



## Government Response to Petition on School Funding Formula

Dear parents and carers

I know that many of you have already signed the petition urging the government to reconsider their proposals for a national funding formula (if you haven't, then please do spare a minute to do so by [clicking here](#)). If so, then like me you will have received an email in response from the government.

I have cut and pasted the email I received below and have provided a response of my own in **red text**. This is a complicated issue and is only really beginning to be understood by most people – partly because schools have worked so hard to maintain the quality of their provision in the face of cuts to funding, but also because the government has done a good job of suggesting the cuts are somehow not real, or are not significant. I hope my responses at least help to provide some clarity.

I would like to reassure you that Lymm High School's finances are stable and we are continuing to work extremely hard to make efficiency savings wherever we can without affecting the education our fabulous students have. I also remain optimistic that the government will see sense on this issue; however, it will require sustained pressure from the public (and parents in particular) and I would be very grateful for your continued support.

As a reminder, the most useful things you can do would be to:

- Write to your local MP to express your dissatisfaction with the fact that Warrington will become one of the ten worst funded areas in the whole country (out of 150 local authorities)
- Sign the petition this letter refers to
- Complete the formal government consultation before it closes on 22nd March (see below)
- Follow the hashtag #whatwouldyoucut on Twitter and re-tweet to raise awareness

More information is available on Warrington Borough Council's website here:

[www.warrington.gov.uk/schoolcuts](http://www.warrington.gov.uk/schoolcuts)

Thank you very much in anticipation of your continued support.

Yours faithfully

Mr Gwyn Williams  
Headteacher

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# LYMM HIGH SCHOOL

Dear Gwyn Williams,

The Government has responded to the petition you signed – “[Reconsider The National Funding Formula so that NO child at school will LOSE out](#)”.

Government responded:

School funding is at its highest ever level - more than £40 billion in 2016-17. We are consulting on our proposed national funding formula, and we are keen to hear from as many people as possible.

Please respond online here:

<https://consult.education.gov.uk/funding-policy-unit/schools-national-funding-formula2/>

***My response: Please do complete the consultation document if you have time, even if it's just the first 5 questions and you skip the rest. It is very complex and so Warrington Borough Council have prepared some notes with suggested responses that you can read by [clicking here](#).***

The Government has protected the core schools budget in real terms for the duration of this Parliament. School funding is at its highest level on record, and will be over £40bn in 2017-18. Additionally, as school funding is driven by pupil numbers, where pupil numbers rise, the amount of money schools receive will also increase.

***My response: This may be true, but the government knows very well that this doesn't tell anything like the full story and there can't be a headteacher in the country who believes school budgets have been protected. The reality is that the amount schools receive per pupil has not changed over the last few years, whilst at the same time there have been substantial rises to the costs schools have to bear. For example, employer's pension and national insurance contributions have risen significantly and the government has recently announced that schools will have to pay tens of thousands of pounds as an apprenticeship levy. The Minister for Schools himself admitted recently at a parliamentary committee meeting that most schools are having to make savings of around 8-10% during this parliament.***

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*This does not even take account of the massive cuts to post-16 funding over the past few years (something that even the government does not deny have taken place).*

But the system for distributing that record amount of funding is unfair, opaque and outdated. Similar schools, educating similar pupils, receive very different levels of funding with little or no justification, because the system is based on historic data and has not kept up with changes since it was established more than a decade ago. We are determined to end this postcode lottery and make sure that funding is consistent across the country, rather than depending on where children happen to live. That is why we are introducing a national funding formula for schools.

***My response:** We absolutely agree with this – the system has historically been extremely unfair to certain areas, with Warrington always having been a loser. This is why we were so pleased when the government announced they were going to introduce a new funding formula. Interestingly, the early talk from government was about a ‘Fair Funding Formula’ rather than the language of a ‘National Funding Formula’ that they are now using.*

The national funding formula does not affect how much money is available for schools overall – it is purely about ensuring that that money is distributed more fairly across the country. The national funding formula will mean that, for the first time, we will have a clear, simple and transparent system that matches funding to children’s needs and the school they attend. More than half of England’s schools, many of which have been under funded for years, will see their funding increase as a result of our reforms.

***My response:** Unfortunately, this doesn’t tell the full story either. For example, the government says that Warrington schools will see their budgets increase by an average of 0.6%. However, the average Warrington school will still receive levels of funding that are a massive 67% less than the best funded areas and 10% less than the average (the equivalent of over £650,000 less for Lymm High School, every year). Quite simply, the new proposals are just as unfair as the existing system.*

*In addition, and without wanting to get too technical, the latest figures show Warrington schools will be net losers – the 0.6% figure the government is quoting uses data from the previous financial year. In any case, it’s also worth bearing in mind that school costs typically rise by around 2% each year, so a 0.6% rise really isn’t much help.*

The biggest element of our formula will be basic per-pupil funding. This will make up about three-quarters of the total funding and means that every child, regardless of circumstances, will attract a consistent amount of money to their school.

