



**LIGHTHOUSE**  
SCHOOLS PARTNERSHIP



13 March 2019

Dear Parents and Carers

### **School funding issues**

You may have seen news coverage last week of action by Headteachers to publicise their anxieties about the current funding crisis in education.

Although the government is right in saying that they have increased the total amount spent on education, this has happened at a time of rising costs and increasing pupil numbers. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) has calculated that since 2010 funding per pupil has declined by 8% across primary and secondary stages and by 20% in Sixth Forms.

In that time, we have seen spiralling additional costs paid by schools. Although most salary increases since 2010 have been very small, they have largely been unfunded by the government and therefore have been met from schools' budgets. Schools have also had to bear the costs of increased pension contributions for support staff and find funds to cover new taxes such as the Apprenticeship Levy.

Our Local Authorities, like many others across the country, have also been coping with fast-rising costs relating to special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The consequence of this is that the North Somerset Strategic Schools Forum (the statutory body that oversees school funding) has had to reduce the 'Top-up Funding' available to children with SEND in mainstream schools so that they can cover North Somerset's bill for other high needs expenditure such as the education of children in 'out-of area' special schools. The general funding per pupil has also been reduced, in both North Somerset and Bath & North East Somerset, to fund increased expenditure on SEND and general funding has been further reduced in North Somerset to pay back some of its historic deficit (also caused by High Needs spending). None of this is the fault of the LAs, which cannot control the decisions of SEN tribunals. The work that schools do with children with SEND is of the utmost importance and should be at the very top of the priority list, both educationally and governmentally. I met Rt Hon Dr Liam Fox MP in January to raise my concerns about current underfunding of SEN High Needs and the impact that it is having on school budgets - he subsequently wrote on our behalf to raise the issue with his cabinet colleague, Rt Hon Damian Hinds, Secretary of State for Education.

**Chief Executive: Mr G J Lewis MA**

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Across our Multi-Academy Trust our schools are now facing some very difficult and unwelcome decisions as a result of financial strains. Most schools have seen their reserves used up over the last few years, our secondary schools have had to reduce the number of GCSE and post-16 courses that they are running and we have had to reduce staffing numbers, usually through vacancy management in virtually every school in the Trust with consequences in many places for class sizes. A small number of schools are currently having to go through restructuring with the consequent risk of staff redundancies.

School funding levels have only been confirmed until March 2020. Beyond this they will be subject to the Governments Comprehensive Spending Review, which is due to be published later this year. This adds further uncertainty and difficulty for schools to plan for a sustainable future.

We are currently doing everything that we can to mitigate the risks presented by low funding and we spend a lower proportion than most MATs on central administration. We are active in exercising our collective buying power to minimise the cost of our external contracts. However, like most others, our schools are facing very challenging times in seeking to maintain the quality of provision. Our Headteachers and Business Managers are seeking to make the classroom the last place to feel this spending squeeze but inevitably if we have less to spend, we are not able to deliver as much as we would wish.

In sending this letter we are not asking for you to take action. However, if you would like to add your voice to the issue of school funding then you may wish to raise your concerns with your MP. The National Governance Association has some advice about doing this available on the website for their recent campaign <https://www.nga.org.uk/fundthefuture.aspx> .

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gary Lewis', written in a cursive style.

Gary Lewis  
Chief Executive

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