

Mark Pawsey MP
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27th January, 2017

Dear Mark,

National Funding Formula

I would like to draw your attention to the concerns that I have about the proposed National Funding Formula. As you may be aware the Department for Education is currently consulting on its proposals. I will be responding to that consultation on behalf of Rugby High School. As someone who I know has a deep interest in educational provision across the town, I wanted to make you aware of the issues that the proposal is throwing up for Rugby High School. I believe that these problems are not unique to Rugby High School or to grammar schools but affect a number of schools in poorly funded authorities with relatively low numbers of students from deprived backgrounds or with low prior attainment.

The figures that the Department for Education has published show that Rugby High School will be losing 2.5% of its 11-16 income if the proposal in its current incarnation goes ahead. The attached case study sets out the impact that this will have on educational provision at the school and places this in the context of the measures that we have been taking over the last six years to try to ensure that the school delivers the very best education that it can within the financial parameters set by the government.

I whole heartedly supported the creation of a National Funding Formula because I think that it has the potential to provide for a more equitable distribution of funding. I agree that there should be additional resources to enable schools to tackle low prior attainment and deprivation. However, what has happened, as a result of the Secretary of State's decision to significantly increase the level of funding associated with deprivation and a political reluctance to impose any significant shift of funding from the inner cities (especially London), is that the top slice has been fixed at a level (27.5%) which means that in F40 authorities which had relatively low levels of top slice (like Warwickshire) already low basic pupil unit funding will shrink still further. In other words many of the worst funded schools in the country will lose funding.

I understand that the government needs to control spending and that includes educational spending. However, in distributing the funding that is available, I would argue that more thought should be given to the minimum level of basic pupil unit funding that is necessary to run a secondary school. The National Association of School Business Managers (NASBM) calculates that at the moment it is £4,800. As you will see, under the proposal Rugby High School will receive just £4,297.

The attached case study details the impact that funding at the proposed level will have on the school's curriculum and also sketches out what would be different if NASBM's figure were to be adopted. It is my contention that all students whatever school they attend, in whatever part of the country, and whatever their social background, should have access to a broad and balanced curriculum. From 2019 as you can see, if this proposal goes ahead, students at Rugby High School

will not have access to a broad and balanced curriculum as there will be some subjects that we simply will not be able to provide.

Rugby High will not be asking parents for an additional significant contribution as some grammar schools are indicating that they will do. All the information that we have about the families who attend our school suggests that although a minority have a relatively high level of income, the majority have to think very carefully about expenditure. A significant voluntary contribution is likely to deter applications for students from deprived backgrounds and from families who are just about managing. We have been working hard to make it clear that our school is for able children from all sections of the local community. We have tried to recruit more pupil premium students in the last few years by making changes to our admissions policy to give a priority to these students and setting slightly lower qualifying score for them. We do not want to undermine this work and the progress that we are making in terms of improving social mobility.

At Rugby High we want our experienced leaders to be able to play a part in raising standards across the educational system. However, our capacity to do that at the moment is really constrained. With a senior leadership team of four (Head, Deputy, Assistant Head and Business Manager) we haven't got enough capacity to work in another school on a regular basis. As one of the most successful schools in Warwickshire in terms of progress, attainment and leavers' destinations, we think we have expertise that we could share. Increased workload resulting from larger class sizes and reduced time for planning, preparation and assessment mean that middle leaders' capacity is similarly restricted.

We used to have an extensive science and languages primary outreach programme which aimed to raise standards locally and to inspire students. The only bits that are left are the bits that don't cost us anything (inviting primaries to see the school play), and elements that we have persuaded external organisations to fund e.g. annual primary forensic science workshops.

We are very proud of our students' achievements: the nine students who have been offered places at Oxford and Cambridge universities for October 2017; last year's Year 11 (79.4% of all GCSE entries were graded A* or A and an above average progress 8 score of 0.28); the 50.4% of Year 13 students who took up places at Russell Group universities in September 2016. We want to be able to continue to provide a great education for the young people of Rugby funded from taxation. We want to contribute to the raising of standards across Warwickshire. All this is placed in doubt by the National Funding Formula proposal.

A slight tweak to the proposal to ensure that every secondary school has at least £4,800 basic pupil funding unit would address many of the issues facing us in KS3 and KS4 for poorly funded schools like Rugby High. We would be very grateful for anything that you might be able to do in terms of drawing attention to this issue in parliament and through your political connections. I would be happy to meet with you either in Rugby or in London to discuss this further if that would be helpful.

With best wishes

Charlotte Marten
Headteacher