

25th March 2021

Dear Secretary of State,

North East schools and pupil premium funding

As regional organisations committed to tackling the effects of poverty and inequality on children and young people in the North East, we welcomed your recent pledge that *'no child's prospects should be blighted by the pandemic'*, following an earlier commitment by the Department for Education (DfE) *'to do everything possible to ensure that no child, whatever their background, falls behind as a result of coronavirus.'*

However, we believe the DfE's decision to change the way in which pupil premium funding is allocated to schools from this coming financial year – so that it will now be based on the number of pupils who were eligible for free school meals (FSM) in October, rather than January – completely undermines the commitments both you and your Department have made.

Our analysis of newly-available data suggests that:

- **There was an increase of around 5,400 pupils in receipt of FSM across the North East** between the school census of October 2020 and that of January 2021;
- **This equates to a loss of between £5.16million and £7.26million for schools in our region**, depending on the age of the pupils, as a result of the pupil premium calculation being brought forward.

What has been described as an administrative change to provide both schools and DfE with greater certainty around future funding levels will therefore actually result in significantly less pupil premium money being available to schools to provide support and interventions to the most disadvantaged pupils in the North East this coming financial year. Of course, this change is also being implemented after twelve months of unprecedented disruption to education, as well as serious upheaval to many children's family circumstances - whilst [the school leaders' union NAHT recently forecast](#) that the scale of this funding loss will effectively 'wipe out' any additional support received via the Covid recovery premium announced earlier this year.

And this change is of particular concern to our region given:

- The significant levels of long-term, high impact disadvantage in the North East which have been both exposed and exacerbated by Covid-19 (we had the highest proportion of pupils eligible for FSM in England and the second highest rate of child poverty in the UK, pre-Covid);
- [The findings of the Education Policy Institute and Renaissance Learning](#) that the North East has experienced the greatest learning losses at both primary and secondary age as result of the pandemic; and
- North East schools are reporting that the one-size fits all approach to some of the DfE's Covid interventions are inappropriate or not flexible enough for our region – [with just 58.8% of the National Tutoring Programme's target number of North East schools engaging with this provision](#) (compared with 100% in the South West and 96% in the South East).

Given the concerns we have set out and the exceptional circumstances facing schools and pupils across our region, we would strongly urge you to reverse the decision to change the way in which pupil premium funding is calculated – at least for this financial year – ensuring the allocation schools receive is based on the number of pupils eligible for free school meals at the January 2021 school census. Funding provided to schools as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic must surely be **additional** to existing support for disadvantaged pupils, not a replacement for it.

We look forward to hearing from you, and are copying this letter to all North East MPs.

Yours sincerely

Amanda Bailey (Director, North East Child Poverty Commission)

Luke Bramhall (Poverty Proofing & Participation Service Manager, Children North East)

Chris Zarraga (Director, Schools North East)

