

ST. LUKE'S CHURCH OF ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL



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14 March 2019

Dear Parents and Carers,

School Funding Issues

I am contacting you to provide information on current issues relating to school funding.

Sadly, I have to confirm that despite intense lobbying of the Government and Department for Education, matters are extremely challenging. In short, schools are still not being provided with adequate funding and resources to deliver the level of provision and support that is expected, and that our families and children deserve.

Current Concerns

- Since 2010 school budgets have been reduced in real terms by 8% and by 20% at post-16.
- Class sizes are rising and the curricular offer is being restricted.
- Increasingly, schools are being asked to support with children's emotional health and wellbeing. Frequently, we do not have the adequate resources to meet a growing need. For example, at St Luke's we have not been able to replace staff, like for like, when they have left: in March 2018 our classroom teaching assistants worked a total of 125 hours per week, but in March 2019 they work a total of 62 hours per week, which means that we have been unable to maintain the class support levels that we used to have. It is only down to the dedication and commitment of our remaining staff that standards have not been affected. However, under current funding levels, we will continue to be unable to replace staff like for like in the future.
- Often, the most vulnerable students in our schools – those from disadvantaged backgrounds or those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) – are bearing the brunt of cuts and schools are struggling to provide the levels of support that they are entitled to.
- Schools are struggling to set balanced budgets. At St Luke's we are predicting a six figure deficit by the end of financial year 2022. The Department for Education will allow us to operate a licensed deficit for a period of three years, on the condition that we have a strategy to return to a balanced budget at the end of the three year period. We really have no 'wiggle room' left to address such a large sum.
- Increasingly we are having to ask for donations towards, or even cut out, the 'little extras' that enhance and bring to life our children's learning, such as visiting theatre companies and school trips, which can have an impact on their depth of understanding of some subjects.

These issues are not simply affecting a few schools. They are common features across our education system up and down the country. Levels of concern are so widespread amongst headteachers that we are all working together with a united voice.

As such, we have written to the Secretary of State for Education on three separate occasions since September 2018. He has chosen to ignore our communications and repeated requests to meet. On 13 December 2018, we were informed by a junior civil servant that ***"I am afraid that, on this occasion, the Secretary of State and the Minister of State must decline your offer to meet. I hope you will understand that their time is heavily pressurised and their diaries need to be prioritised according to ministerial, Parliamentary and constituency business."***

Given the seriousness of the current school funding crisis and the impact upon schools, children and families, headteacher colleagues and I believe that this approach is entirely ill-judged. On 14 January 2019, we wrote again to the Secretary of State for Education asking that he reconsider meeting with representative headteachers. Six weeks later, this request was declined once more: **“As I’m sure you will appreciate, both their diaries are very full and they are unable to accept your kind offer at this time.”** Thousands of headteachers simply do not understand what issues could be seen as more important than the ones we are raising on behalf of schools, children and families.

In September 2018, over 2000 headteachers campaigned at Westminster in order to underline the seriousness of the current situation. This action was unprecedented.

We continue to recognise that there is not a ‘bottomless pit’ of money and also acknowledge that many local MPs from across the political spectrum are taking a supportive approach. We must make clear, however, that the current response from the Department for Education is inadequate.

Why we need to meet

- Headteachers want to contribute constructively to overcome current funding issues.
- Headteachers want to reflect the serious concerns expressed by families regarding inadequate levels of resources and provision, especially for our most vulnerable students.
- Headteachers want to ensure that schools receive a much better deal when future Government spending plans, such as the Comprehensive Spending Review, are drawn up over the next few months.
- Headteachers want to indicate serious and rising concerns relating to the wider pastoral and social care that schools are expected, by default, to provide against a background of severe cuts to Local Authority provision.

Headteacher colleagues and I feel fortunate that we have been so strongly supported by parents and carers as we campaign for a much improved level of funding for our schools and pupils. We urge you to make representations to your local MP and to the Department for Education and wider Government to ensure that matters improve.

A positive starting point should come from the Secretary of State for Education in the form of an urgent meeting.

Yours sincerely,

S Hardaker

Mr S Hardaker
Headteacher