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We also want to support schools as they continue to work to break the link between disadvantage and attainment. So we think it is right that schools serving children with additional needs, who face entrenched barriers to their success, benefit from extra resources to help support these children. That is why we are also proposing to target money towards pupils who have additional needs through the formula.

***My response: On the face of it, this is not unreasonable; schools serving more disadvantaged communities do need more money. And if the government was in a position to put more money into the schools budget overall, this element of the proposals might just work. However, they have made a huge mistake in their calculations here because they have drastically under-estimated the amount it costs to run any school, regardless of its circumstances. It would make far more sense for them to have worked this out first and then to have allocated money for additional needs on top of this. As it stands, the proposed formula is weighted too heavily in favour of additional needs whereas, in practice, most of this money won't be used for anything 'additional' compared to the basic services all schools have to offer.***

We have thought very carefully about how to help schools that are losing funding manage the transition to the new system. We have built significant protections into the formula, so that no school will face a reduction of more than more than 1.5% per pupil per year, or 3% per pupil overall. This limits the otherwise very large reductions that some schools would have seen, which we know would have been unmanageable.

***My response: This is perhaps the most nonsensical element of all. Protecting the amount schools lose in any one year is reasonable – and phasing in a new formula is also sensible. But capping the total amount of losses at 3% when some schools are receiving over 60% more than others to start with is ludicrous. It also completely undermines the government's case in other areas – if they believe the formula is fair, why on earth would they not apply it in full?***

We are also continuing to work with schools to help them use their funding in the most efficient way.

To support schools to improve their financial health and efficiency we have produced a collection of tools, information and guidance, <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/schools-financial-health-and-efficiency> including benchmarking tools and case studies of best practice, to help schools make savings.

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***My response: There are some helpful tools here - but many of us already had our own versions of such things and they aren't a great deal of help in addressing the central issue of insufficient funding. In addition, most of the benchmarking data provided is 2-3 years out of date and the financial situation in most schools has shifted so considerably since then as to make such comparisons almost meaningless.***

Most recently, we published the Schools' Buying Strategy, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-buying-strategy> to support schools to make significant savings, over £1bn a year by 2019-20, in non-pay and procurement costs. We also launched Workforce Planning Guidance, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-workforce-planning> which contains links to advice and case studies, as well as lists of options and questions for school leaders to consider when reviewing their staff structures.

***My response: We've read these documents and they contain absolutely nothing that any reasonably well-run school doesn't already know – and certainly nothing those of us who have been working in poorly funded areas hadn't worked out long ago. Frankly, the advice is patronising.***

***Despite repeated requests from headteachers' organisations, absolutely no evidence whatsoever has been provided to support the claim that there are £1 billion worth of savings to be made. Even in the (extremely unlikely) event that there are, it seems impossible to believe that these can be in areas such as Warrington where we have had to be especially pro-active in making efficiency savings because of the low levels of funding we receive.***

***In addition, it needs to be borne in mind that 75-80% of school budgets are typically spent on staffing (with the majority of this being on teaching staff) – so the notion that we can endlessly cut back in other areas without impacting on provision for students is, to put it mildly, wishful thinking.***

Creating any national funding formula involves balancing the core funding that every child attracts, and the extra funding targeted to those with additional needs; and balancing increases for those that are due to see gains with stability for those schools that are due to see losses. We are consulting for a full 3 months on our proposals to ensure we get them right. We are keen to hear views from as many schools, governors, local authorities and parents as possible. Please respond to the consultation online here by 22 March 2017: <https://consult.education.gov.uk/funding-policy-unit/schools-national-funding-formula2/>

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***My response: As stated earlier, please do complete the consultation document if you have time. It is very complex and so Warrington Borough Council have prepared some notes with suggested responses that you can read by [clicking here](#). Even if you could just answer the first 5 questions and skip the rest, that would be very helpful.***

Department for Education

Click this link to view the response online:

[https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/182705?reveal\\_response=yes](https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/182705?reveal_response=yes)

The Petitions Committee will take a look at this petition and its response. They can press the government for action and gather evidence. If this petition reaches 100,000 signatures, the Committee will consider it for a debate.

***My response: Please do continue to share the petition and encourage others to sign. There is clear evidence that a growing number of Conservative MPs recognise the unfairness of what is being proposed and are beginning to press their government to make changes. Anything you can do as parents and constituents to keep the pressure up will help.***

The Committee is made up of 11 MPs, from political parties in government and in opposition. It is entirely independent of the Government. Find out more about the Committee:

<https://petition.parliament.uk/help#petitions-committee>

Thanks

The Petitions team

UK Government and Parliament

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