

25<sup>th</sup> January 2017

Scott Mann MP  
10 Market House Arcade  
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Bodmin  
Cornwall  
PL31 2JA



SIR JAMES SMITH'S  
COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Dear Scott

**Re: National Funding Formula and concerns over school budgets**

I am writing to raise my concerns about education funding and to ask that you raise this issue in Parliament and with the Secretary of State for Education. You may remember that you kindly popped into Sir Jim's last year when we took the opportunity to appraise you of our concerns over the funding of rural schools. I am sorry to say those concerns have not gone away; government plans for a new funding formula and efficiency savings have made things even worse.

The government's decision to make £3 billion of "efficiency saving" from school budgets will have a potentially disastrous effect on the ability of heads and governors to maintain schools let alone raise standards. The Government is imposing real terms funding cuts on schools by freezing per-pupil funding while inflation and the cost of employer pension and national insurance contributions increase. This affects all schools and academies alike. The National Audit Office has raised concerns the DfE had not outlined how schools would make £3bn worth of savings. It is worrying that Jonathan Slater, the permanent secretary at the DfE, told the public accounts committee on Monday (23/01/2017) that efficiency savings expected by government were "doable" without larger class sizes, curriculum changes or damaging pupil performance. Meg Hillier, the chair of the committee, said: "... there is a disconnect between what you are asking schools to do and your knowledge and understanding of what the impact will be on pupil attainment."

The proposed new funding formula will not solve these funding shortages either – the cake is just not big enough. Figures from the National Union of Teachers and the Association of Teachers & Lecturers, using Government statistics, show that even after a new funding formula 98% of schools would face budget cuts over this Parliament, with an average budget cut of 9.5% in primary schools and 8.7% in secondaries. If political 'spin' is set aside the truth is that schools are not receiving adequate "core funding" to meet basic staffing and equipment costs this will lead to cuts.

There are also serious concerns over the identification of 'disadvantaged' children. When schools are increasingly reliant on additional funding to meet the needs of its disadvantaged students, the methodology used to identify those students is of paramount importance. Our concern is that the methodology used by the DfE fails to recognise the low density geographical spread of deprivation in north Cornwall but does pick out the larger concentrations in urban areas. In addition, the formula

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still fails to reflect the disproportionate costs of being a small school. So here at Sir Jim's we suffer the double whammy. Once again rural areas are losing out to urban-centric policies.

The senior team and governors at Sir Jim's are dismayed that our financial situation looks so bleak. As a consequence, our fears about reduced staffing levels, increased class sizes and reductions in curricular and pastoral provision are likely to become a reality in the short term as we set a deficit budget (that will grow over the next few years) and look to cut costs. A few simple but telling examples of the constraints facing us now will suffice;

- As the new reformed GCSEs come 'on-stream' (this started in 2015 for first examination in 2017) we are unable to purchase new textbooks to support staff and resource students in the delivery of the new courses – this putting our students at a disadvantage
- The school is struggling to replenish its library stock which means dwindling numbers of books on shelves and more and more older and well-thumbed tatty books – literacy is at the heart of school improvement - it will be students from poorer backgrounds that suffer most!
- Asking parents for voluntary contributions for technology subjects because the school can no longer afford to purchase sufficient resource materials for product design, graphics and art – which may result in some student not be able to follow technical-vocational subjects
- Cut-backs in science resulting in fewer and fewer practicals – yet the Prime Minister is telling us the country needs more scientists to secure our economic future
- Inability to reward high performing teachers because the government has failed to fund the School Teachers' Pay Review Board recommendations several years running – this is having an enormous impact on recruitment, we are struggling to employ specialist teachers putting the standards agenda at risk

We know we are not alone, other school leaders in other areas are also making their concerns public. Heads in West Sussex have written to their parents detailing their concerns. The head of Altrincham Grammar School for Boys, Tim Gartside, told BBC Radio 4's Today programme (25/01/2017) that he and his governors were considering asking for voluntary contributions of £30 or £40 a month from parents if the cuts took place – this is beginning to happen in Cornwall as school leaders search for ways to balance the books. And Southend High School has folded parental contributions into its main accounts for two years and is increasingly using it to contribute to spending on salaries and library books – so voluntary contributions from parents are now part of core funding in that school.

It is clear that schools are already struggling with their finances. I do not want children in this country to miss out on being taught a full curriculum in a school which has sufficient teachers and support staff to give children the attention they need to make the best of their education. The current Government was elected on a manifesto that promised to protect school funding. It is clear that this pledge is not being honoured. I hope you will press the Chancellor to use the Budget to announce increased education spending.

We will continue to do everything in our power to maintain standards of care and provision but also feel that it is important to let you know just how bad matters are at present. Sir Jim's is one of Cornwall's top performing schools and we want to keep it that way. All our successes are threatened should the new funding mechanism go ahead in its current form. Likewise, if the DfE considers there is plenty of room for efficiency savings I can confirm they can come only from redundancies and cut-backs to services which will jeopardise all the good work we have doing.

Our children deserve better than this. As one of the traditionally poorly funded authorities Cornish children have always been 'worth less' than children in other areas, under the new arrangements they still simply don't appear to be 'worth enough'. It's time children in Cornwall were valued by politicians as much as children anywhere.

I look forward to hearing from you

Yours sincerely

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

**Ruth Krolik**  
**Chair of Governors**  
**Sir James Smith's Community School**