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R.E. Letter received concerning funding pressures at the Epiphany school

I am writing to you in response to the letter you sent to Councillor Rey relating to the funding pressures faced by schools in Bournemouth, in particular the Epiphany school. Councillor Rey has requested council officers respond to your letter on her behalf.

Unfortunately, schools nationally are reporting similar situations, and it has long been the case that Bournemouth schools in general receive below the national average in per-pupil funding. This is a result of the historic process by which schools funding has been distributed among local authorities. The proposed 'National Funding Formula' currently due to be implemented from the next financial year, is intended to address the inequality of the current funding system, and will see many schools in Bournemouth receive higher funding levels under the new system as compared with funding at present

Bournemouth has seen unprecedented rise in primary age pupils since 2010, that is soon to extend into secondary education. With this population rise, an increase children with a statement or an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) has inevitably risen. This increase has yet to be recognised within the funding allocation Bournemouth receives for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). As schools and the Local Authority (LA) share a responsibility for ensuring adequate provision is available for Bournemouth children with SEND, the decision was taken this year to redistribute a share of revenue funding from that provided to individual schools, toward funding for SEND children, to ensure appropriate provision could be maintained for these often vulnerable children.

The LA are exploring, alongside local schools, numerous avenues aimed at reducing the High Needs spend to within the budget. However, it should be recognised that, similar to social care, the High Needs budget is demand led, and with rising EHCP numbers, costs are expected to rise, and until the allocated budget reflects this increase in numbers, budget pressures are expected to continue. In this challenging environment for both schools and local authorities, we encourage schools to work closely with the local authority to find innovative ways to identify budget savings, to ensure that both children with and without SEND continue to receive the high-quality education that they currently have access to in Bournemouth.

Thank you for taking the time to contact your local authority regarding the Epiphany school funding concerns.

Kind regards,

Jack Cutler

Clerk to Schools Forum, Community Learning and Commissioning

(sent on behalf of Neil Goddard, Service Director for Community Learning and Commissioning)