

This email is being sent to Headteachers of schools within the 200 sq miles representing Bexhill and Battle constituency. Please feel free to forward to your Governors, Staff and Parents as you feel appropriate.

Dear Headteachers,

Thank you for writing to me with your concerns around school funding. Thank you also for initiating the letters from parents. As many of you know, I share the concerns which have been raised and, having raised them myself to Government Ministers, I feel empowered by your lobbying efforts and those from parents.

In your letters to me, you asked me to demonstrate the steps I have taken to represent your concerns publicly, and privately, to Government Ministers in order to champion your schools. To this end, I set out below what I have been doing in the last six months since this matter became a priority. I also attach a weblink from my website which I refer to below.

<https://www.huwmerriman.org.uk/campaigns/schools-funding>

December 2016: Revised Funding Formula and Meeting with Schools Minister

1. As you know, the funding mechanism for schools has historically benefited metropolitan and city areas over a constituency such as mine. Per pupil head, we have received less than £4,500 per pupil per year of funding whereas Hackney has received nearer £7,000. Whilst I accept that Hackney is a more deprived area than my constituency, this does not justify the extraordinary difference.
2. The revised funding formula was supposed to close this gap. To protect areas, such as Hackney, from losing large amounts, the Government proposed capping reductions to 3% and increases to areas such as mine are, therefore, similarly capped. East Sussex received only an extra 2.5% as a result. Sadly, whilst 13 of my schools are recipients of funding increases, 23 of my schools actually face reductions under this proposal (with others remaining unchanged). The full table for local constituency schools is contained in the third attachment.
3. We therefore remain underfunded compared to other areas. To compound matters, and as you have mentioned, we also have an increase in costs for schools. Therefore, even an increase in funding for the 13 of my schools, as welcome as it is, is not meeting the extra costs you are having to meet from increases to pay, national insurance and pensions. I am pleased that the Government are raising pay but, with staff costs amounting to 90% of school budgets, in some cases, the Government needs to give you the cash to deliver the rises we have set for the living wage and other employee benefits.
4. Concerned by the proposed funding formula, which would not go far enough to cover the cost increases your schools have experienced, I was the first MP to go to the Department of Education to meet with the Schools Minister and his team to obtain an explanation. After an hour of discussions, I made it clear that these proposals needed a rethink. I was assured that this was a draft for consultation and Ministers would listen to the concerns raised. To your point about publicly raising this matter, I was interviewed by the Education Correspondent for BBC SE where I outlined my concerns.

January 2017: Speaking out in House of Commons and writing to Heads

5. In a debate called to discuss Schools Funding, I spoke in the House of Commons, with the Education Secretary at the dispatch box, and called for my Government to deliver more funds for my local schools and address the costs shortfall you are facing. The weblink carries this speech. On the same day, I received a 'Dear Colleague' letter from the Schools Minister explaining Government policy (second attachment). As it correctly points out, funding for schools, at over £40bl, has never been greater. As you rightly point out, costs have gone up faster than the increase in funds.

6. I also wrote to every headteacher in the constituency to warn of the outcomes of the proposed funding formula. I was therefore pleased with the responses you sent back, and your encouragement for parents to also write to me.

February 2017: Meeting with Secretary of State for Education and Letter from Schools Minister

7. Recognising that there was a need for collaboration, I joined with other Conservative MPs from across the South East and we met the Education Secretary to lobby for more funding for schools. This was a robust meeting where my concerns were laid out clearly and lines were drawn.

8. I received a response from the Schools Minister (see first attachment) to a letter which I had written outlining my concerns around Schools Funding and other issues impacting your schools. This letter was initiated by a brilliant letter from one of your retiring colleagues.

March 2017: Second Meeting with Schools Minister

9. I met with the Schools Minister for a second time to continue my lobbying effort and seek more funding for the constituency. I was armed with the letters which hundreds of parents had written to me. I have responded to each of these parents. I am sure you have seen a copy but a standard response is attached below. I salute you, and the parents who took the time, for such a good letter to me:

<https://www.huwmerriman.org.uk/news/schools-funding>

April 2017: Meeting with County, Consultation Deadline and Second Meeting with Secretary of State for Education

10. I met with Education officials at County Hall to discuss the concerns from some Headteachers from mainstream schools that their budget is having to fund specialist schools when pupils have to transfer. I have to say, and this is an area where we may disagree, that if there is no funding to follow the pupil transferred then there is no incentive to keep that pupil in mainstream and we could end up with even more pupils in special schools away from their peers, parents and community. This will make it harder to get these pupils in to the workplace and they may therefore forever be in risk of being in special needs and not in the community and workplace mainstream. In East Sussex, 1.8 pupils per 100 are in special schools. The regional average is 1.4 pupils. I do not deny that there is a challenge for you but there are far too many local pupils being referred out of their community schools and put in to special needs. We can continue this discussion further.

11. I submitted my response to the Schools Funding Formula and recommended, amongst other proposals, that there is a fairer redistribution from metropolitan and city schools to our

local schools and that the lump sum per school is greater than £110,000 in order to ensure that smaller primary schools with less than 210 pupils remain viable.

12. I was supposed to meet with Justine Greening earlier this month but the meeting was at the exact time when the terror attack was perpetrated on Westminster. I therefore pushed for the rescheduled meeting, which was held last week and lasted 30 minutes.

From this meeting, I can report that the Secretary of State for Education recognised the concerns which you and I have raised over the last six months and she suggested that I took this higher in order to make representations to better fund our schools. I have therefore pressed the Prime Minister and her team writing my party's manifesto. I now await the next step and hope that the lobbying which we have all made, in public and private, will yield results to better fund the increased costs which your schools are experiencing.

I am hoping that, notwithstanding the General Election, we can continue with a meeting which has been pencilled in for May in order for all Headteachers and Governors from the constituency to engage with me on this matter.

Should you, or parents, wish to contact me during the election period then my auto-reply will direct you to my political email address. I cannot use my MP address during the election period.

This will be the final communication which I send before I officially cease being an MP from 12.01am on 3 May and become a Parliamentary Candidate again. It is fitting that it is sent to a group of professionals who have always welcomed me, always challenged me and always worked so hard for the future of our constituency. As the son of a teacher, I remain in awe of the job which you, and your staff, do.

My best wishes to you, and your school team.

Regards,

Huw

Huw Merriman
MP for Bexhill & Battle
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

Website: www.huwmerriman.org.uk
Twitter: @huwmerriman
Facebook: huwmerriman/bexhillbattle