

Letter from Barnet head teachers on the issue of school funding

26th November 2018

As you will be aware, head teachers of nursery, primary, secondary and special schools in the London Borough of Barnet are committed to providing a world class education for your children. We have, for some time now, developed powerful and effective partnerships which see us working together to secure high quality provision across all of our schools.

We are concerned that current levels of funding are now seriously threatening this high quality provision.

On 23rd November 2018, headteacher representatives met with Nick Gibb, Minister of State for School Standards, and Mike Freer, MP for Finchley and Golders Green, and presented a briefing paper, setting out the following points:

Barnet: A borough of excellence

There is considerable externally verified data to support our assertion that Barnet is delivering a world class education offer to your children.

- 95.5% of pupils in Barnet Primary and Secondary schools attend a good or outstanding school, all secondary schools are graded good or outstanding
- Attainment in the Year 1 Phonics screening is in the top 10% nationally
- End of Key Stage 2 attainment in Reading, Grammar, Punctuation and Maths is in the top 10% nationally
- Progress between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 in all subjects is significantly better than national
- End of Key Stage 4 GCSE attainment and progress is in the top 5% nationally (Including Progress 8 and Attainment 8)
- End of Key Stage 5 A Level attainment is in the top 5% nationally
- The highest progress 8 score in the London regions was achieved by Barnet, at 0.58
- There is accelerating progress of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils in order to close the gap between them and their peers
- Most schools are full and/or oversubscribed

The borough has a dedicated and high achieving group of schools who are committed to maintaining these standards. However increasing pressure on budgets with rising costs of services which are not met by current and anticipated levels of income means that there is a real risk that many of these standards will not be maintained.

Barnet: context of the borough

A number of contextual problems present Barnet schools with particular challenges:

- The extremely high cost of living makes it very difficult to attract staff to an area where they are not able to afford accommodation.
- This is compounded by proximity to other boroughs where the cost of living is lower (eg Hertfordshire) or where Inner London weighting affords higher salaries (eg Camden or Haringey).
- Whilst Barnet is generally an affluent Borough, approximately 16% of children under five live in the 30% most deprived Local Super Output Areas. 19% of children under five

(5,000 children) live in low income families, defined as those in receipt of Child Tax Credit and either on benefits (Income Support or Jobseekers allowance) or earning less than 60% of the median income.

- Barnet is an inclusive authority, given that 57% of pupils (997 of a total of 1751 in 2014) with a statement of Special Educational Needs or Educational Health Care Plan maintained by the council are placed in mainstream settings. A level which is significantly higher than statistical neighbours and other Outer London Boroughs, where larger proportions attend specialist provision.

Barnet Schools – the decisions we are making and the potential impact of these

Schools across Barnet, as in all local authorities, have been tackling the ongoing financial challenges of reduced budgets and increased financial expenditure owing to nationally driven decisions. Additionally, a proposal has been issued to all Barnet schools surrounding the future of school funding in Barnet. Chiefly, per child funding is continuing to decrease while costs increase.

Barnet schools have been impacted by the financial decisions made at a national level, alongside all other schools:

- Increased pension costs
- Increased National Insurance costs
- Teacher increased pay award
- Unified Pay Award for support staff
- Inflationary increases

In addition to these challenges Barnet has now issued all schools with a consultation surrounding the future of school funding. Schools recognise the financial pressures of the local authority which must cut spending by 50% across the period of 2011 and 2020, with further savings needed after 2020. However, schools are concerned about their financial sustainability and ability to continue to provide high quality educational provision if these cuts are actioned. Chiefly concerns lie with:

- Reduction of funded services to maintained schools, aside from statutory services
- Further cuts in front line education or children's social care services
- All school improvement services moving to a traded services, for maintained schools alongside academies
- The transfer of 0.5% of schools block funding to the high needs block in 2019 2020
- Potential direct cuts to SEN funding, likely in the area of top ups, direct funding provision in schools, cuts in therapy services or specialist inclusion services

Following a series of head teacher meetings across the borough, all headteachers were asked to respond to detail how they have adapted their provision to cope with the ever increasing financial pressures and the 56 schools reported the following:

- Staffing reduction of teaching and non-teaching posts
- Curriculum reduction across all key stages, this was chiefly seen at Key Stage Four and Five where a number of subjects have been cut by all schools. This suggests these courses are becoming inaccessible to students across the borough, identified subjects seem to be across the arts, sports and foreign languages.
- Increase in class sizes or merging of classes.

- Reduction in interventions to support students who start below expected standard, fall behind, are identified as vulnerable, have SEN or complex behavioural needs.
- Reduction of specialist support staff such as Teaching Assistants, Counsellors and Learning Mentors
- Inability to fund alternative provision and specialist support for vulnerable students, those with SEN or at risk of exclusion
- Not replacing ICT equipment
- Reducing or stopping budget allocation for the school library
- Reduction in spend on premises maintenance
- Increase in Planned Admission Numbers (PAN)
- Reduction in departmental budgets
- Reduction in staff training and development budgets, a particular area of concern owing to the national curriculum and examination board changes at all key stages
- Reduction in school leadership teams
- Increase in teaching allocation of headteachers and deputy headteachers
- Increased contact time for teachers
- Reduction of extra-curricular and/or enrichment programmes
- Reduction of staff used for supervision of breaks and lunchtimes
- Any previous financial reserves having been exhausted
- Increased teacher workload
- Challenges of complex students, those identified as vulnerable, SEN, EAL or with behavioural needs not being met and the additional disproportionate impact on the wider school
- Inadequate meeting of needs in relation to mental health and emotional well-being of students when these challenges continue to increase
- Seeking additional funding from parents
- Leadership time focused on fundraising
- Premises decline and health and safety concerns
- No financial reserves to meet emergency needs
- Reduced curriculum, teaching and learning innovation
- Non specialist teaching
- Split classes

Concerns for the future:

It was clear from the Headteacher responses that schools have been working increasingly hard to plug gaps in funding but the situation has become unsustainable. These points have been raised with Nick Gibb, Schools Minister and Mike Freer MP. We have asked that the Minister raises these concerns with the Secretary of State for Education and the Treasury. We felt that the Minister listened to our views and we are looking for parents to support the efforts of schools to secure the funding needed to maintain the high standards of education Barnet has delivered for many years and would hope to maintain.

Barnet Primary and Nursery Headteachers' Forum & Barnet Secondary Headteachers' Forum