

**Report of the Cabinet Member  
Children's Services and Schools**

I have been asked to report as follows for Full Council on 3 December 2020:

1. By Councillor Hannaford on the ongoing additional costs to Devon's schools from the Covid 19 pandemic, and what work is being done to secure additional funding.

**Response**

I would first like to put on public record my thanks for the way Devon's headteachers, teachers and school and college staff have risen to the challenge of educating our children throughout this pandemic.

As well as helping children catch up with their learning after the first lockdown, they've been confronted with the huge task of making schools as safe as possible for children to return. And they've been juggling with cases of Covid in both staff and children and organising for bubbles and, in some cases, whole year groups to self-isolate.

On top of that, they've had to reorganise timetables in some cases and arrange for supply cover.

That places a tremendous pressure on them and obviously adds to their costs.

In the last academic year, schools were offered extra financial help from the Government to compensate for the extra costs of Covid. So far that support has not been repeated in this academic year.

I have already written to the Education Secretary calling for better compensation for schools for Covid costs:

**Williamson letter - attached appendix 1**

As you know I am chairman of f40, and the organisation has also written a very detailed letter to Mr Williamson:

**f40 letter – attached appendix 2**

In addition I have met with officials responsible for finance at the DfE. They have told us they are looking at the pressures and are intending to put a plan together.

Dawn Stabb also has raised this issue in her regular meetings with the DfE regional directorate. We are both lobbying as hard as we can.

I was asked about the specific costs of Covid for schools but obviously this varies enormously in a county like Devon where we have primaries with just 20 or 30 pupils up to those getting on for 600 children and secondaries with below 1,000 up to some of the largest in the country with well over 2,000.

So, these figures are for an urban primary with just over 200 pupils. Their extra costs up to the end of November include £6,902 for cleaners, cleaning materials and masks and hand gel and a loss of revenue of £7,920 from lettings income.

**James McInnes**

Cabinet Member

Children's Services and Schools

Secretary of State for Education  
Gavin Williamson

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20 October 2020

Dear Mr Williamson,

I am writing to you as deputy leader of Devon County Council and the Cabinet Member responsible for schools as well as the National Chairman of f40.

I want to highlight the difficulties that many schools in Devon, and nationally, are having in trying to balance their budgets because of the extra costs of dealing with the Covid-19 crisis.

Schools in Devon have done a remarkable job since the start of the pandemic in providing an education for our children. First for the children of key workers and vulnerable children, later for all pupils in Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 in our primaries and then for Years 10 and 12 in our secondaries.

Since the start of the new academic year in September all of our schools have been open to all pupils. Despite a number of schools having to send home some year groups or bubbles to self-isolate, our latest figures show a 93 percent attendance rate.

So our schools and my hard-pressed education officers have done everything that has been asked of them, particularly in giving parents the reassurances on safety they needed to send their children back to the classroom in the first place.

Apart from the human cost, this has also come at a financial cost. Schools have been scrupulous in ensuring their premises have been kept clean and stocked with hand sanitiser and other essentials, but this has meant a considerable increase in their bills for cleaning and caretaking.

The latest instruction to provide tailored home learning for pupils having to self-isolate has greatly increased the pressure on teachers who are finding they have to do this on top of their classroom teaching duties.

And when teachers are required to self-isolate, their heads are having to find extra funds to pay for supply teachers to take up the strain.

In Devon all this is compounded by the historic under-funding of our schools compared to the national average.

I am only too aware of the huge obstacles the Government has had to overcome during this unprecedented crisis and the vast amount of money that continues to be spent in supporting the people of this country.

But I would point out that our children – and so their parents – have paid a very high price for protecting the health of this nation and particularly our older and more vulnerable people. The time is now right to re-balance that situation.

I would like to emphasise that I welcome the extra funding that has been made available to education and your Government's commitment to levelling up school finance in areas like Devon. However, much of the additional funds that schools have received have been dissipated by the costs of Covid in hiring supply teachers, ensuring virtual learning is in place, organising one-to-one learning for self-isolating pupils and ever more rigorous cleaning and caretaking.

The National Association of Head Teachers says that in just the first few weeks of term, schools have spent an average of £8,017 on enhanced cleaning supplies, personal protective equipment, hand-washing stations and other measures.

No one is disputing that the costs of this pandemic will not have to be paid for in time but I would urge you, as Education Secretary, to ensure our schools have the resources they need now to continue to provide a Covid-safe education for their pupils. I believe education has to be one of our top priorities for extra spending so we can restore the terrible loss of learning that our children have suffered as a result of this crisis.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'James McInnes', with a stylized flourish at the end.

