

Education Committee

Oral evidence: [Government plans for Maths to 18 and Schools Funding, HC 1745](#)

Tuesday 18 July 2023

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 18 July 2023.

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Members present: Mr Robin Walker (Chair); Miriam Cates; Mrs Flick Drummond; Anna Firth; Nick Fletcher; Kim Johnson; Andrew Lewer; Ian Mearns; Mohammad Yasin.

Questions 1-84

Witnesses

I: Nick Gibb, Minister of State for Schools, Department for Education; Sarah Maclean, Director for Skills Strategy and Engagement, DFE; and Tom Goldman, Deputy Director, Funding Policy Unit, DFE.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Nick Gibb, Sarah Maclean and Tom Goldman.

Q1 Chair: Welcome to this accountability session with the Minister for Schools. The Committee has the opportunity to question the right hon. Nick Gibb on two areas within his portfolio: proposals for maths to 18, following the Committee's initial session on this in February; and schools funding. Welcome, Minister. Today we hear evidence from the Minister and from Sarah Maclean and Tom Goldman, officials at the DFE.

First, Minister, what is the Government's overall objective for extending maths to 18 for all pupils and the reform agenda that sits alongside that?

Nick Gibb: We have had a very successful pre-16 maths reform programme since we came to office in 2010. We reformed the content of the primary school curriculum, removing some of what I would call the absurdities from the national numeracy strategy in the ways you calculate long division and long multiplication and in how you perform addition. We brought in evidence-based written methods. We looked around the world, such as at Singapore and its 2007 curriculum, and we had teacher exchanges with the best performing jurisdiction in PISA, which was Shanghai. We established 40 maths hubs around the country in order to spread best practice—teacher-led best practice—in how to teach mathematics, based on the east Asian mastery method.

As a consequence of all that, we are seeing standards rise in the SATs taken at the age of 11—we saw a drop following covid, but a rise again after covid. We have also seen this country rising in the international league tables in PISA and TIMSS. In TIMSS, for example, we have risen from joint 10th in 2015 to joint eighth, and we had our highest ever score.

Since 2010, I am confident that we have seen significant improvements in maths attainment pre-16. We can build on that and address the fact that this country is an outlier in terms of the proportion of post-16 young people who continue to study maths beyond that period. We know that there are high returns to the economy and to individuals in continuing to study maths beyond 16. So that is the purpose: we want a higher proportion of young people continuing to study maths beyond 16.

Q2 Chair: How much of that position as an outlier is a consequence of the design of our qualifications system? We do allow people greater choice and greater specialisation than many systems around the world, so it appears to be a departure from that approach if we then say, "You can choose what you want to study, except for maths, where you need to continue." How much of that goes against the grain of our system?

Nick Gibb: We have a very good system. People criticise it, but we have a very broad curriculum up to the age of 16. It is even broader up to the age of 14. Young people then start to select their GCSE choices beginning



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in year 10. By the time of year 11, young people will have had a very broad education, and I personally believe it should be broader still. That is why the EBacc for me is very important: it encompasses a language, two sciences, humanities, English and maths.

We then specialise post-16. Going down the academic route, we specialise in A-levels, which means that our university degrees are three years. In many countries around the world, they are longer in order to make up for the fact that young people have not had that specialisation. The specialisation enables young people to think more intellectually, if you like, ready for a university education. I do not believe that including maths as an additional qualification to those three or four A-levels necessarily takes us in a different direction from the very successful direction that we have had so far in terms of specialising post-16.

- Q3 **Chair:** We have heard from the Prime Minister that this is not all about everybody taking A-level maths. As you just said, it could be an additional qualification alongside three or four A-levels. What is the design of the qualifications that you are considering in order to enable this? Surely, that is crucial to enable continued participation for people of a range of abilities.

Nick Gibb: Yes. Following the Adrian Smith review, we have introduced a range of core maths qualifications post-16. They have not had a huge uptake—about 12,000 entries last year, I think—but they are very high-quality qualifications.

We have, of course, the AS-level in maths and then the maths A-level. For young people who have only achieved a grade 3 pass in GCSE maths, there is a condition of funding that means their institution will continue to teach them maths to help them to achieve a grade 4. If they achieve a grade 2 or grade 1 in GCSE maths, they will be able to take the GCSE again or take another qualification, like functional skills.

There is a range of qualifications already, but we have established the expert advisory group primarily to advise us on what routes young people should take. I am not sure that there necessarily is a route for the young people who have grades 4, 5 and 6. They could take a core maths qualification or AS, but there may be other qualifications that are more suitable for them, depending on what other choices they are making at 16 and what route they are taking: a vocational route, apprenticeship, T-levels or A-levels.

- Q4 **Chair:** Getting the right response out of the expert advisory group—getting the right system, designed for people of different abilities and ranges for maths—will be crucial. Can you give us an update on the work they have done so far?

Nick Gibb: They will be reporting by the summer, I think.

Sarah Maclean: The end of this month.

Nick Gibb: The end of this month—the beginning of the summer recess.



Chair: That will certainly be very interesting to hear. I will hand over to Flick.

- Q5 **Mrs Drummond:** We have heard from most headteachers and in education generally that there is a shortage of maths teachers. What are the plans to recruit and train more maths teachers to provide further teachers in the classroom up to 18?

Nick Gibb: This will very much come out of the recommendations from the expert advisory group as to what maths will need to be taught post-16. Inevitably, if we are extending the range, we will need more maths teachers. We already have in place significant incentives for recruitment. We have a £27,000 tax-free bursary and a £29,000 scholarship for people to train to be maths teachers. We also have the levelling-up premium of £3,000 not just for maths, but for physics, chemistry and computing teachers in the first five years of their careers who teach in certain disadvantaged schools around the country. Those are incentives to bring in more people to become maths teachers. But the actual answer to your question will depend on what the expert advisory group advises in terms of what is going to be taught.

- Q6 **Mrs Drummond:** Will you be giving handcuffs to those people you give bursaries to? The retention for teachers is quite low, up to five years. Can we ensure that if we spend taxpayers' money giving them a bursary, they stay in the profession for longer?

