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West Sussex Headteachers Speak Out About Funding Crisis

The majority of West Sussex Headteachers believe they won't be able to balance the books next year as the school funding crisis takes hold in schools across the county – with support for children with special educational needs (SEND) the worst hit.

A survey carried out by West Sussex County Council shows that 52% of those who responded said they expected to be unable to set a balanced budget in 2020/21 with 40% asking for parent contributions towards curriculum activities and school essentials.

A third expect to reduce teaching staff numbers this year to help save money, the result being a reduction in the number of classes, larger class sizes and multi-year group classes. Furthermore, nearly two thirds are planning to cut non-teaching staff numbers with 76% reporting this will reduce their capacity to support children with special educational needs.

This comes at a time when 70% of headteachers are seeing an increase the number of students with Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs), while 82% are also seeing a rise in pupils on the SEND register who don't qualify for an EHCP.

Responding to the survey results, John Gadd, Headteacher at Thomas a Beckett Primary School in Worthing said: "The survey results from West Sussex Headteachers clearly show the reality behind the spin and smokescreens that the DfE continues to publish. Schools are having to provide the best education possible with less resource while at the same time the needs of many of the children entering primary schools are increasing year on year.

"With many primary schools having to reduce their teaching assistant provision significantly, not only is the workload for those remaining having to be shared between fewer staff, but also the range of SEND, social care, counselling and well-being support they are providing for pupils in their care is growing."

Chris Keating, Headteacher at Davison C of E High Schools for Girls added: "The results of this survey are a real worry. They show the precarious situation that many of our schools are in right now and

that many others are within a year or two of similar difficulty. Headteachers are working hard to save money by re-distributing the workload of colleagues who leave – adding more pressure to those remaining – which is in stark contrast to the government’s attempts to address workload issues within schools.”

Rosemary Hudson, local parent and SEND campaigner said: “We are dealing with a SEND crisis. The funding pressures are leaving some of our most vulnerable children unsupported which is having a negative effect not only on their education but their emotional, social and mental health, with some ending up being excluded or withdrawn from schools as their needs are not met. It is also impacting on the support available outside school, leaving some families at breaking point. Furthermore, teachers are being put under increasing pressure as learning support assistants are being withdrawn and class sizes increasing. The situation is unsustainable and seriously challenging the quality of education that all our children receive – despite teachers’ best efforts”.

The survey results come as analysis by the three main teaching unions shows that £12.6bn of extra funding would be needed by 2022/23 to address the funding crisis. The coalition made up of The National Education Union (NEU), the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), and the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), as well as the f40 education fair funding campaign group, which is made up of 42 local authorities who are among the lowest funded for education in England, set out a long-term plan to reverse the impact of the cuts over the next four years.

Mel Pickett from SOS West Sussex said: “As the school term comes to an end these results show the reality of what our hard-working teachers are facing when they return in September. The funding situation is going from bad to worse and we as parents will continue to fight for our children’s education. The figures released by f40 show for the first time how much the government needs to invest to give our children the education they deserve.”

Further information:

The survey was carried out by West Sussex County Council and 90 schools across the county responded. The full results of the survey can be found here http://www2.westsussex.gov.uk/learning/schools_forum/2019/jun_2019/agenda_item_8_school_funding_survey.pdf

Details of the f40 long-term plan can be found here <http://www.f40.org.uk/2019/07/15/coalition-unveils-long-term-funding-plan-to-reverse-education-cuts/>

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