



From David Hutchings, Exeter 382594, October 16, 2009

Devon schools unite to launch campaign for fair funding

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DEVON'S schools are uniting to launch a campaign calling on the Government to give education in the county a fair deal.

Headteachers, governors, teachers and parents will launch the campaign at a special protest meeting at **Stoke Hill Junior School in Exeter on October 19 at 10.30am.**

The campaign slogan will be: Hands Up for Fairer School Funding.

The schools say Devon is one of the worst funded education authorities in the country standing at 148th out of 151 councils.

Currently the top funded council in the country – City of London – receives £7,603 for every pupil.

The national average funding for each school pupil is £4,217. In Devon the average funding is £3,842.

So every pupil in a Devon school is worth £375 less than the national average.

In a 1,000-pupil secondary school that equates to £375,000 a year – enough to pay for around 10 experienced teachers.

In a primary school of 200 pupils, the gap amounts to £75,000.

The campaign is backed by the Devon primary, secondary and special heads' associations, DAPH, DASH and SHAD, the Devon Association of Governors, DAG, the main teaching unions and the Devon Education Forum. It also has the whole-hearted support of Devon County Council.

County Hall
Topsham Road
Exeter
Devon
EX2 4QD

Leader of the Council:
Cllr John Hart

Chief Executive:
Phil Norrey

Telephone:
(01392) 383262

Fax:
(01392) 382301

Email:
media@devon.gov.uk

Information Devon:
www.devon.gov.uk

Devon County Council News:
www.devon.gov.uk/media/

Fact File (2009/2010):

Devon is an excellent council which is improving well.
The Audit Commission

- Budget £865 million
- Population: 750,100.
- County Councillors: 62
- Schools: 364
- Pupils: 96,200
- Children looked after: 550
- Adults helped to live at home: 18,956
- Roads: 12,831 km (7,973 miles)
- Bridges: 3,500
- Residential Care: 3,564 adults
- Libraries: 61 (11 mobiles)
- Streetlights: 71,000
- Illuminated road signs and bollards: 10,917
- Recycling Centres: 20
- Recycling rate: 49.21%

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DAPH chairman, Gary Chown, who is headteacher of Tiverton's Wilcombe Primary, said: "We are not asking for special treatment. What we want is for Devon's schoolchildren to be treated fairly.

"Historically education authorities in London and the South East have been given more Government funding because the cost of living was judged to be higher.

"But staff costs account for around 80 per cent of a school's running costs.

"It costs roughly the same to employ a teacher anywhere in the country because of the national pay scales. Books and equipment cost the same. So do most of the running costs of a school.

"And in Devon many remote schools have to pay more for such services as Broadband because of their distance from the main hub."

DASH chairman David Fitzsimmons, who is principal of Holsworthy Community College, said schools had received a three-year settlement from the Government from 2008 to 2011 but Devon was well below the national average.

At the same time, schools were experiencing significant spending pressures, including the impact of job evaluation on non-teaching staff, energy price rises and general cost inflation.

"In the last academic year, more than a fifth of Devon's secondary schools were forced to make redundancies while a number of other posts were lost through natural wastage," he said.

"That level of redundancies was the highest in 10 years and our projections for school budgets in 2010/11 give significant cause for concern.

"Over half are predicting a deficit budget and that could mean the loss of over 100 jobs. And all this is happening in schools in Devon which are very far from over-staffed because of their historic unfair funding from the Government."

The chairman of DAG, Don Paterson, who is chairman of governors at Newton Abbot College, said the Government was going to review the way the formula for funding schools was calculated.

"This is a particularly timely moment for us to launch this campaign and to alert parents and families in Devon to the problems that schools are likely to face maintaining a quality education for their children in the future.

"We do not dispute for a moment that the Government has put more money into education since 1997 but percentage increases in school funding merely means that the gap is widening all the time between Devon schools and their better-funded colleagues in other parts of the country.

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“As we approach the General Election we want all of our MPs and prospective MPs to back our case and speak up for Devon’s schools when the formula for funding is reviewed.”

Teaching unions’ spokesman Josh Wright, who teaches at Honiton Community College, said: “My colleagues are at the chalk face and we know what a difference we could make to our students’ education if we were fairly funded.

“An extra teaching assistant or another field trip or an additional piece of kit in the classroom could really help a student to get the best from their education.

“Children only get one chance at education and it is really unfair that Devon children are penalised because of the postcode lottery of school funding.”

Devon County Council leader John Hart said: “We are whole-heartedly behind this campaign and will give our schools every possible support.

“Despite the fact Devon’s schools are the fourth worst-funded in the country, they are in the top third when it comes to exam results.

“That shows what an excellent job our heads and teachers are doing with scarce resources.

“But they cannot continue making do for ever. This is the education of our children we are talking about and that is one of the most vital jobs with which we are entrusted.

“A successful outcome to this campaign will really help us to make a difference for all Devon’s children.”

NOTE TO NEWS EDS: Reporters, photographers and cameramen are welcome to attend the launch at Stoke Hill Junior School at 10.30am on October 19.

Gary Chown, David Fitzsimmons, Don Paterson, Josh Wright and Stoke Hill headteacher Roy Souter will be available for interview along with Stoke Hill parents. Gary Chown is available on 01884 253025, David Fitzsimmons on 01409 253430, Don Paterson on 01647 277519, Josh Wright on 01404 42283 and Roy Souter on 01392 667830.

There will be opportunities to film classroom activities. The Fair Funding website is:

<http://www.fairfundingfordevonschools.org.uk/index.html>

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