Nick Gibb: There is a downside to doing that. We consider these issues regularly, and the argument against doing that is that the more restrictions you place on a young person electing to train to be a maths teacher—or in any teaching role that attracts a bursary—the less attractive a choice it is for those young people to make. We can send you the details, or maybe my two senior officials have them here. But I do not think we are seeing huge drop-out rates for people that have had the bursary, sufficient to make doing that an attractive proposition, bearing in mind that it could be a disincentive for people to apply to be teachers. It is a balance of incentives and disincentives, and that is why we have not attached repayment conditions or any other kind of handcuff to those bursaries.

- Q7 **Mrs Drummond:** It would be great to see those statistics at some point, just to be reassured.

Nick Gibb: I will send you those.

- Q8 **Kim Johnson:** Good morning. Nick, last week we had teacher training providers giving evidence. While most of them were very optimistic about recruiting, because of the massive problems we have at the moment with recruitment and retention, most of those providers had not reached their targets and were not going to. If we are not able to recruit the levels of maths teachers with the relevant qualifications, what will be the impact of rolling out the Prime Minister's agenda on teaching maths up until 18?

Nick Gibb: It is a combination of policies. We have increased the number of specialist maths teachers in secondary schools from 25,323 to 28,786



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last year. That is a 14% increase in that period. This is about not just recruiting, but retention and returners. We leave no stone unturned right across teacher recruitment to ensure we have sufficient teachers.

You have seen the figures for those coming into teaching every year. Last year, there were about 44,000 people, and there were a number leaving. Those leaving percentages are broadly similar, on average, going back 10 or 13 years. The numbers coming in are roughly around 40,000 to 50,000. They peaked in about 2015 or 2016 at something like 56,000. We can give you all those figures. The challenge we have had generally on teacher recruitment is that we have created over 1 million new school places since 2010.

Having said all that, in terms of retention, we were worried that so many teachers were leaving in the first year and the first five years. I was concerned about how we treat young graduates coming into teaching in that first year. Here they are at 23 or 24 years old—it is their first job, they are living in their first flat, and they are having to learn how to teach children. They were then being asked to prepare lesson plans, so they were up until midnight every night. It is no wonder so many were leaving. We brought in the early career framework as a way of helping young people, or new teachers, coming into the profession in the first two years through mentoring.

Q9 Kim Johnson: Do you monitor how well that is working, given the numbers that are leaving? According to the NEU, 40,000 teachers left last year. We have not got staff in classrooms to provide that support, so how well is the scheme operating to support newly qualified teachers?

Nick Gibb: We are monitoring that scheme. Do we have the latest evaluation here?

Sarah Maclean: I have not got the evaluation for that particular scheme, but we can provide you with more information on that. The other things that are in place to help support teachers are the school workload reduction toolkit, to help review and reduce that workload, and the education staff wellbeing charter, to make sure that the wellbeing of staff and the way in which they are looked after are paramount.

Kim Johnson: Thanks, Sarah.

Nick Gibb: I just want to go back to the point you made about 40,000 leaving. In 2022-23, the number of full-time-equivalent entrants into teaching was 47,954 and the number leaving was 43,997. On that leaving rate of 9.7%, you can go back to 2010—the year before, it was 8%; during covid, it was 7%; and it was 9% in 2018 and 9.9% in '17-18. We can send you these figures. The leaving rates are broadly similar. And the number coming into teaching was 47,000 this year, as I said, 44,000 the year before, 41,000, 45,000, 47,000—the numbers are broadly similar, year on year. The leaving rates are also broadly similar. As I said, the real challenge has been 1 million new school places. That has been the main thing.



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- Q10 Nick Fletcher:** Thank you, Minister. I have done a small piece of work regarding male teachers and recruitment and retention. Only one in seven primary school teachers is male, and only one in three secondary teachers is male. In the survey that I did, four out of five teachers said that having men in the classroom was hugely important. I just wonder what you are doing on this piece of work and whether it would form any longer-term strategic workforce plan.

Nick Gibb: We do monitor these issues and all our marketing is geared to appeal to a diverse range of potential candidates—male, female and different ethnic backgrounds—to make sure that we are not missing out on any particular demographic. We need people—the best people—to come into teaching, so all our marketing is geared to that.

We are also focusing quite a lot on behaviour. One of the main reasons why people are deterred from coming into teaching and one of the main reasons why they might leave—well, workload is one, but behaviour in schools is another significant factor. So we are expending a lot of effort, with our behaviour hubs, spreading best practice in order to improve behaviour in school as well. That will also help to retain teachers, male and female.

- Q11 Nick Fletcher:** We spend quite a bit of money, I believe, on campaigns to encourage women to go into engineering, which is great. And with regard to sports, we have had “This Girl Can” and lots of different campaigns like that. Do you think we should do something along similar lines about men coming into teaching?

Nick Gibb: Well, if you look at our marketing and adverts, including the TV adverts that come on, you will see that it is geared, as I said, to a whole range of demographics, and you will see very compelling male role models being used for some of the teachers portrayed in that marketing campaign.

- Q12 Ian Mearns:** Do we have a plan to recruit more maths teachers? I note, Minister, that what the Department has actually done in response to under-recruiting maths teachers is to reduce the targets, in terms of recruiting maths teachers on a year-on-year basis. That seems to me, when you have a shortage of maths teachers, a perverse response. I wonder what the rationale was behind that. It seems to me that we need, like what has just been announced for the NHS, a long-term staff and workforce development plan, because it isn't just teaching where we have shortages. Teachers are of course absolutely vital, and needed in particular specialisms, but we have shortages in a whole range of auxiliary but very important professions—educational psychologists, for instance. Has there been any thinking in the Department about trying to develop a long-term workforce development plan for teaching and for schools?

Nick Gibb: Certainly in terms of the targets, the reason why—what's it called? The workforce—

Sarah Maclean: The workforce plan?



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Nick Gibb: No, no. We have a formula every year that calculates the target that we need, in terms of teachers overall and by subject, and that isn't just based on the prior year's recruitment—we are meeting about 90% of the target, by the way, in maths recruitment. It's also based on other people coming into the profession—the retention rates as well as the demand from schools. The fact that the target was reduced was not a ministerial edict to deal with the low percentage achieving the target; it was based on a complicated formula that takes into account all these other factors, over which Ministers have no control.

