

Campaigning for fairer education funding, reform and investment



Now is the time to tackle the unfair distribution of education funding and deal with the SEND crisis to ensure all children can reach their potential.

f40 believes that every child should have access to the same resources and opportunities, regardless of where they live or their level of need.

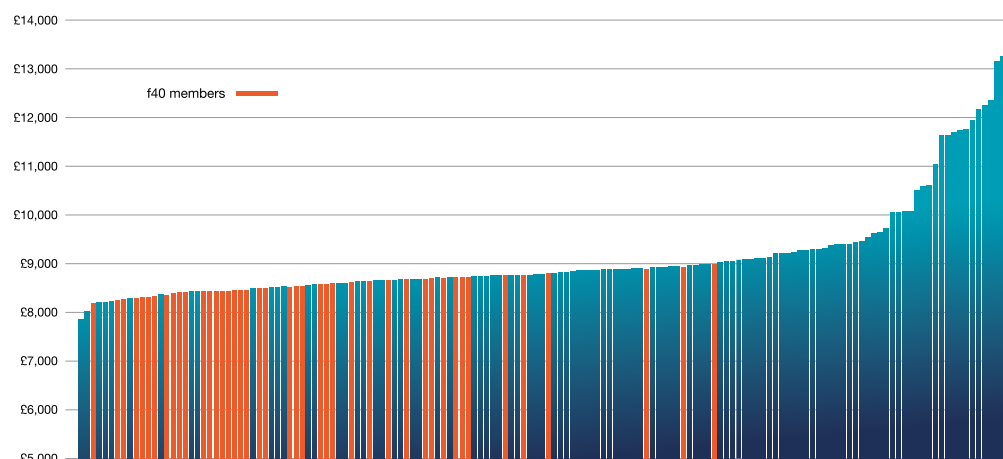
However, our educational landscape continues to be uneven with the continuation of unfair School and

High Needs funding, which means some schools receive over £5,000 less per pupil in Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) than others.

High Needs funding is also unfairly distributed, locking in many historic factors that bear no resemblance to

today's needs. The lowest funded authority receives just £969 per pupil SEND funding, in comparison to the highest funded area that receives £3,565. Even when area living costs are considered, the differential is grossly unfair and far too wide.

Variation in gross Dedicated Schools Grant allocation per mainstream pupil by local authority 2025-26



While all schools are struggling to make their budgets stretch following a series of disappointing funding settlements, the challenges are exacerbated and the impacts greater for the lowest funded areas.

Headteachers and staff do everything they can to ensure children receive a good education, but the lowest funded schools are forced to make even more tough decisions on where to make cuts; often that is to key teaching staff, resources, pastoral care, and extra-curricular activities. Teacher recruitment and retention is incredibly difficult. Ultimately, it is the pupils who suffer.

Under the current funding system, neighbouring authorities with comparable pupils and demographic can receive wildly different funding levels. There is an example of two local authority areas, located close to each other and with similar pupil numbers, where one receives £30m less in SEND funding annually than the other.

We are at a pivotal time when Government is looking to reform our education system, and we await the eagerly anticipated SEND reforms later this year. We implore Government to be bold and brave in its reforms and to guarantee they are supported with additional funding so they can be successful.

And we urge the Department for Education to act now to review the whole education funding system to ensure money is fairly distributed and targeted where it will have the most impact. If we don't, we will be perpetuating the inequality of opportunity for children and young people.

f40 is campaigning for:

- A review of the whole education funding system to ensure money is distributed more fairly and targeted towards inclusion and early intervention.

The SEND Crisis

The number of children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) has doubled since changes to the Code of Practice were introduced in 2014. While the Code was well-intentioned, funding has not kept pace with demand, meaning more and more children are being provided with additional support without sufficient funding to pay for it.

As a result of the mismatch between demand and supply, children are often not being provided with the right support quickly enough, or in the right environment, and local authorities have a cumulative High Needs deficit that is expected to be £5bn by March of next year.

Government has announced plans to extend the statutory override that is holding these deficits off council books for a further two years – until 2028 – but the debts will need to be dealt with at some point, and local authorities are still having to pay interest on those debts.

We agree with Government's direction of travel with regards SEND, particularly around strengthening inclusion and focusing on early intervention, to enable more children to attend their local mainstream school. However, we must equip schools and Early Years providers to succeed with additional funding, resources, training and guidance.

f40 believes the SEND crisis can only be solved with major reform that focuses on early help and achieving better outcomes for children through targeted investment and support in all schools, without the need to go through the rigorous EHCP process, especially for those children who can thrive without one.

The current Early Years and mainstream systems are insufficiently funded or equipped to deal with the increased demand in SEND. Too often, pupils with SEND are absent or leave to be home-schooled, or are transferred into costly specialist provision, when a mainstream place with additional support could have met their needs.

Investing in mainstream schools will enable them to better support all pupils and lead to better outcomes, give parents greater confidence, reduce the pressure on specialist provision, and lower transport costs.



Providing schools with the tools and incentives to be inclusive will:



Reduce the number of children leaving mainstream schools



Reduce the demand on State specialist provision



Reduce the number of children in costly independent provision

f40 is calling on Government to:

- Substantially invest in mainstream schools to better support children with SEND
- Improve clarity around the level of SEND support mainstream schools should offer
- Provide training, resources and guidance to mainstream schools to support inclusion
- Ensure greater accountability for inclusion and focus on inclusion during inspections
- Invest and focus on early intervention
- Provide additional funding for local specialist SEND provision
- Tighten regulation of independent SEND provision, with emphasis on value for money
- Commit to paying off the local authority High Needs deficits

For more information about f40:

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