

22<sup>nd</sup> June 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 wrote to you on 25th March to express our serious concerns about the Government's decision to change the way in which pupil premium funding is allocated to schools from this financial year.

It was clear then from our discussions with schools and local authorities in the region, and the obvious rise in the number of pupils who had become eligible for free school meals (FSM) between October 2020 and January 2021, that basing schools' pupil premium allocation on the number of pupils eligible for FSM in October, rather than in January as has previously been the case, would result in a significant loss of funding to North East schools this year.

However, the Minister of State for School Standards told the Education Select Committee on 29th April that schools would not lose out 'as a direct consequence of the change – whether a school gets more or less pupil premium will depend on its own circumstances, but if you take a typical school, an average school, they will see their pupil premium increase from last year to this year – we don't know the actual consequence of moving to October 2020 from January 2021 because those figures haven't been calculated yet.'

We accept that schools in the North East will receive more pupil premium funding in this financial year than last, but that is because the number of pupils eligible for free school meals rose very sharply in our region between January and October 2020 – indeed by over 10,000.

Critically, your Department **has** now calculated the January 2021 FSM figures and, from the official data published last week, it is clear that:

- **There was a further increase of 5,700 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 up to £7.66million in pupil premium funding for schools in our region**, depending on the age of pupils/whether any have previously been eligible for FSM in the last six years.

This is funding which is used by schools to provide, for example, extra teaching staff, breakfast clubs, additional resources like laptops and tailored support for their most disadvantaged pupils – indeed, during the pandemic it has been used by schools in the North East to provide support directly to struggling families.

Our region already had the highest proportion of pupils eligible for FSM pre-Covid, the second highest rate of child poverty of anywhere in the UK, and experienced the steepest increase in child poverty rates in the years leading up to the pandemic – but the FSM figures published by your Department last week illustrate quite how stark the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has been for families across the North East:

- **Almost 16,000 more pupils became eligible for FSM in the North East between January 2020 and January 2021;**
- **This means almost 109,000 children and young people in our region are now eligible for FSM – 27.5% of all pupils, up from a pre-pandemic 23.5% – the joint steepest increase of anywhere in England.**

If the Government is serious about levelling up, and building back better from the pandemic, it is vital that investment in children and young people is placed at the heart of the recovery. It is difficult to understand how removing almost £8 million in pupil premium funding from schools across the North East – a region which has experienced some of the worst learning losses a result of the pandemic – matches up with those pledges. As we emphasised in our previous letter to you, funding provided to schools as a result of Covid-19 must surely be **additional** to existing support for disadvantaged pupils, not a replacement for it.

In light of the new FSM data published by your Department, we therefore strongly urge you – again – to reverse the decision to change the way in which pupil premium funding is calculated.

We 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)**



**NORTH EAST**

**CHILD  
POVERTY  
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