

5th December 2011

Stuart Miller
Central Capital Unit
Department for Education
Sanctuary Building
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Dear Mr Miller

Basic Need Allocation

Regarding the additional Basic Need allocation of £500m, I would like to express upon behalf of Harrow Council our disappointment and concern due to the very low amount of additional funding we received, particularly compared to other London Local Authorities with only 3 of 33 London Authorities receiving less than Harrow. We understand that the allocations were in some way based on the Net Capacity Figures, and would question the principle of this approach for reasons explained further below.

Along with many Local Authorities in London and the Southeast, we have been dealing with the significant increase in school places required in the primary sector for the past few years. The solution thus far has been the introduction of 'bulge classes' which is an additional form of entry for one year only (with the possibility of a consecutive or later bulge class in the same school) with no permanent expansion of that school. We introduced five bulge Reception classes in 2009 and five again in 2010, and eight bulge Reception classes in September 2011. We have also had to increase the number of Year 1 places and opened an additional Year 1 bulge class in October 2011.

Current projections show a consistent and sustained rise in school places needed, such that we have had to embark upon a permanent school expansion programme to meet increased demand alongside further bulge classes to deal with peaks in demand. This means that Harrow needs to expand permanently 11 schools within the next three years.

It is acknowledged that Harrow is in a unique position that we have exploited to manage the increase in demand thus far. This is because in September 2010, the local authority implemented a strategic school reorganisation to change the ages of transfer and align all schools with the national curriculum key stages. All Year 7 pupils are now in secondary schools and separate junior schools now have Year 3 pupils. As a result of this change, some accommodation, in combined primary schools and separate infant schools has become available. This includes general teaching

classrooms and Key Stage 3 specialist curriculum areas. The position for schools varies considerably and no space has been generated in separate junior schools as a result of this change. Theoretically this means that the majority of our schools show spare capacity.

Whilst the spare capacity produced from the change to the age of transfer has assisted us with allowing space for the many bulge classes already in place, the amount of space generated by changes to the age of transfer do not allow for permanent expansions. A combined primary school permanent expansion requires up to seven additional classrooms and associated shared areas which generally requires significant investment in the physical expansion of our schools. A separate infant school up to three classrooms and a separate junior school at least four classrooms. This could amount to 77 extra classrooms. Some of this capacity will be met from re-commissioning accommodation, however, this is insufficient and additional accommodation is required. The attached spreadsheet demonstrates the situation and acknowledges the spare capacity based on net capacity figures, but also demonstrates that generally this does not negate the need for significant investment and physical expansion to achieve a permanently expanded school. We note that 30 of 38 maintained primary schools are either at/over capacity or have up to one third of the space that would be needed for a permanent expansion. Of the remaining eight schools, we are aiming to permanently expand four of these to utilise the spare capacity as far as possible, but all will still require physical capacity improvements to varying degrees. It should also be noted that part of the consideration for which schools to expand has to include popularity and mobility issues which relate to the spare capacity in the first instance, and consequently some schools are unfortunately not appropriate to expand even where space may be available.


We have embarked on a consultation on proposals to expand permanently 11 schools and have completed feasibility studies to assess the accommodation requirements and costs associated with the expansions. The initial estimate of the costs for the expansions is £27.415m required in the next four years with the majority required in the next two. Our situation is exacerbated by the fact that many of our schools are also in poor condition with buildings that are effectively life expired and therefore this sum includes for two partial or complete rebuilds (we note that we have applied for these schools to be re-built and expanded under the Priority School Building Programme). The £27.415m is therefore a basic need requirement in addition to ongoing significant capital maintenance requirements for the other schools.

We have discussed our allocation, the situation in Harrow and the attached spreadsheet with George Lawson of the Central Capital Unit who acknowledged the issue and agreed that the allocation may not have fully considered our situation. Mr Lawson also confirmed that the same 'formula' (which we are still not clear on) will not be used for the FY12/13 allocation for basic need.

It is clear to us that a local authority with zero or less capacity will need a larger share of allocations, however, the proportionality of that needs to consider the cost of solutions. If our eleven expansions require one third less new build than an authority with no spare capacity which also required 11 permanent expansions, then we could expect a third less funding. Perhaps a local authority with one third over capacity would conversely need the additional one third funding for their expansions. However, it is difficult to see how an allocation of £120k received by Harrow can compare to a circa £25m allocation received by our neighbouring boroughs in this respect.

We would welcome formal acknowledgement of our situation and seek your assurance that there will be on-going consideration of the needs of all local authorities in providing additional capital funding. Harrow may appear to be in a less challenging position than our neighbours, but the methodology for the allocation of this additional £500m funding does not appear to reflect our needs going forward. We have serious concerns that the yearly allocation may still not recognise our situation leading to a significant shortfall in funding and our inability to expand schools and provide high quality school places.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Catherine Doran". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C'.

Catherine Doran
Corporate Director of Children's Services