James McInnes



October 20, 2020

## **Continuing impact of Covid-19 on school and education funding**

Dear Mr Foot/Mr Goldman

I hope you and your colleagues at the Department for Education continue to be well through these difficult times.

Since I last wrote to you in August, the f40 group has been in dialogue with our members, both from local authorities and schools, about the continuing impact of Covid-19.

While f40 would very much welcome an opportunity to meet with you remotely later in autumn, we felt it would be useful to share now some of the feedback we have received.

We appreciate you are under increased pressure, but feel a grassroots perspective is of benefit.

f40 believes the impact on schools should be continually monitored, and the criteria for claiming back extra expenses regularly reviewed.

While we welcomed the additional funding announced for schools last year, much of it is being swallowed up by the increases to teachers' pay and pensions, and now Covid-19.

In real terms, schools are much worse off than they were five years ago and simply cannot meet the additional demands placed on them now due to the pandemic.

### **1. Additional teaching costs**

Since schools returned in September, one of the greatest challenges for headteachers has been ensuring that their schools have sufficient teaching staff in place every day.

As the number of Covid cases rises, more and more teachers are having to isolate if they have possible symptoms, or if they have been in contact with someone who has tested positive.

Some teachers are also having to stay home to look after their own children who are isolating.

The impact on schools is enormous.

The squeeze on education budgets in recent years has led many schools to reduce the number of teaching staff to the bare minimum. That means they now have no spare capacity when teachers are absent.

During the pandemic, schools are having to increasingly rely on supply teachers to provide cover. This is exacerbated when Covid tests are not quickly or locally available.

If teachers could be tested immediately, those that receive a negative result could return to the classroom, rather than having to spend unnecessary time away from school.

Such is the extent of the issue, many schools have already spent their annual supply teaching budget. As time goes on and costs continue to be incurred, schools are having to consider the

trade-off between opening in full and the threat that may pose to the future financial sustainability of the school.

A number of headteachers have considered using their school budgets to buy testing kits themselves – in order to get teachers with a negative result back in the classroom quickly. They were eager to know whether it would be an appropriate use of budget, claiming it was the only way they could keep costs down and schools open during particularly trying times.

We do not believe schools should have to use their teaching budget to pay for Covid tests but agree with them that it would be a better use of their budget if it saved them substantial sums on supply teachers.

**Suggestion:** f40 believes Government should pay the additional staffing costs of schools, where they have arisen due to the pandemic.

**Suggestion:** Priority should be given to schools and teachers during the testing process, similar to that given to health care workers, to ensure teachers can return to the classroom at the earliest opportunity.

**Suggestion:** Additional testing kits should be supplied to schools on a rolling programme.

## **2. Additional teaching resources**

Schools, particularly primary schools, are having to spend more on teaching resources.

Social distancing measures mean children can no longer sit together and share learning resources and equipment, as in the past. This is a direct additional cost to schools caused by the pandemic.

**Suggestion:** Schools be allowed to claim back extra costs for learning resources brought about by Covid-19.

## **3. Extraordinary additional costs**

The current guidelines around reclaiming additional expenses have been in place since the spring, and we believe they are now too narrow for the current situation. The range and breadth of additional costs for schools is constantly expanding as they navigate their way through the pandemic.

Schools need ongoing assistance with generic extra costs, such as deep cleaning and the displaying of information signs, however, a range of additional 'other' costs are also emerging.

While we encourage schools to make savings where they can, we believe no school should be worse off because of Covid-19.

Some schools may also have unique costs to them, which we believe should be included in the criteria for claiming back expenses.

For example, special educational needs schools are spending substantial sums on PPE, such as aprons, masks, and gloves. This is considered essential as some children with additional needs are prone to spitting, biting, and licking, increasing risk of infection, but it is costly.

Examples of emerging additional extra costs include:

- Additional water usage due to extra hand washing
- More frequent emptying of cesspits due to the increase in water usage
- PPE
- Remote learning platforms

- Extra toilet blocks
- Additional lunch/dining room equipment to aid social distancing (trays, cutlery, crockery)

**Suggestion:** f40 believes allowance should be made for schools to recoup 'other' extra expenses that are not already included on the claims form, and which may be specific to their situation. At the end of the financial year(s), it should become clear if they need to pay back funds.

#### **4. Winter costs**

Schools are expecting their heating costs to rise this winter as a direct result of the pandemic.

In order to reduce the risk of Covid infections passing between pupils and teachers, schools have been advised to keep buildings well ventilated by keeping windows open wherever possible.

This hasn't posed a problem during the warmer months, but now autumn is here, schools are having to use their heating systems more frequently, and increase the temperature, to compensate for the open windows.