Q13 Ian Mearns: We were talking about recruitment and retention to another panel, and I said to them that if you under-shoot a target, and then reduce the target next year, what you under-shoot the target by that year would be less. That would be regarded as an improvement in some people's eyes. That would be a cynical way to look at it but, to be honest, it raised a few wry smiles amongst one of our panels of professionals. We have had year on year shortages in the number of maths teachers recruited. Reducing the target, even once, seems odd, to say the least, because we still have not got enough specialist maths teachers. Unfortunately, particularly in many of our secondary schools, far too many youngsters are not being taught maths by fully qualified maths teachers, or science by science teachers. That is an ongoing concern, and one would have thought that, in response, the Department would be thinking about an ongoing, long-term workforce development plan.

Nick Gibb: There are a couple of things there. First of all, as I said, the target is not driven just by the prior year's recruitment. It is also driven by other factors: returners, retention, demand and so on, over which we have no control. Secondly, we have a long-term development plan for teachers, called the golden thread. It has been worked on since 2018. It is about improving the training that teachers get in initial teacher training in universities, and school-centred initial teacher training. It is then about the early career framework that I talked about, which aims to improve the mentoring and support that teachers get in the first two years of their career. We have also revamped the whole suite of national professional qualifications for teachers.

All that is based on evidence, and overseen by the Education Endowment Foundation, and aims to make sure that teachers get the training that they need to manage classroom behaviour, and understand things like cognitive load theory and how children learn. We have really improved the quality of the training and support that teachers get in the initial stages of their career, and throughout their career as they move up to leadership roles and then senior leadership roles. That is all designed to make sure that the teaching profession in this country gets the same support as other professions. I would say it is even better support than other professions get.

On the post-A-level qualifications of teachers, the figure that everybody cites for the proportion of hours taught by teachers with a relevant post-A-level qualification in 2022-23 is 87.2%, but if you go back to 2014-15, it was 79.8%. If you go back to 2010-11—although that figure is not directly



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comparable, because the methodology used changed in 2012 and 2014—the figure, just to give a rough and ready comparison, was 83.6%. This is not something that has arisen recently. In fact, if anything, the proportion of teachers who have a post-A-level qualification is improving. The same applies if you take the proportion of teachers, rather than teaching hours. It was 87.2% in 2022. Going back to 2010—again, when there was a different methodology—it was 74%.

Q14 Ian Mearns: But there is a fly in the ointment: I am sure that it is your ambition, and everyone else's, to have more youngsters studying science or maths to A-level. If that is our ambition, we need to beef that up somewhat.

Nick Gibb: And we have been successful in that. As you know, A-level maths is now the single most popular choice. I think it is taken by something like 26% of students.

Sarah Maclean: That has increased over the last few years. It is the fastest-rising and most popular A-level subject, which is really encouraging. There is also an advanced maths support programme in place—we are not resting on our laurels—to encourage more people to take maths A-level, further maths and core maths.

Q15 Chair: Seeing as you mentioned the advanced maths support programme, I have heard concerns from sixth-form colleges that those who have been the most effective at recruiting for that lose out the following year, because they do not necessarily have the same trajectory of growth. How do we ensure that we have a system that incentivises take-up of advanced maths, and also rewards the people who have been most successful to date?

Nick Gibb: When we brought this in, we had to have a baseline. We are paying £600 for every additional student per academic year studying a level 3 qualification. You have to have a baseline for that; it was originally an average over two years, 2015-16 and 2016-17. The average of those two years was the baseline. Between 2019, when that came in, and 2022-23, schools received significant additional funding each year in order to incentivise. On top of that, they get the usual funding, of course, for those students studying the subject.

There comes a point when the baseline of 2015-16 is ancient history. You do have to reset it at some point. We decided to reset it for 2022-23, but for those schools that are losing something like £20,000 or more, we continue to provide temporary funding.

Q16 Chair: That is on a one-year basis, currently, isn't it?

Sarah Maclean: The programme has just been extended for a fifth year, into 2023-24, so that will continue this year. Any future programme will be looked at in the light of the recommendations from the expert advisory group.

Q17 Chair: From the expert working group. Presumably, it is envisaged that there is likely to be a future programme, given the importance of this



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area for Government policy more generally.

Sarah Maclean: I think so, depending on the recommendations and advice from the EAG.

Q18 **Ian Mearns:** A last one from me, Robert. I am going back to the stats about the number of youngsters being taught by specialised teachers. You quoted a number of figures, some historical, some more up to date. They were around 82% or 83%.

Nick Gibb: 87%.

Q19 **Ian Mearns:** Given that 13% of youngsters studying maths are not taught by specialised, degree-level qualified teachers, is it not perverse for the Department to reduce its target for recruiting maths graduates into teaching?

Nick Gibb: Those targets have not prevented a single successful applicant from getting a place.

Ian Mearns: I know, because you undershot the targets.

Nick Gibb: It is an arbitrary thing, really. Even if we got to 100%, we would not say to institutions, "Don't recruit any more maths teachers." This is not having any real-world impact, in terms of institutions taking people on.

Q20 **Ian Mearns:** All I am questioning is the methodology that the Department is using to determine the targets. If you have under-recruited in a number of previous years—not just the previous year—coming forward with a reduced target seems odd, given what is happening out there in the real world of schools, Minister.

Nick Gibb: It seems counter-intuitive, but the formula is the formula. It is available—

Ian Mearns: We need a mathematician to look at the formula.

Nick Gibb: It is open source. Anybody can look at it, and people do. They examine and criticise it, and we can tweak it if it is not right. On the general point about the proportion of teachers with a post-A-level qualification in the subject they are teaching, you can see those figures; I can send you these two charts. I think you will find them quite interesting. There is an issue across a lot of subjects, but in most subjects, the figure has increased since 2010. There is again the caveat about the methodology changing in 2012 and 2014. This is an issue that we are concerned about, but the numbers are going in the right direction, though there is obviously more to do. It would be nice if the figure was 100%.

Chair: We would definitely welcome seeing those charts; thank you, Minister. Anna, can I bring you in?

