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Office of Robin Walker MP
Minister of State (Minister for School Standards)
House of Commons
London
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Dear Mr Walker,

In line with the Governments commitment to 'Fair school funding for all' the DfE consultation document (dated July 2021) which has the target of completing the National Funding Formula reforms, and to avoid an abrupt depletion of funds within the primary sector, most local authorities have chosen to move their primary/secondary ratio towards the national average.

In 2020-21, the primary / secondary ratio nationally across all local authorities was 1:1.298, a slight increase from the 2019-20 formulae where it was 1:1.297.

Our statistical secondary neighbours all enjoy higher funding than us; moving significantly beyond Walsall's 1:1.24 ratio, with half of them (alongside our physical neighbour, Wolverhampton) adopting a 1:1.32 ratio or above.

You will see from the table below, that each neighbouring LA has made a transitional move towards the adoption of the NFF, Walsall MBC remains the only LA that has made no attempt at all to do this. This therefore remains at odds with the commitment made for fair funding for all pupils, by Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP

Local Authority	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Walsall MBC	1.25	1.24	1.24	1.24
Wolverhampton CC	1.34	1.34	1.34	1.36
Dudley MBC	1.22	1.33	1.32	1.33

Sandwell MBC	1.23	1.23	1.23	1.25 plus 1.27 in 21-22
Birmingham CC	1.30	1.31	1.33	1.32
Coventry CC	1.31	1.32	1.31	1.32
Stoke on Trent	1.27	1.29	1.29	1.29

Secondary Headteachers in the Walsall Borough have been campaigning to receive a fairer funding ratio for many years. We are fighting to improve academic and social outcomes for our students: raising aspirations in one of the most deprived areas in the country. Simultaneously, in an attempt to balance budgets, we have to make redundancies; we are not able to replace teachers and support staff who leave; we have to inflict larger class sizes on dwindling numbers of staff; we have to reduce the breadth and scope of our curricula; we have to expurgate our resources budget to a minimum and we have to stop carrying out essential building works.

Our local authority representatives tell us that they understand we are underfunded, yet no-one acts to stem the unacceptable drain on our human and physical resources.

Following much debate, a working group was established in July 21 to review the local funding formula, NFF factors and include other potential review areas. The options considered were as follows:

Modelled Option 1

Reduction of Lump Sum by £25k, with funding re-allocated via an increase to Low Prior Attainment rates in such a way as to ensure the distribution of released funding was kept within phase.

A reduction in the Local FSM factor rates to mirror the NFF FSM rates. The funding released re-allocated by the introduction of Ever 6 FSM as a funding factoring, again mirroring the full NFF Ever 6 rates.

Implement the use of the Mobility factor, not currently used in the Local funding formula.

Modelled Option 2

As in Option1 - Reduction of Lump Sum by £25k, with funding re-allocated via an increase to Low Prior Attainment rates in such a way as to ensure the distribution of released funding was kept within phase.

The introduction of Ever FSM as a funding factor at 50% of the NFF Ever 6 rate, achieved by a circa 34% reduction in the Local FSM factor rate with released funding redistributed through Ever FSM.

Implement the use of the Mobility factor, not currently used in the Local funding formula.

Modelled Option 3

Reduction of Lump Sum by £25k, with released funding used to apply LPA rates equal to 95% of the NFF LPA rate. This option does not keep the released funding within phase and sees funding moving from primary to secondary.

As Option 2 Ever FSM as a funding factor is introduced at 50% of the NFF Ever 6 rate, achieved by a circa 34% reduction in the Local FSM factor rate with released funding redistributed through Ever FSM.

Implement the use of the Mobility factor, not currently used in the Local funding formula.

A summary of modelled options was provided by LA officers to group members in September 21. The figures calculate a remodelled 2021-22 funding formula using the same data, on a school-by-school basis, as submitted to the DfE in the 2021-22 APT.

The table overleaf shows the impact of each of the 3 modelled options, compared to the current formula and full adoption of the NFF.

	Local Walsall Formula	Replicate National Funding Formula	Modelled Option 1	Modelled Option 2	Modelled Option 3
Movement of Funding	Nil	£1.1million move from primary to secondary	£0.832k move from primary to secondary	£0.560k move from primary to secondary.	£1.1million from primary to secondary
Ratio	1.248	1.29	1.267	1.261	1.275
Max Primary Funding Loss		£41,764	£37,439	£22,780	£32,129
Max Primary Funding Gain		£13,366	£21,157	£23,356	£2,760
Max Secondary Funding Loss		£42,836	£6,885	£5,653	£5,653
Max Secondary Funding Gain		£186,673	£97,373	£63,133	£111,625

As you can see from the modelling shown above, no primary school would lose funding of more than £41,764, regardless of the option chosen. Additionally, it can also be seen that this would be a stepped change towards the NFF, thus protecting the funding levels within the Primary sector.

Furthermore, a number of schools would see no change in funding regardless of the option used. This is due to the impact of either the application of the minimum funding guarantee, which in all models was set the minimum permitted 0.5%, or the impact of the Minimum per pupil funding guarantee.

The modelled options were presented back to the working group members in Sept 21 and were subsequently rejected with the current model being taken forward, yet again for 2022-23. We have explained that if the local authority does not act soon, the primary sector will suffer a devastating, instantaneous depletion of funds with the introduction of the NFF but there seems to be a recalcitrant belief that doing nothing is an acceptable tactic.

The inability to change or even influence the primary/secondary ratio is detrimentally affecting the funding of all secondary schools in one of the most deprived areas in the country in terms of resourcing; recruitment and retention.

We believe that the current outcome is not in the spirit of the DfE guidance and the undersigned Walsall secondary headteachers unfortunately feel that they have been left with no alternative but to abstain from the 2022-23 ratio vote to make clear our exasperation with the way the working group (with a Primary sector-based focus) has been used to continue to ignore National DfE guidance on 'Fair school funding' and the consequential financial outcomes. We ask that the voting system be made more equitable: for example, by implementing a weighted vote, accounting for pupil ratios in each sector. We would welcome a discussion on the matter.

Yours sincerely,

Billy Downie (on behalf of the Walsall Association of Secondary Headteachers)

School	Headteacher/Principal
Aldridge School – A Science College	Ian Bryant
Barr Beacon School	Lynsey Draycott
Bloxwich Academy	Andy Seager
Blue Coat Church of England Academy	David Smith
Brownhills Ormiston Academy	Helen Keenan
Grace Academy Darlaston	Julie Anstey
Joseph Leckie Academy	James Ludlow
Ormiston Shelfield Community Academy	Stuart Turnbull
Pool Hayes Academy	Tom McDowall

Queen Mary's Grammar School	Richard Langston
Queen Mary's High School	Dr Alison Bruton
Shire Oak Academy	Annabelle Stoddart
St Francis of Assisi Catholic College	Luke Salkeld
St Thomas More Catholic School, Willenhall	Siobhan Bowen
The Streetly Academy	Billy Downie
Walsall Academy	Simon Rogers
Walsall Studio School	Darren Perry
The Ladder School	Chris Bury
New Leaf (AP)	Stuart Evans
Shepwell Centre (AP)	Stephen Pritchard-Jones