proposals will ensure that areas with the highest need attract the most funding and end the historic unfairness in the system."

The NUT and the ATL have mapped the changes to school funding with an interactive programme that shows the effect on every school in England and Wales. The research, based on published school funding data for 2016/17 and 2014/15, shows that 83 percent of UK schools are worse off in real terms since the Conservatives took office.

GHYPERLINK "https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/planned-la-and-school-expenditure-2016-to-2017-financial-year"overnment statistics on planned local authorities and school expenditure for the next financial year show that, even without considering inflation, levels of funding per pupil have dropped since 2012.

Last month, the NUT and the ATL held a special conference to amalgamate the two unions to form a new body called the National Education Union. The decision will now be put to the members of both unions for approval in ballots to be held in the spring term.

However, the fight for fairer funding for schools cannot be won through the existing trade unions or by creating new ones. The teachers' unions, including the NUT and the ATL, have overseen the decimation of education by successive governments. Cuts to pensions, the introduction of performance related pay and the academies programme—which have rapidly privatised education—have proceeded without opposition from the unions.

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