Q21 **Anna Firth:** I start by congratulating you on the tremendous impact you have had. You are now in your second decade as an Education Minister. It is very impressive that we have gone up the international tables,



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particularly for literacy; we have the best literacy standards in the west. Going from 15th to 8th in maths is equally impressive.

However, I want to push you on the nature of the curriculum that the Department has in mind for this additional maths education. We have had one inquiry on that already, and we heard evidence from a number of experts, who said that for it to be effective, it needed to be applied maths, not pure maths. We also quizzed the Secretary of State, who told us that, "rather than focusing on rigid distinctions between arithmetic, numeracy and maths, our driving principle is to equip all young people with the knowledge, skills, and confidence they need to succeed in their future careers and use maths in a range of contexts". Can you put some more flesh on those bones for us?

Nick Gibb: Before I do, as you did that "Hooray for the Government", I want to read out another one. This Ofsted report came out on 13 July: "In the last few years, a resounding, positive shift in mathematics education has taken place in primary schools...The overall picture of mathematics education in England is broadly healthy." Ofsted is saying that we have achieved great things in our primary school maths.

On your question, this is what the EAG will advise us on: what is the maths that these young people do not have in their brains so far, but that they will need to help them with the careers they have chosen? That might even be something in the arts; they might want to be a technician in the theatre. The Prime Minister launched this policy from the London Screen Academy. People might think, "That's very arty; why would they need maths?" They need maths to design sets or to work out the angle of cameras—there are all kinds of reasons why they might need mathematics. Almost no trade or profession that you can think of, however artistic, does not require maths somewhere—for example, in running the business side.

Q22 Anna Firth: We heard a lot of evidence from teachers who said that maths has to be applied, and of course it is applied in the primary sector. Maths is almost taught through role play, or by talking about shops and interest rates. In secondary school, teachers might talk about mortgages, which introduces concepts such as compound interest. How will that be further applied in maths up to 18, and will financial education be part of maths to 18?

Nick Gibb: First of all, I do not disagree with what you are saying, but we also need to teach the abstract concepts of mathematics. Most primary maths is actually quite abstract. It goes from the concrete, in terms of blocks and making sure that children understand number and so on, but it has to go into the abstract as well, because children need the abstract to understand practical application. That does not mean that teachers cannot say, "Here's how this is used in the real world. Let's pretend you have bought some sweets; you have £1.50 available, and the sweets cost this amount." They can of course turn an abstract concept into a real-life mathematical problem for children to solve, to make sure that they understand the abstract mathematics, but we should not veer away from



the fact that some abstract concepts need to be understood if they are to be applied in the real world.

What will the EAG advise us on? A lot of those young people will have that level of arithmetic already and, presumably, quite sophisticated maths, if they have a good GCSE pass grade under their belt. The EAG will advise us on the next stage of practical maths needed if those young people want to be a politics undergraduate, for example. Will they need statistics, to understand the facts and figures that we throw at each other the whole time? I have forgotten the thread of your question, now that I have been waffling on for so long.

Chair: Financial education.

Nick Gibb: Yes, financial education. Advising on that is part of the remit of the EAG as well. A lot of financial education is already in the curriculum: it is in the maths curriculum and the citizenship curriculum, for example. In primary and secondary maths, there is strong emphasis on basic arithmetic, as well as on managing budgets and money. There are also the concepts of loan interest rates and repayments, as well as personal finance problems and how to calculate compound interest. Citizenship gets even more practical, and talks about the products available in the financial services sector. It is already there in the curriculum, but we are asking the advisory group to provide further advice on whether more needs to be done in that area.

Q23 Anna Firth: You are confident that this new teaching of maths up to 18 will deliver the economic benefits that the DFE have identified?

Nick Gibb: Yes, I am very confident; there is a lot of evidence. For example, we know what the inverse is: those with poor numeracy are more than twice as likely to be unemployed as those with competent numeracy at age 30. The OECD has identified a strong link between basic numeracy and higher wages. In terms of advanced maths, individuals with a maths A-level are estimated to earn between 7% and 10% more than those without one who are otherwise similarly educated. There is a lot of evidence that it brings economic benefit to the individual, and we know that employers are crying out for this level of maths skills and knowledge.

Q24 Kim Johnson: I want to pick you up, Nick, on the statement that you just made about our having achieved great things in primary maths. I want to know how well that continued into secondary education. If things are going so well, why do so many 16-year-olds in my Liverpool, Riverside, constituency turn up at FE colleges without basic maths, and then have to be supported during their vocational courses?

Nick Gibb: The TIMSS shows a plateauing for year 9, so there is more to do there. On GCSE outcomes prior to covid, or in the first bit of the covid period, Ofqual runs a national reference test, and that shows genuine improvement. We have eliminated grade inflation from our GCSEs and A-levels, but you want to be able to allow the proportion of top grades to rise when there is genuine improvement in the school system, as young people genuinely are better educated in mathematics. The national



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reference test is the same test, but it is not high stakes. It is done on a sample basis to assess whether there has been genuine improvement across the system, and the national reference test did show improvements.

As a consequence of covid, Ofqual did not adjust the grades, but I think we were seeing improvements in maths attainment at secondary as well. We are spreading the maths hubs, which have been very successful in raising standards in primary schools. That is being extended to secondary. All the work that the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics was doing with primary is extending into secondary. I think we will start to see the same rise in attainment that we have seen at primary happening at key stage 3.

Q25 Mohammad Yasin: My question has been asked already, but how is pupils' confidence in and enjoyment of maths from the early years onwards being supported?

Nick Gibb: Children enjoy any subject if they are able to do it. They start to not enjoy a subject when they struggle with it. The better any subject is taught, whether it is a foreign language or mathematics, the more enjoyment there will be.

Sarah Maclean: In the DFE, the policy lab have been working directly with young people to understand their attitudes to maths, and particularly on potential digital delivery methods, because sometimes the mode of delivery and the use of technology can inspire some young people. We have fed the findings of those consultations with young people into the work of the expert advisory group, and I think its advice will be interesting.

Q26 Mohammad Yasin: Minister, we have heard from expert witnesses that a large proportion of both teachers and pupils feel anxious, worried and confused about maths. I understand the desire to turn around what the Prime Minister has described—rather unhelpfully in my view—as an anti-maths mindset, but I see no inspiring proposals to resolve what is not a simple issue. Will there be a new and wider offer to children on the cusp of adulthood to make maths more directly relevant to their lives, such as financial education about student debts, mortgages, budgeting and saving and investing, for instance?

