

TO: The Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

CC: Ed Davey, MP for Kingston and Surbiton
Munira Wilson, MP for Twickenham
Sarah Olney, MP for Richmond Park
Julia Kinniburgh, Director General for Skills Group

17th July 2023

Re: Impact of school funding in Richmond and Kingston Boroughs

Dear Ms. Keegan,

We are chairs of governors at schools in South West London who are extremely concerned about how inadequate school funding is impacting every area of school life.

Will you meet with us so we can show you the impact that it is having?

Many of our school leaders and staff are at breaking point. They are amazing people who “just get on with it”, which they have done for several years now. They go above and beyond to ensure that children do not suffer because of insufficient funding.

But this comes at a huge cost, taking an enormous toll on our staff and our school leaders. We know that additional funding is on its way to schools but – once this and added costs are factored in – we are only back to where we were in 2010. And it simply isn't enough.

These are the main problems our schools are facing:

- **Budgets:** Many of our schools are running budget deficits for the first time. Others are depleting their reserves. This year's unfunded teacher pay rise and the uncertainty around next year's settlement is making it difficult for schools to plan. Some of our schools' energy bills have tripled, with one school paying £78,000 more than a year ago. Others have been forced to ask parents for donations or set up Amazon wishlists for everything from pencils to tissue boxes. Our budgets are, in many instances, not even covering the basics.

If we are to balance our budgets, we must cut staff or other provision. We and our school leaders are bearing the stress of this uncertainty, with far too little Government support.

- **Recruitment:** Experienced staff are leaving the profession and our schools are struggling to recruit. We find it particularly difficult to recruit subject leaders, so their responsibilities fall on other classroom teachers. Many secondary schools cannot find the specialist teaching staff for all subjects, so they combine the roles - meaning that many children are not taught by a specialist in their subject.

It is too difficult to recruit admin and support staff as they can get higher pay elsewhere. This adds to the workload of existing staff and makes the recruitment crisis worse.

- **Staff wellbeing:** We are deeply concerned for the wellbeing of our staff. Headteachers, particularly in primary schools, are spending more and more time in the classroom or on other tasks that distract from their ability to work at a strategic level. In one school, the headteacher has taken on caretaking responsibilities, including litter-picking and cleaning up fox faeces, because the school cannot afford temporary cover until a new premises assistant starts in September.

- **Workload:** Staff sickness has increased markedly since the pandemic, yet our schools struggle to cover these absences. This is due in part to a lack of supply staff. However, the largest factor is budget restrictions. It means that we must organise cover from within our existing staff - often our school leaders. Headteachers are spending more and more time in the classroom rather than focusing on their own responsibilities.
- **Buildings:** When budgets are so tight, it becomes harder and harder to justify spending our grant funding on school maintenance and IT hardware once we have exhausted our Devolved Formula Capital funding. This means that many of our school buildings and IT equipment are left to deteriorate.
- **Extra-Curricular Activities:** More and more families cannot pay for after-school clubs or school trips, and our budgets rarely stretch to supporting them. Schools are booking fewer of these clubs and activities. The most vulnerable children are missing out on these valuable experiences.
- **SEND:** The number of children who need additional learning support or who have social, emotional, behavioural or mental health challenges has grown since the pandemic. Yet squeezed budgets mean that our schools have no choice but to cut back on teaching assistants and learning support assistants. EHCPs are becoming harder to secure, meaning that our school budgets must pick up the slack.
- **Free School Meals:** With caterers increasing the price of school meals due to spiralling food costs, we have little choice but to pass these rises on to parents, putting more financial pressure on families when they are already struggling. In addition, funding for free infant school meals is only £2.41, when schools in our boroughs are paying around £2.52 per meal to the caterers under our existing contracts. Schools must make up the shortfall. A three-form entry infant school in our area is around £4,000 a year out of pocket.

We know that these challenges are not limited to South West London, and that schools across London and, indeed, across the country are struggling with similar issues.

We would welcome the opportunity to talk to you about what is happening in our schools and the impact it is having on our pupils and staff. When are you available to meet?

Yours sincerely,

Alex Axiom, CoG, Orleans Primary, Richmond Borough
 Alice Bishop, CoG, St Stephens CofE Primary, Richmond Borough
 Jen Buckley, CoG, Stanley Primary, Richmond Borough
 Catherine Chevalier, CoG, Archdeacon Cambridge's CofE Primary School, Richmond Borough
 Julia Cole, CoG, Hampton Wick Infant & Nursery School, Richmond Borough
 Sarah Dietz, CoG, Turing House School, Richmond Borough
 Mike Dormer, CoG, Chase Bridge Primary School, Richmond Borough
 Jamie Grant, CoG, Federation of Tolworth Infants & Nursery and Tolworth Juniors, Kingston Borough
 Mary Hawes, CoG, St Mary and St Peter CofE Primary, Richmond Bough
 Jason Hughes, CoG, Richmond Upon Thames School, Richmond Borough
 Claudia Huwendiek, CoG, St Paul's CofE Primary, Kingston Hill, Kingston Borough
 Clare Jones, CoG, St Edmund's Catholic Primary & Nursery School, Richmond Borough
 Rachel Lambert, CoG, Malden Manor Primary School, Kingston Borough
 Deb Long, CoG, Carlisle & Hampton Hill Federation, Richmond Borough
 Luke Parker, CoG, St Richard Reynolds Catholic College, Richmond Borough
 Caroline Rayfield, CoG, St Mary's CofE Primary School, Richmond Borough
 Tim Sandford, CoG, Coombe Hill Infants, Kingston Borough
 Lorraine Slattery, CoG, Alexandra Primary School, Kingston Borough
 Andrew Tanner, CoG, Waldegrave School, Richmond Borough