

Effect of school funding on arts education

APPG Art Craft Design in Education

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[@andrewbaisley](#)

School budgets have been under pressure for the last few years in particular for the last 3 years. However, the problem does go back further than that. These are the largest education cuts in a generation.

16 – 19 education

Since 2010, funding for 16 – 19 education (FE, sixth form college and school sixth forms) has been under a tight squeeze.

Since 2010 funding per student has fallen by 17.5% in real terms and by 2020 it will be at the same level as in 1990 in real terms. 30 years ago 16 – 19 education had a 45% premium over secondary school spending per pupil, today it is 10% behind.

Changes in education generally happen very slowly. Schools generally have 30 pupils in a class and that has been true for decades. This is not true for our 16 – 19 year olds. Their education today is profoundly different to the past with much larger class sizes and less subject choice. Many more students are required to make a course financially viable.

According to the Sixth Form Colleges Association, two thirds of colleges have dropped subjects since 2010 and 84% have increased class sizes. Two thirds of colleges have moved from offering students the opportunity to study four A levels offer to three.

Last year the Association of Colleges reported that performing and expressive arts were amongst the subjects that had been dropped the most.

“Sixth-form funding levels have for some years now been too low to be able to afford a full curriculum,” Bill Watkin, chief executive of the SFCA said. “And lower funding levels mean a class size has to be bigger for it to be viable.”

Schools

Since 2015/16 school funding has been under a lot of pressure. According to the DfE per pupil funding in real terms is 5.3% lower than it was two years ago, or £2 billion. There are two factors driving this, a rapid increase in pupil numbers and an increase in school costs. So whilst the Government's mantra that schools are receiving more money than ever before is true, it is also true that per pupil spending in real terms has fallen. It is per pupil funding that determines class size, the range of subjects on offer and the level of individual attention a child will receive.

Following the significant parental concern expressed at the last General Election, the Government have put back £1.3 billion over the next two years. However, that is only enough to stabilise the situation. The picture is complicated by the introduction of the National Funding Formula that begins in April 2018. There is no uniform national picture.

The Government plans is for beneficiaries of the NFF to receive up to 3% more funding in April, so they will be able to keep up with inflation, whereas unlucky schools will receive only 0.5% well below inflation.

But the sad fact is that nine out of ten will have lower per pupil funding in real terms in 2019/20 than they did in 2015/16.

The average primary school has lost £45,000 and the average secondary school £185,000.

Even if we were to write off the last two years of cuts, 55% of schools will see a fall in funding over the next two years.

The impact of these cuts on education is very clear.

The Association of School and College Leaders (the Secondary Heads Association as was) surveyed their members last year and found that 72% reported that they had cut GCSE courses. And those cuts disproportionately fell on creative subjects:

- 44% said they had cut design and technology subjects,
- 18% music,
- 26% other performing arts,
- 16% art and design courses.

The impact of funding cuts has been felt hardest in the secondary sector because of the deep cuts to sixth form funding, so we can now measure the impact on staffing. The average secondary school has 5.5 fewer staff than two

years ago – that’s 2.8 fewer classroom teachers and 2.3 fewer teaching assistants. It is also important to bear in mind that we have more secondary pupils than ever before. Research by the School Cuts coalition released in early March 2018, shows that class sizes are rising in two thirds of secondary schools. Depressingly we know the worst cuts were made this September, we will have a fuller picture in July. All the indicators point to this situation continuing to deteriorate. School balances are down. The Education Policy Institute has shown that a quarter of maintained secondary schools are running a deficit; and two thirds are spending more than their income; and for 60% of maintained primary schools their expenditure is greater than their income. So we can assume there will be further cut backs in provision over the coming years.

For some schools the position is dire. Take the BRIT school for performing arts and technology in south London. A national centre of excellence. They increased their role to bring in more funding, however, they have also cut 11 teachers over the last two years. I am sure the school will manage but it is hard to see how the school can maintain their standards with cuts of this size. It is also clear from their financial returns that the school will continue to make further the cuts.

The introduction of a National Funding Formula should have been an opportunity to significantly improve the education system. The problem is that it has not been accompanied with sufficient funding and so this has turned into an exercise in levelling funding down.

The tragedy for schools that the Government recognise as being underfunded, is that the majority will not see their funding increase.

I’m afraid ministers’ reassurances need to be taken with a pinch of salt. At the beginning of March 2018, the UK Statistics Authority wrote to Damien Hinds MP telling him to correct his claim that funding is increasing overall and that all schools will see a cash increase in funding.

Whilst the Government do not argue this, I am sure some will say that we are in a period of austerity and so all public services need to cut back on expenditure because the country cannot afford current levels of school spending. I do not think that is true.

In 2010, we spent 5.8% of the nation’s wealth (GDP) on education. That has fallen steadily since then, in 2015 it was 4.6% and it is projected to be just 4% in 2020. The last time the figure was that low was in 1959. Over the last 60

years, we have spent between 4.5% and 5.5% of the nation's wealth. UNESCO recommend that countries spend 6% of GDP.

As well as how much education enriches our lives, it is also a key driver of economic growth. We need to see education spending as an investment in our future and we cannot expect to maintain our standard of living without spending more on our schools and colleges.

Please go to schoolcuts.org.uk to see the effect of cuts on your local school.