Nick Gibb: A brilliant teacher will bring any subject to life in the way that they want to, as Anna was saying, and can bring mathematics into the real world. We remember our own maths lessons, and that happens in almost every maths lesson. I do not know if you have heard of Colin Hegarty; he won the international teaching prize, and he is an absolutely brilliant maths teacher. He said that there is no such thing as a bad student, just a teacher who has not yet found the right explanation. Our teaching profession are brilliant at finding the right explanation, so the idea that any of us is intrinsically bad at maths is something that a teacher like Colin Hegarty would dispute. We just need to ensure that we are taught it properly.



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Q27 Chair: A concern we heard from the Royal Society is that culturally, it is acceptable to be bad at maths in a way that it is not acceptable to be unable to read. It made the point that that seems to be a peculiarly English phenomenon.

Nick Gibb: I understand that the Prime Minister cited that when he launched Maths to 18 as well.

Q28 Mohammad Yasin: We have heard that if around one third of children each year fail to achieve a standard pass in their GCSEs, forcing them to take the subject until 18 will serve little purpose. Do you not think that it will actually deter students from further education?

Nick Gibb: The GCSE exam, do not forget, is meant to be all-encompassing. Grades 1, 2 and 3 are passes in that qualification but they are not regarded as strong passes. We also have a condition of funding policy that we brought in in 2014 that if you do not have a grade 4 or above in GCSE English and maths—if you have a grade 1, 2 or 3—and you go on to FE or do another technical course, the course provider is required to continue teaching those subjects. That was not an uncontroversial policy, for the very reasons you point out, but actually, I think it is probably one of the most successful policy initiatives we have introduced. In 2014-15, 29,000 students went on to pass the GCSE in maths post-16. The figure is now 57,000 getting that GCSE, because the teaching in FE colleges for those young people has improved. That is a wonderful achievement. These young people are disproportionately likely to come from disadvantaged backgrounds. We see tens of thousands of these young people every year getting this very valuable qualification and the knowledge and skills that go with it, which they would not otherwise have had but for this policy.

Q29 Chair: Do you have the proportions of all those going through who that applies to? We heard some evidence that of all the people doing retakes, only 25% actually got the requisite grade.

Nick Gibb: We do have the proportions. In 2014-15, that 29,000 figure was 17.71%. The 57,000 is 35.08%.

Q30 Chair: I appreciate that is progress, and it is welcome that so many more people have the qualification, but still more than half—nearly two thirds—of the group in that position are not getting the qualification. Does that not beg the question whether there ought to be some more accessible qualification for them to try to achieve?

Nick Gibb: As I said, there is. This includes the equivalents, does it not? It includes level 2 functional skills as well. Young people with a grade 2 or grade 1 in GCSE maths will be more likely to be encouraged to take the functional skills than the GCSE. I always say that what matters is the underlying knowledge; that is what gets them the higher income in the workplace as a consequence, not necessarily just the qualification and a bit of paper. There is no point in changing the bit of paper and making it easier to acquire if in getting that bit of paper you have less maths.

Q31 Chair: I appreciate that there is a conundrum there, but we heard quite a



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lot of evidence that more focus on functional skills and perhaps less on GCSE grades of any particular level might be helpful in encouraging people to continue to pursue their studies and enable them to make progression.

Nick Gibb: Yes, and we do that. The functional skills qualification is being revised as well to ensure that it is accessible to young people.

Q32 **Mrs Drummond:** Will the expert advisory group also put forward various qualifications? Will they recommend exams at the end?

Nick Gibb: Yes, I think they will. That is precisely what we are asking them to look at. They will look at the current suite of qualifications. They will look at functional skills—level 1, level 2 or beyond. They will look at the GCSE, at the core maths qualifications, and at AS and A-levels, and they will ask, “Is that enough for the whole cohort?” My instinct is that they will say it is not enough because, as I said, there is a group in the middle. For example, you would not ask somebody with a grade 5 GCSE to retake the GCSE to get a grade 7. That is an awful thing to ask somebody to do. It may be that they want to go into an area that is not necessarily maths-driven but would benefit from having some form of maths, such as statistics or financial maths. That is really what we are asking the EAG to look at.

Q33 **Mrs Drummond:** Just going back to your Colin Hegarty point, we had some students here and only one said they really liked maths. That was because Janice, her teacher, explained at the beginning of every lesson the reason they were going to learn that particular sort of maths that day. She is at the London Design and Engineering UTC. I just wanted to praise her again; I met her when I went to that UTC and she was incredibly good.

Nick Gibb: There are teachers like that up and down the country, inspiring young people. It is no coincidence; if you look at the increase in young people taking maths A-level, that cannot just be because they have cleverly understood that A-level maths will open opportunities for them. It will also be about the inspiring teachers they have had at GCSE who have enabled them to choose that A-level.

Mrs Drummond: It was very sad that only one person in that group really enjoyed maths.

Chair: The other intriguing thing from that group was that when we asked them which subject they had been told was most vocational and useful to them, the unanimous conclusion was history, which is not necessarily the one you would have thought. As a historian, I am delighted to hear that, but it was quite striking. I turn to Miriam, before I get sidetracked too much by subject disciplines.

Q34 **Miriam Cates:** In my opinion, the Multiply programme is a fantastic programme to help adults who have left school but do not have enough maths skills to access maths training that will help them in the workplace. When it was first announced, it included an on-demand digital platform so



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that people could access Multiply training from wherever they were, but it seems as though that has been paused and not yet rolled out. What are the plans for the online platform? Is that still part of the package?

Nick Gibb: We will be reviewing that and will give an update on the digital platform shortly. Do not underestimate the success of this programme. It is a £559 million programme over three years that has been designed to address adult innumeracy. We know from quite old surveys—in 2012 and 2011—the very high proportion of adults who do not have the necessary mathematical skills that they really should have, including, in some cases, lower skills than some schoolchildren. The funding for that comes from the shared prosperity fund, so it is right across the UK: £270 million for England, and £160 million for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The programme is being administered at a local area level and is very successful. Sarah, do you want to add anything?

