

UK school funding crisis worsens

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The majority of schools in the UK are facing an unprecedented funding problem. Many schools are being forced to ask for parent contributions for essential resources.

According to the National Education Union (NEU)—recently created from the merger of the National Union of Teachers and Association of Teachers and Lecturers—88 percent of schools face a real terms cut despite the announcement from the ruling Conservatives that there will be more funding by 2019.

Over the last five years, the ever-worsening situation has been opposed by campaign groups and teachers, who have demanded equal allocation of funding among schools as well as increased funding. In response to criticism, in July the government promised an additional £1.3 billion in a package of “fairer funding.”

With the extra money, total budgets are to increase to £2.6 billion for schools in England over the next two years. This was described by Education Minister Justine Greening as a “historic reform.” The truth is that no extra spending at all is being allocated by the Department of Education (DoE) as the £1.3 billion is coming from “efficiency savings” from its existing budget.

Some £420 million of the savings will be cut from the DoE’s capital budget. Further savings of £250 million will be made in 2018-19 and £350 million in 2019-20 from the Department’s resource budget, with £200 million to be taken away from its central school improvement programme.

Despite the hype from the Tories as they announced the details of the new package last month, the money being provided falls far short of what is needed and will hardly make any difference to the situation facing the majority of schools. The increase equates to just 0.5 percent per pupil from the next school year, and a one percent increase from 2019-20. Some schools will receive extra funding but the average primary school

will still lose £52,546 per year and the average secondary school £178,321 per year.

According to the Association of School and College Leaders, schools require a further £2 billion a year between now and 2020 if they are to be able to deal with previous budget cuts. Since 2015 alone, schools have suffered a real terms cut in funding of £2.7 billion.

Many inner city areas of the UK will lose out in the new funding formula. This is because the funding is largely being redistributed from schools in one area of the UK to top up another. The borough of Tower Hamlets in London is set to lose a projected £19 million by 2020.

Figures provided by the Department of Education show a total of 9,438 schools, or one-in-three, are already in the red. In east London alone, over 200 schools were in deficit in 2015-16.

A new survey by the National Education Union found that primary pupils will in fact attract five percent less funding in real terms by 2020, compared with 2015—a £201 cut per pupil.

Like other public-sector services, state education is being pushed to a breaking point as a step towards further privatisation and the establishment of a two-tier system.

A report by the Parent Teacher Association found that out of 1,507 families, a third of parents regularly gave money to school to subsidise funds in the past year. More than half the schools surveyed were asking parents to contribute. This is not something that parents are legally required to do in the UK, but schools asking for funds has become commonplace.

Parents report that they are contributing money to provide the essentials, which many expect to be provided by the state. Some examples include asking parents to provide stationary and books. Almost a fifth of parents have been asked to provide essentials such as toilet paper.

Some schools are asking for voluntary contributions of around £10-£30 a month to top up their funding. Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) said, “This takes us to the very edge of what state education should be doing, if we are starting to ask parents for [toilet paper].”

Schools have also asked for donations from businesses to provide basic necessities, resulting in further reliance on the private sector.

A survey of teachers by the *Times Educational Supplement* (TES) found that nearly four-in-ten (39 percent) respondents said their school asked parents for money to help with school funding last year. More than two-thirds (68 percent) said their school asked parents to pay to attend school concerts and sports events. Over a fifth (22 percent) of schools asked parents to pay for books. Some 22 percent of parents were paying for design technology and 21 percent for art materials.

Workers employed in schools are also picking up the bill. A survey, carried out by the NEU in August and September of just over 1,800 school staff in England, revealed that 94 percent “paid for classroom resources or equipment from their own pocket in the last school year, with a third (33 percent) saying they spent more last year than in previous years. Nearly two-thirds (61 percent) said they did so because their school did not have enough funds.”

It also noted, “Over a quarter (26 percent) of them spent between £101 and £500 of their own money on school resources last year and nearly a third (31 percent) between £51 and £100. Seven-in-ten (73 percent) said they paid for stationery, nearly six-in-ten (58 percent) said they bought books and four-in-ten (43 percent) bought art materials.”

While the NEU carries out such surveys, the teaching unions have done nothing to mobilise their members, who are angered by the dire crisis in school age education. Apart from the NEU creating and updating their website *School Cuts*, the only action they are planning is a lobby of parliament on October 24.

The “campaign” of the NEU is encapsulated in all of 90 words on its website and is aimed at telling its members to appeal to the good graces of a government which has imposed over a hundred billion in austerity measures in the last seven years to desist!

It states, “MPs will be asked to put pressure on the

Chancellor to find the funding needed to reverse the cuts and invest in our children and young people, a month before he is set to deliver his budget statement.”

The only call on its members to do anything is that they “Use the form [on the NEU’s website] to request a meeting with your MP and tell us you will attend the lobby ...”

Included in the MPs that NEU members are being asked to arrange meetings with are the 316 Tory MPs who openly support the cuts.

At its annual conference in April, the then National Union of Teachers (NUT)—now the NEU—backed industrial action over the education funding crisis. The union, however, took no action in the summer term. This was despite a motion being passed which led to General Secretary Kevin Courtney—a supporter of the pseudo-left Socialist Workers Party—declaring that strike action would be considered. This was to be confined to regions of the country where schools are the worst hit by funding cuts.

Since then, talk of action has disappeared altogether, despite the newly created union being able to count on the backing of 450,000 teachers, lecturers and support staff.



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