



Rt Hon David Laws MP
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Graham Stuart MP
Chair, Education Select Committee
House of Commons
London
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Dear Graham,

Subject: Further information for the Education Select Committee

Thank you for inviting me to give evidence to the Select Committee on Wednesday 23 October. I promised to write to provide further details on a number of issues.

This Government has doubled investment in new school places, improved targeting so that money gets to where it is needed, and funded programmes that target creating places in good and outstanding schools.

The previous government spent £1.9billion on basic need between 2007-8 and 2010-11. Capital investment was targeted at areas of disadvantage rather than primarily at basic need or schools in the worst condition. The Primary Capital Programme (PCP) sought to raise standards in areas of deprivation, at a cost of £1.75billion between 2008-9 and 2010-11 – and in fact one of its primary purposes was to remove surplus places.

Similarly, the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme was not targeted at areas needing new places, or at the schools in the worst condition. BSF projects cost a total of £9.4billion (£6.3billion of capital funding and £3.1billion of PFI funding) with an average cost of around the £17,000 per pupil place. This Government's capital programmes will deliver additional school places much more quickly, and currently 40% cheaper than BSF.

Local authorities are taking a sensible, strategic approach to creating high quality places where they are needed. As I said at the evidence session, I am aware that many LAs and others are thinking creatively to make good use of space and opportunities, but I do not think that it is necessary or desirable to introduce a shift system. I promised to write to confirm the position about infant class sizes: the most recent data¹ show that the average size of infant classes is 27.3 pupils,

¹ School Census January 2013 - published 12 July 2013

compared to 27.2 pupils in 2012, and that 4.1% of all infant classes have more than 30 pupils. We collect data about why any infant class has more than 30 pupils. The data show that in 42.6% of cases, the additional pupils were admitted as a result of an admissions appeal being upheld. A further 31.1% were as a result of pupils moving into the area after the normal admissions round and there were no available schools within a reasonable distance.

Some of the committee members expressed concern that schools and local authorities might seek to build on playing fields as a way to create additional places, and I promised to confirm the numbers. Since February 2012, the Government has received 167 applications to approve a 'change of use' for playing fields. 141 of these applications were for classrooms, of which 91 applications were approved. When taking a decision about a 'change of use' application, I consider a number of factors, including challenging whether the LA has looked at all alternatives and making sure that the school will have enough space after any such change. As I said to the Committee, these numbers reflect a very small proportion of schools and expansions, and the applications that I have seen show that schools and LAs are careful to seek approval only where this would be appropriate.

I was asked how funding has been calculated to support existing schools to expand through the Targeted Basic Need programme. In these cases, the Education Funding Agency calculates funding to provide for additional classrooms and ancillary space (such as toilets, corridors and storage) but not for main facilities such as dining halls, which the new classes would be able to share. Once the funding has been allocated, the local authority can use its discretion about how to use the funding to maximum effect.

The Committee asked a number of questions about free schools. First, let me confirm the number of alternative provision free schools: we have 18 schools open, and a further 16 in the pipeline. There were a number of questions about where free schools were being established and the interplay between such decisions and local demand for new places. In assessing the need for free schools, we take into account the basic need for places, and the Secretary of State does consider, as he is required to by law, the impact of establishing a new free school on existing education providers. We also consider the demand from local parents for a new school, and the quality of existing schools in the area, because free schools offer parents the choice of a better education where they are dissatisfied with existing local schools. Many free schools also help to meet demographic pressures, with 102 of the 142 mainstream free schools in areas of basic need. All free school applicants have to demonstrate strong demand and also show how they will engage with a broad section of the community, but we do not hold data about whether pupils live near to the school they attend. It is then up to parents to make up their own minds as when selecting the best school for their child. It is also worth remembering that free schools are only a small proportion of total schools in England and a small proportion of capital investment, accounting for 9% of capital spend between 2011-12 and 2014-15.

Free schools have proved incredibly popular with parents; those open at the start of the last academic year received an average of three applicants per place for this September. Free schools are also demonstrating their ability to provide high

quality places. While the numbers are small and it is clearly early days for the programme, we can compare the judgements Ofsted made on the free schools inspected during the 2012/13 academic year with the inspections of new maintained schools inspected against the same framework in the same time frame. 18 out of 24 free schools were judged to be good or outstanding, compared to 8 out of 16 new maintained schools.

There was some discussion about academies and free schools which also have a sixth form, as some committee members were worried that the new school sixth forms would undermine current post-16 providers. At present, there are 1,125 academies and 98 free schools² that include sixth form provision. The vast majority of the academies already had a sixth form (only 34 had predecessor schools without a sixth form). Sixth forms allow these schools to raise pupils' aspirations and attract more specialist teachers, and also increase the range of options and choices open to pupils and parents in a local area. When allocating capital funding we do not make allocations specifically for sixth forms, and we do not collect data on how much schools or local authorities spend on sixth form provision.

You also asked about the capital and revenue calculations for the costs of kitchens to provide infant classes with free school meals (FSM), the Department is currently looking at what challenges universal infant FSM might create for primary schools and considering what support they will need to implement the policy successfully. Further details on how this will policy will be funded will be announced later this year.

Finally, I promised to confirm the number of teachers with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) currently teaching in maintained schools and in academies (which includes free schools). Overall, 95.6% per cent of teachers in academies (including free schools) hold QTS, compared to 96.7% per cent of teachers in all state-maintained schools. However more teachers in academies than in all state-maintained schools held degrees or higher level qualifications (including PGCE): 75.1% in primary academies (72.9% in primary maintained schools), and 90.3% in secondary academies (89.5% in secondary maintained schools). The data show that the vast majority of teachers in state-funded schools are qualified, and we expect this to continue.

I hope this additional information is helpful to the Committee.

Yours sincerely,



David Laws MP

² Including 40 studio schools and UTCs.