Sarah Maclean: It is interesting to think about the connection between what the EAG might say about maths from 16 to 18 and how that aligns with what is happening 19-plus. We are conscious of looking at how that fits together as a whole.

Just going back to the point about culture and people saying that it is okay to not be good at maths, I think another benefit of the Multiply programme is teaching parents who want to help their kids at school with their maths homework and learning. A real benefit of the programme is the provision of courses for parents wanting to increase their numeracy skills to enable that sort of support of their children.

Q35 **Miriam Cates:** Are you saying that take-up has been very good and you are pleased with the roll-out?

Sarah Maclean: *indicated assent.*

Q36 **Miriam Cates:** But at the moment there is a pause on the digital platform.

Sarah Maclean: That's right. There will be updates shortly on the platform, but in the light of what the EAG recommends in this space too; it needs to be seen as a whole.

Q37 **Andrew Lewer:** We have already talked about alternative curriculum and assessment pathways for pupils who do not get grade 4, and you talked about level 2 functional skills particularly. Are you confident about the amount of training and skills for teaching level 2 functional skills, as opposed to GCSE? Would level 2 functional skills at an appropriate level enable people to get into some of those FE courses that at the moment require a GCSE, or would they just cover a more basic level than that?

Nick Gibb: Sorry, I didn't quite catch the last part of your question.

Andrew Lewer: At the moment, there are GCSE requirements for a lot of FE colleges and vocational courses. Would getting a good result at level 2 functional skills—this alternative pathway—enable people to move on in that way?



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Nick Gibb: Yes, a level 2 is a level 2. It is up to colleges, of course, to set their own entry criteria, but generally speaking if you have a level 2—that is, equivalent to a GCSE—that will normally be sufficient to gain entry to those colleges that have that requirement. But it is up to the colleges.

In terms of the teachers, we have the Taking Teaching Further programme, which is for FE colleges, and there are also financial incentives to encourage people to come into teaching in FE colleges as well. I do not know whether you want to say anything more, Sarah.

Sarah Maclean: There is also an investment of up to £10 million over three years for professional development programmes specifically for FE maths teachers. That is really looking at embedding some of that mastery, pedagogy and approach that the Minister was talking about, which has been so successful earlier in schools, and bringing that to the fore, particularly for those in 16 to 19, for resits and functional skills. The evaluation of that approach has been really positive.

Q38 Chair: Before we move on from this area and recruitment and retention in maths in particular, do you feel that the Department has enough in its toolkit to attract career changers? I recently went along to a NowTeach conference in which there were some very exciting and excited people wanting to change careers and come into the sector, but it is a relatively small part of the pipeline. Do you feel that there is more that could be done on that front, particularly if we are setting this national challenge of maths to 18?

Nick Gibb: I think there is always more. I was always very supportive of Lucy Kellaway when she established NowTeach and wanted it to be part of the firmament, and it has expanded and delivered. As you say, that one programme is a small proportion of the overall 40,000-odd that we need to come into teaching every year, but it is a wonderful programme that gives support to, if you like, senior career changers. People like Lucy have been wonderful teachers, and there are lots of examples like her.

I am also looking at returners coming back to the UK, for example. A lot of youngish teachers like to spend some time teaching abroad. In recent weeks, I have met some of the international British schools associations that exist, and they tell me that it is quite challenging for some people to come back, because when they apply for jobs here, people do not really know the quality of the school or education system that they have been teaching in for the last five or six years. There is work to be done to make that transition back into UK and English schools easier for those teachers.

I think it is good experience for a young person to go to teach in a British school overseas; we just need to find a way of providing information to headteachers in this country when they are recruiting those very talented teachers.

Chair: As a two-way process, rather than just the one way.

Nick Gibb: Exactly, rather than just the one way. We want to encourage them to come back when they are ready to come back.



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Q39 Chair: Moving on to funding—my pet subject—the Government have increased funding since the spending review of 2021 to restore per pupil funding in real terms to 2010 levels by '24-'25. But given the ongoing period of high inflation, is this commitment still achievable? We are all aware of the IFS analysis, but that came before the persistence of recent levels of inflation. What is your analysis in terms of where we sit now with regards to the actual inflation affecting schools in comparison to the funding that they are getting?

Nick Gibb: By '24-'25, we will have the highest ever level of funding in our schools in cash terms, in real terms and in real terms per pupil. As you said, before the recent pay award, the IFS said we were returning to 2010 levels. Tom, I don't know whether you want to opine on the consequence of the recent pay award and the extra £1.5 billion that we are putting into schools.

Tom Goldman: Shortly before the announcement of the pay award on Thursday, the IFS said that a 6.5% pay award would require £900 million more to go into schools in order to keep us on track on the IFS's measure, and that is the amount of money that is additionally going into schools. I do not think the IFS have come out and said something post the pay award, but I am pretty confident that when they do, they will say we are in the same position that we were beforehand on their measure, which was, as the Minister rightly says, that the funding will be restored in '24-'25.

Q40 Chair: In terms of that, if we listen to schools and the concerns expressed by headteachers and leaders at schools, they will say that they are facing significantly above-inflation pressures when it comes to, for instance, energy costs and a number of other costs. Again, the IFS has its own measure of real inflation in the school sector. Does the Department broadly agree with that, or do you have your own calculations to measure the real inflationary pressures taking place within education?

Nick Gibb: We submitted very detailed evidence to the school teachers' review body about the costs that schools are facing. Don't forget that they have had very big increases, even before the additional money we are giving to fund this teacher pay award. Last year, '22-'23, they received an extra £4 billion. This year, '23-'24, the schools are getting an extra £3.5 billion, plus the extra money for the teacher pay award. Leaving aside the teacher pay award, that £3.5 billion and the £4 billion is a 15% increase over two years, so there is very significant money going in.

On the costs side, every year we do a very detailed analysis of the costs that schools face. We put in a very pessimistic assumption for energy cost rises. There is headroom of about £2.4 billion. Some of that was for the pay award, and we said that up to a 3.5% pay award for teachers was affordable within that £2.4 billion headroom, bearing in mind the very pessimistic assumption of the increase in energy costs. I don't know whether the figure of £600 million is public figure or not.

