

Local Government Association briefing

Opposition day debate: schools

House of Commons

Wednesday 25 April 2018



Key messages

- All children deserve access to the best possible education. Data shows that council-maintained schools receive better Ofsted ratings, and improve more quickly, than academy schools.ⁱ Ofsted's latest Annual Report on education and children's services showed that ninety-one per cent of maintained schools are now rated as either good or outstanding.ⁱⁱ
- We were pleased that the Government recognised concerns raised by the LGA and announced in July 2017 that an additional £1.3 billion would be allocated to schools during 2018-19 and 2019-20, meaning that no school would lose out under the new National Funding Formula.
- While introduction of the National Funding Formula will see the budgets of 22,000 schools set in Whitehall, we are pleased that until 2020 at least, councils and schools will retain some flexibility to agree a slightly different allocation to reflect local needs and circumstances.
- We remain concerned, however, that the introduction of the National Funding Formula, combined with changes to High Needs Funding, will exacerbate existing shortfalls in funding to support children and young people with SEND.
- The Government should take advantage of councils' position in the community, to give them a clear and strategic role in school improvement and holding schools to account for education standards. Councils know their local schools best and are uniquely placed to offer up to date local knowledge. Local government must be empowered to help all schools improve where necessary, including academies and free schools. Councils should also have a clear role in decisions on the location of new academies and free schools.
- Over recent years councils have created an extra 600,000 new school places.ⁱⁱⁱ This is a demonstrable record that they are doing everything they can to rise to the challenge of ensuring no child goes without a place. Councils and schools work extremely hard to try and ensure that as many pupils as possible are allocated their first preference.

Background information

Schools funding

The Government's announcement last year that £1.3 billion had been allocated to ensure that no school would lose out under the National Funding Formula, for 2018-19 and 2019-20 was positive. Schools should also be given greater certainty of future funding, to help them better plan for the spending pressures they face. Three-year budgets should replace annual budgets.

Further to this we are concerned that part of the £1.3 billion per year has been found by taking money from other important education budgets. £315 million is

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coming from the soft drinks levy, which had previously been allocated to capital projects to boost healthy eating and physical activity in schools.

Local government leaders are supportive of the national funding formula but are clear that setting 22,000 school budgets on a 'one size fits all' national formula decided remotely in Whitehall will not work. Councils know and work closely with their local schools and they are uniquely placed with up to date local knowledge to ensure funding is distributed fairly. They must retain some flexibility to agree with schools a slightly different allocation of funding from that dictated by the national formula if that produces better outcomes for schools and pupils.

Councils are particularly concerned about the proposed changes to high needs funding which will reduce council and school flexibility to make additional funding available where there are rising demand pressures for special educational needs and disability (SEND) support. Since 2014 the number of children and young people with statements or Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) increased by 21.1 per cent, from 237,111 to 221,548.^{iv} The proportion of pupils with SEND who attend special schools has increased from 5.6 per cent in 2012 to 8.5 per cent in 2016.^v

School provision and oversight

Data shows that council-maintained schools receive better Ofsted ratings, and improve more quickly, than academy schools.^{vi} Ofsted's latest Annual Report on education and children's services showed that ninety-one per cent of maintained schools are now rated as either Good or Outstanding.

Everyone wants their child in a school where they can be happy, safe and reach their full potential. Over recent years councils have created an extra 600,000 new places. The Government's school capacity figures for 2016/17 demonstrate that councils have an excellent track record of fulfilling their statutory duty to ensure every child has a school place available to them.^{vii} Councils and schools work extremely hard to try and ensure that as many pupils as possible are allocated their first preference.^{viii} If we are to meet the demand for school places, councils should be given back the powers to open new maintained schools and existing academy schools should expand where required.

The Government should take advantage of councils' unique position in the community, to give them a clear and strategic role in school improvement and holding schools to account for education standards. Local government must be recognised as an improvement partner. This means being empowered to help all schools improve where necessary, including academies and free schools. We have also called for councils to have greater powers over school places and a say on where new schools are built.

ⁱ http://www.local.gov.uk/media-releases/-/journal_content/56/10180/7799763/NEWS

ⁱⁱ Ofsted Annual Report 2016/17: education, children's services and skills (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-annual-report-201617-education-childrens-services-and-skills>)

ⁱⁱⁱ LGA media release, April 2018 (<https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/councils-respond-number-children-securing-first-choice-primary-school-places-0>)

^{iv} <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statements-of-sen-and-ehc-plans-england-2017>

^v <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england-january-2016>

^{vi} http://www.local.gov.uk/media-releases/-/journal_content/56/10180/7799763/NEWS

^{vii} Department for Education, School capacity: academic year 2016 to 2017 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-capacity-academic-year-2016-to-2017>)

^{viii} LGA media release, April 2018 (<https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/councils-respond-number-children-securing-first-choice-primary-school-places-0>)