**Suggestion:** Schools should be allowed to claim for additional heating costs by submitting this year's heating bill along with a comparative bill from the same period last year.

#### **5. Loss of income**

Many schools are facing financial hardship because their income streams continue to be frozen. These could be after school clubs, or the hiring out of sports and community facilities.

In many cases, while the income is no longer coming in, the costs associated with them, such as staff and leasing costs, are continuing.

Some schools have had no choice but to wind up certain activities, which is a loss to their community and has also incurred associated redundancy costs.

**Suggestion:** We believe the DfE should support schools who have lost income by agreeing to subsidise a percentage of it – for example, funding 75% of lost income. This would be in line with the approach taken with local authorities.

#### **6. Extra learning support**

Many local authorities are reporting a sharp spike in EHCP applications since September.

f40 does not believe EHCPs are the right solution for all children and should only be used when long-term special educational needs are identified.

We feel they should not be applied to children who have fallen behind due to coronavirus, or who have anxieties relating to the pandemic.

However, greater funding for early intervention programmes should be available to restore emotional well-being and provide additional support to children who need it due to the impact of Covid.

While the catch-up grant goes somewhere towards this, it will not be sufficient to meet the demand of every school. Also, schools may have to use the catch-up grant to ease wider funding pressures, rather than targeting it at specific pupil need.

By putting additional funding into learning support now, Government will save money in the long-term on EHCPs and special educational needs.

Local authorities can play a key role in bringing together large numbers of schools, along with other key services, such as social care.

**Suggestion:** Additional early intervention funding, over and above the £1bn catch-up grant, should be provided to ensure additional emotional well-being and learning support can be provided – reducing the likelihood of children needing EHCPs and to help children progress.

## **7. School transport**

Local authorities and schools welcomed the additional funding to assist with school transport in September and have done incredibly well to ensure children get to and from school according to the new safety measures.

While we welcome the new injection of funds for school transport announced last week, £27m, we fear this will not be enough to meet demand, especially in large rural counties.

For example, in Devon we had a shortfall in extra school transport costs of £100,000 between the start of September and the October half-term. That is additional spending that Devon County Council cannot afford.

We need a commitment to fund the extra school transport required until the Covid restrictions end – whenever that might be.

**Suggestion:** f40 believes Government should make a long-term commitment to fund all additional extra school transport costs brought about by the pandemic until social distancing measures and restrictions are removed.

## **8. School census**

The school census is taking place this month and concerns have been raised around the accuracy of the census in relation to the funding requirements of each school next year.

In recent weeks there has been a noticeable rise in Elective Home Education (EHE), with one council claiming a 500% rise in applications, from 70 during this period last year to 350 now.

We believe this is a direct result of the pandemic.

Children who are being educated at home will not be included in the school census, and thus not included in school budget forecasts for next year.

However, a large number of these children may return to the school system later this academic year – creating a funding shortage for their schools.

When these children return, they may also require greater learning support and may qualify for Free School Meals, yet their school will not receive funding to cover either purely because they missed the census.

**Suggestion:** f40 believes the Department for Education should prepare for discrepancies in the census due to the high number of children taken out of schools due to Elective Home Education. We believe schools should be paid an additional sum to cater for the likelihood of children being brought back into the system next year, and to enable them to provide extra learning support where needed.

## **9. SEND**

Special Educational Needs continues to be a major concern for f40, with the needs of pupils outstripping available budgets, and EHCP applications continuing to rise.



The situation is only going to get worse unless the High Needs system is overhauled, with less reliance on EHCPs and greater emphasis on school inclusion.

Many councils have growing deficit SEND budgets and these will continue to increase unless action is taken now to deal with the High Needs crisis.

We urge Government to resume its review of SEND as soon as possible, and report back with recommendations at the earliest opportunity.

Schools need support systems, guidance and additional funding to enable them to be flexible in the way they work, which can enable them to be properly inclusive of pupils with SEND.

And local authorities need additional funding to settle the huge deficit budgets they currently have, which is running close to £20m in some councils.

**Suggestion:** The review into SEND be resumed as soon as possible.

**Suggestion:** The SEND system be overhauled, with less reliance on EHCPs and greater emphasis on inclusion at mainstream schools. Schools should be given greater funding, guidance and support in order to provide the right level of care and education to pupils with High Needs.

**Suggestion:** Local authorities should be given additional funding to pay off the deficit SEND budgets they have accrued.

## **Conclusion**

Once again, thank you for taking the time to read some of the feedback we have received from our members.

If you would like to discuss it in more detail, don't hesitate to contact me, or f40 Secretary Karen Westcott, and we will be happy to arrange something.

Kind regards



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