Tom Goldman: Yes, it is.



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Nick Gibb: So every 100% increase in the costs of energy costs the school sector £600 million. Given the very significant increases in energy costs that schools face, you can see what the last chunk of the £2.4 billion in energy costs was for. When we had the negotiations with the unions in March, energy prices had come down lower than our pessimistic assumption, so we assumed, on the basis of that—or Tom did—that up to 4% was affordable for schools, and therefore we were going to give schools extra cash for the extra 0.5%. We were going to give schools extra money for the £1,000, but that is now off the table. We are now back where we are, with a 6.5% pay award for teachers. We have now gone back to the 3.5% figure that we originally said, to make sure schools can afford it. So we are funding, with extra money, the difference between the 3.5% and the 6.5%, and that is £525 million for this year and £900 million for next year. That is designed to fund that extra 3%.

- Q41 **Chair:** The unions have confirmed that they believe it is fully funded and it meets the requirement in terms of pay. I guess the concern is in terms of other measures of inflation. You have not increased the amount that schools get as block school funding under the formula for running the schools as part of this settlement; those increases were already in the previous arrangements. Given the persistence of inflation and that it is higher than it was forecast to be at this stage, are you comfortable that they have the resource they need?

Nick Gibb: Yes, because in the 2021 spending settlement, the increase scheduled for the year we are in now, 2023-24, was £1.5 billion extra. And you are right: inflation is higher now than was envisaged back in the 2021 settlement. That is why the Secretary of State, when she was appointed, went to the Treasury and said, "I need more" and got the £2 billion. That is why the money coming into this year is £3.5 billion, not £1.5 billion. It is a very significant difference from the original 2021 spending settlement. On top of that, we have got this extra £525 million.

Having said all that, I am conscious of the unions' argument that all the figures that we have been talking about in these discussions are averaged across the whole system. Inevitably, they have to be, because we do not control the budgets of 23,000 schools from Sanctuary Buildings; we give autonomy to schools to spend, so there will be differences, of course, due to the different priorities that schools have. But we are conscious that some schools—a small minority—will face some difficulties and we want to support them with those. We have set aside £40 million, which schools will be able to apply for—we will set out more details shortly—for those schools that are struggling. They may have, for example, a very expensive energy contract or something.

- Q42 **Chair:** That is very interesting. Would that sit with the Department? Is that money that is with the Department rather than local authorities or would that be through—

Nick Gibb: Yes, that is through us, but Tom might want to say a bit more.



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Tom Goldman: For academies, they will come to the Education and Skills Funding Agency. Maintained schools go to their local authorities, but we are providing some of that support to local authorities so that they are in a stronger position to support maintained schools that find themselves in financial trouble.

Q43 **Chair:** To be absolutely clear, that is money that is distributed to local authorities and they can use it as necessary to support schools—

Tom Goldman: Individual schools, yes.

Q44 **Chair:** And then the other half of it, roughly, will be done through the SFA and go direct to academies? It is not money, therefore, that the Department holds in a pot and waits for the local authority to apply to it; it is pre-distributed?

Tom Goldman: We will pre-distribute it to local authorities, yes.

Chair: Okay, thank you. I had better let others come in. Anna and then Miriam, please.

Q45 **Anna Firth:** Thank you. I have two quick questions on funding. I have an excellent grammar school in my patch, Southend High School for Boys, which has a unique problem—but it may not be unique; this may be a problem that is shared around the country—in that it has the lowest level of per-pupil funding, compounded by very high energy costs and the cost of retaining expert teachers who are on high salaries. It is a good thing that it has retained fantastic teachers, but it is in the position that its expenditure will exceed the budgets that it will be getting from the Department for Education.

My first question is, is that sort of school in the category for which the £40 million has been set aside? Secondly, is there a plan to review the minimum per-pupil funding level at any stage?

Nick Gibb: You will know that the national funding formula is geared to distribute more money to schools that have higher proportions of disadvantaged pupils. There is a single figure that all schools get—one figure for primary, one for key stage 3 and one for key stage 4—called the AWPU. Then, on top of that, the schools will get an extra several hundred pounds for a child on free school meals, a bit for English as an additional language, and a bit more for children who live in a low IDACI area or have low prior attainment. There is a whole range of factors set out with figures attached to them. You can have all those things as well; your school can get all those allocations for one child. That does skew money to the disadvantaged, and that is a deliberate policy.

On those proportions, we can discuss in this House whether we think that there is too much or too little for disadvantage. We can look at that every year. But once we have decided on the formula, it then gets applied everywhere. Leaving aside the issue of the local formula, you could say that any school with this proportion of these children in your constituency or in my constituency would get exactly the same money. The local



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formula slightly changes that, but not by very much, although we can talk about that if you want.

When we were devising the national funding formula, we did have a worry, which I call the Cheshire East issue, that there are schools that have very little deprivation, almost no children with English as an additional language and, particularly for grammar schools, almost no children with low prior attainment—otherwise they wouldn't be in the grammar school. Under our formula, they would not benefit from all those additional items.

The question then for us, when we were devising this system, was, "Will the money that they get be enough to run a school?" So we looked at it from the bottom up. What would it take to run a school? What would be the bare minimum to run a school in areas of wealth and prosperity without all these various disadvantages? That is where we came up with the minimum per pupil level funding. It is a kind of additional add-on, if you like, to the purity of the national funding formula. It goes up each year, and this year it is £6,050 per pupil—

Tom Goldman: That's next year, from April.

Nick Gibb: That's from April. For primaries, it is £4,655. What does it go up by?

Tom Goldman: It will be going up by 2.4% from the current year to next year.

Nick Gibb: And that is designed to assist schools like Southend High School for Boys in your constituency.

Q46 **Anna Firth:** But the point that has been raised with me is that that, notwithstanding that 2.4%, it is not going to be a sufficient level. Are there any plans for either reviewing the level of the minimum funding or the percentage by which it is increased each year?

