

The Rt Hon Theresa May MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
LONDON
SW1A 2AA

31 January 2017

Dear Prime Minister

Expression of concern by secondary headteachers in Slough

As headteachers of secondary schools in Slough we are writing to you to express our serious concerns about the cumulative impact of Government policies on the success and achievement of young people in Slough.

We have already raised our concerns regarding some aspects of current and future funding arrangements with Ministers and through our local MP. We have also expressed our concern about the deepening recruitment crisis which is affecting schools across the country and particularly in this area. However, the responses we have received suggest little prospect of measures being taken to address these issues with the urgency we believe necessary.

Secondary schools in Slough are successful. The DfE performance tables show that young people in Slough achieve to a high level in all schools. Attendance statistics show that Slough's young people have one of the highest rates of attendance in the country. Slough is an extremely diverse area with significant levels of deprivation, and yet has remained free from the difficulties which have been evident in some other similarly disadvantaged areas of the country in recent years. Slough is experiencing one of the highest levels of growth in pupil numbers in the country, including a high level of inward migration.

Slough secondary headteachers have worked closely together to establish two free schools to successfully address this growth, and individually to raise aspirations and promote successful outcome in the local communities served by their schools. The Department for Education's vision of a school-led self-improving system has been embraced with the formation of numerous multi-academy trusts, the establishment of a teaching school hub and a willingness to proactively support other schools. For a small local authority area, Slough has a wide diversity of secondary schools; grammar schools, non-selective schools, maintained schools and academies, faiths schools, single sex and free schools all have a proven track record of working collaboratively together - despite clearly differences in educational philosophy and approaches – to enhance the prospects of all young people.

We believe this effective work and our record of success is now seriously threatened. Over the last five years, Slough secondary schools have seen their funding decline in real terms. This has been combined with increases in staffing costs, partly driven by changes in government policies on pensions and national insurance contributions. Changes to IDACI bandings and FSM eligibility have meant less income while the material circumstances of the pupils - and the support they therefore require - have not changed. The majority of our secondary schools have been on the minimum funding guarantee for a number of years, and significant cuts to budgets have already been made in many cases.

We accept that historically Slough has received a relatively high level of funding compared to many local authorities and that the current funding system across the country has numerous historical anomalies. However, we would contend that there are particular challenges in this area which would justify a level of funding above the average, and that this has been used very successfully.

The introduction of the national funding formula is intended to eliminate these anomalies. However, the proposals indicate that all schools in Slough would lose funding. As you would expect we have already implemented a range of efficiency savings; the impact of further budget reductions on our schools is likely to require us to take drastic decisions which will have a significant impact the future prospects of our young people. Appropriate funding for disadvantage is important but we are particularly concerned that the current national funding formula proposals will not provide sufficient basic per-pupil place funding to enable our schools to continue the level of educational provision you are expecting for all pupils regardless of their backgrounds.

We have already expressed our concerns to the Department for Education regarding other funding issues; these include the number of unfunded pupils in the town due to in-year migration, the underfunding of high needs provision, the impact of top-slicing of DSG to establish a growth fund, and rapidly increasing costs of recruitment.

For our schools, further reductions in funding will mean reductions in staffing levels. There will be increases in class sizes, cuts to the level of support for disadvantaged students, reduction of time for teachers' preparation, assessment and CPD, removal of extracurricular activities and a narrowing of curriculum provision at GCSE and post-16. In addition, our capacity to work collaboratively and continue the range of highly successful strategies we have outlined above will be severely compromised.

We know that we are not the only group of headteachers to voice their collective concerns, and no doubts similar arguments will have been raised with you in other contexts. However, we write to you now as we genuinely believe that the success of our schools in supporting and developing the young people of Slough and their communities is now under serious threat as a result of the aggregation of a number of policies, however well-intentioned those policies may be individually.

We ask for reassurance that you and your colleagues in Government will listen and respond to the concerns of school leaders who share your concern for social mobility and aspiration.

The Slough Association of Secondary Headeachers

Arbour Vale School
Baylis Court School
Beechwood School
Ditton Park Academy
Haybrook College
Herschel Grammar School
Langley Grammar School
Lynch Hill Enterprise Academy
Grove Academy (opening September 2017)
Slough & Eton CE Business & Enterprise College
St Bernard's Catholic Grammar School
St Joseph's Catholic High School
The Langley Academy
The Westgate School
Upton Court Grammar School
Wexham School