

Secretary of State
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

12 October, 2017

Dear Secretary of State,

SEND funding in Hackney

I am writing to express my concerns about high needs funding arrangements which is disproportionately affecting some of Hackney's most vulnerable young people.

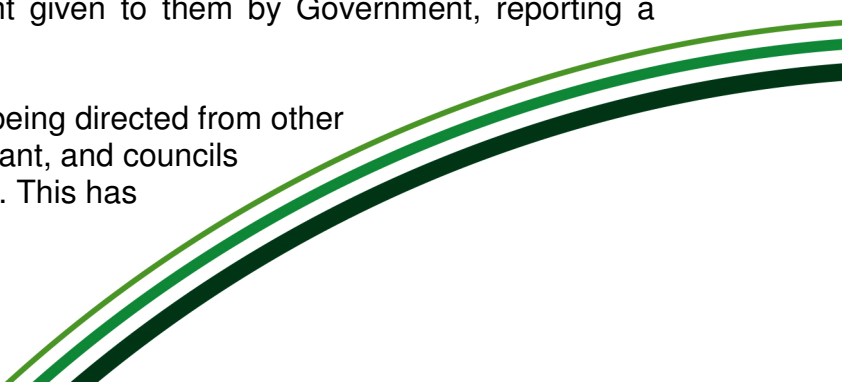
While the long term impact of changes to the National Funding Formula are not clear, and there remains unfunded cost pressures in the system, we welcomed your decision to provide an extra £2.6bn in funding over the next two years. However, there remain considerable concerns about the ongoing shortfall in funding for some of our most vulnerable pupils.

As you will be aware, high needs funding, which allows local authorities to support young people with special educational needs and disabilities, has effectively been frozen since 2011-12, with a minimal increase of 0.5% proposed for 2018/19. This is despite a 34% increase in the number of young people in Hackney receiving SEND additional support over that period, and the age of young people able to access the funding increasing from 5-19 years to 0-25 years.

The limited additional resource made available to local authorities to implement the SEND reforms back in 2014 in no way meet the true costs of delivering them. The increased age range, parental expectations and choice, as well as the limited number of specialist placements continues to drive up costs.

High needs funding is vital and allows our mainstream, special and independent schools to support all our children to have the start in life they deserve. In Hackney the shortfall in DSG is forecast at over £6m along with a deficit of nearly £2m in the associated transport budget, but these concerns are not restricted to my borough. Research carried out by London Councils found that in 2016/17, 26 out of 31 London boroughs spent more than the amount given to them by Government, reporting a combined funding shortfall of £100m.

To meet this shortfall, around £40m is being directed from other blocks within the Dedicated Schools Grant, and councils have drawn on about £20m of reserves. This has



obvious impacts on wider schools funding and the provision of essential services in other areas.

This is simply unsustainable.

In Hackney, we will be forced to reduce the amount of 'top up' funding to schools for pupils with Education, Health and Care Plans by 5%. Reducing funding is absolutely the last thing we want to do, and will be a hard decision to make. As a former SEN teacher, I know the importance of adequate funding, but there simply is no other option left to us.

During the public debate around the changes to the National Funding Formula you listened to how important this issue was to parents, teachers and councils, and I would urge you to do the same about funding for pupils with special educational needs.

In order to avoid a growing funding crisis – and the impact this would have on vulnerable pupils, their parents and carers – it is imperative that you reform how this vital funding is calculated and distributed. It should take into account the growth in demand alongside actual spend. It should also include the role of the SEND Tribunal in the decision to assess or not.

Currently, proposals for the next two years of high needs funding merely provide a small increase against a baseline funding level which is wholly inadequate to meet current demand.

I look forward to hearing your plans for the future funding of SEND and I would like to invite you to meet with some Hackney SENCOs and staff at the Hackney Learning Trust to discuss this matter further.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anntoinette Bramble', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Cllr. Anntoinette Bramble
Deputy Mayor of Hackney