



Vikki Slade MP

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Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP
By Email

19th July 2024

Dear Secretary of State,

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me briefly this week about the issue of SEND funding for local authorities. As you know, a lack of high needs block funding is having a significant impact on the financial sustainability of councils.

I am particularly concerned about the cohort of children who had the potential to be educated in mainstream schools but, due to funding issues and a lack of availability of teaching assistants, are leaving mainstream schools or, worse, falling out of education altogether. We know there is a great variation in inclusivity between schools and I am pleased you are looking at measures to ensure education can become more holistic and support a wider range of needs.

I shared my frustration with you that this is now creating a significant capacity issue in the specialist sector and an unsustainable pressure on local authority education and school transport budgets.

Data from the Institute of Government suggests that Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council had a £35.8 million deficit in dedicated school grant funding in 2022/23, and Dorset Council had a £35.9 million deficit.¹ This is not acceptable or sustainable.

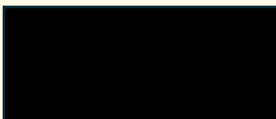
I welcome the work that your team has commenced to review Special Educational Needs and Disability issues and I would be keen to offer any relevant insight.

Furthermore, I call on your department to look carefully at the Safety Valve Programme in its entirety. At present, the programme is setting families against councils over funding for their child's education and support for their health and wellbeing. It is not the solution to the situation faced by councils, and you will be aware that the programme in Dorset Council has been suspended by the Department for Education.

I would appreciate the time to meet with you to share the circumstances that exist in BCP Council where a financial emergency is developing due to the cash flow issues related to high needs funding. Every child is entitled to a high-quality state funded education and for many children with additional needs this simply is not the reality.

I look forward to hearing from your office regarding a meeting.

Yours,



Vikki Slade MP

¹ Nye, P, *SEND spending needs reform to stop local authorities going bust*, Institute for Government (2024)
<https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/comment/send-spending-reform-local-authorities>

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