Nick Gibb: Well, the challenge for us is that this is sort of not part of the national funding formula. This is, if you like, a safety thing attached to the side of it. In theory, you should not need this. The national funding formula itself is designed to make sure that every school is fairly funded on the same basis. This is like a safety valve to ensure that we do not go below a de minimis that a school needs to run. In theory, we should not be looking at this; we should be looking at the national funding formula, and it is that that should be applied to every school in the country. I do not know whether you want to come in and say a bit more.

Tom Goldman: The only thing I was going to say in terms of looking at future levels is that for next year, as announced yesterday, that 2.4% increase—it is the same as all the other factors in the funding formula we are receiving for next year. It is not that schools who are on the minimum per pupil levels are in any way falling behind the average any further next year; all the elements of the formula, including the minimum pupil levels, are going up the same. Obviously we and Ministers do consider each year



whether particular tweaks, changes, or new emphases within the formula are needed.

- Q47 **Anna Firth:** What about a school that has these unique problems and no additional factors but has retained teachers, which gives a much better education, I would suggest, than when there is a lot of churn, and has high energy costs? Is that the sort of example that could apply for the additional funding that you have mentioned—the £40 million?

Nick Gibb: We are still working on the criteria that schools will need to fulfil to apply for the fund. I do not know how advanced—

Tom Goldman: I do not know the situation of individual schools, but any school which does find itself in real financial difficulties will be able to apply either to the ESFA or their local authority. I think that is an academy, so it would be the ESFA in that case.

Nick Gibb: It has always been the case actually, Anna, that where schools are in genuine difficulty, even leaving aside this particular teacher pay award, they can always apply to the local authority, they can apply to the ESFA, and then together they can look at the accounts, look at where the money is going, and supply some help and support.

Anna Firth: Thank you. That is very helpful.

- Q48 **Miriam Cates:** That leads on very well to what I was going to ask. This is the first year of the direct national funding formula roll-out. I can see that what you said and the way it is designed to work makes an awful lot of sense in a climate where you have relatively constant population levels. I just want to explore what happens over the coming 20, 30, 40 years, because we obviously now have a very low birth rate—the lowest we have ever had. Over the next two generations, we are probably going to see a 40% drop in the number of babies born each year. Okay, that's 40 or 50 years away, but that is a significant number.

A lot of primary schools are going to have to face moving from two-form entry to one-and-a-half-form entry, let's say. While the per pupil funding works really well if you have a relatively constant number of classes in a school, the biggest cost to a school is actually the teacher, and you cannot have one and a half teachers, or it's much more difficult to have one and a half classes. It's quite a difficult adjustment. What is the Department's thinking about how to handle the decline in birth rates?

There is a fixed cost to running a school, regardless of whether you have 100 or 1,000 pupils. How is this going to be monitored to make sure you are not getting to the point where a village is going to lose its whole school because it has a five-pupil shortfall? This is already happening in schools in my constituency. They have five fewer pupils per year now than they had five years ago. It is having a huge impact on their budgets. They still need the same number of teachers. What do they do?

Nick Gibb: We also have an element of funding that is called—well, it was called the growth funding, but we have added falling numbers funding to



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that, so that local authorities have a sum of money they can use to support schools that are seeing these short-term—

- Q49 **Miriam Cates:** But I think that is only if they anticipate going back up to full roll within the next few years, whereas that is not going to happen, judging by the birth rates decline.

Nick Gibb: Yes, so then some difficult decisions have to be made. Those schools will need to adjust their costs to deal with the fact they have fewer pupils. But there is that cushion, and the fact that we have lagged funding anyway to support schools and give them the time to adjust, because their funding is based on last year's census, not this year's. They have time to adjust their cost base to reflect the lower income coming on the per pupil basis.

- Q50 **Miriam Cates:** As I said, that makes sense for small fluctuations, but if there is this trend where, essentially, the number of pupils arriving in primary schools each year is going to go down and down and down, which it is—even if we reversed the trend in the birth rate now, it would be a long time before that worked through the system. There is no significant difference in cost for a school to run a class of 30 students or one of 25 students. There is no significant difference and yet that is £25,000. If each and every year, a school is losing £5,000 to £10,000, then until they get to the point where they can axe the whole class, they are going to be running budget deficits for a long time. Are you considering flexing the formula to allow for a more per class model, rather than a per pupil one? Does that make sense?

Nick Gibb: It does, yes. Tom, do you want to come in?

Tom Goldman: We haven't been funding per class. It's quite difficult, in terms of a primary school, to work out what the right number is. If you start thinking about secondary schools and how many classes a secondary school has, that in itself is quite a difficult calculation. It is very challenging to run a funding system on that basis.

One of the changes we have been making specifically around small and rural schools is that we have significantly changed the support through what we call the sparsity funding. We have extended it to many more schools. We have improved the measurement, and we have increased the amount in there. That helps schools that are both small and in rural areas, where the pupils would otherwise have to move a long way.

That support does not extend into cities and towns, where I think probably more of a consideration needs to be made if the pupil numbers are falling, and falling without, as you say, coming back in three to five years; they just look like they're falling. More difficult decisions probably need to be made in terms of thinking: what is the right offer for schools in this area? But for rural areas, you are obviously running into the danger that, yes, the only school in the area is in difficulty. We do have our sparsity funding. As I say, we have significantly increased the support coming through that over the last four or five years. These are the sorts of things that we try to keep in mind for future changes to the formula. This is certainly an area



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we will want to be looking at carefully. I don't know that I would be brave enough to say that over the next 30 or 40 years numbers will be falling, but over the next five to 10 they certainly will be.

Chair: Thank you. It is an important question. Those demographics are quite a significant concern for a lot of the sector that we are talking to. Kim, may I bring you in, please?

- Q51 **Kim Johnson:** Nick, you will know that we have growing numbers of children presenting with SEND and a crisis in terms of the time it takes to access an EHCP, but also in terms of schools being able to meet the demands of those children. How is the Department monitoring local authorities' ability to implement SEND services in the context of wider funding challenges?

Nick Gibb: We are very aware of the challenges facing local authorities in terms of their high needs budgets. A significant number of local authorities are in deficit because of that, and that is why we have increased SEND funding over the last four years by over 50%—it is now rising to £10.1 billion. We continue to monitor the situation because we know that local authorities are facing these challenges.

One issue is that, with more EHC plans, a number of children with very significant special needs will need to go to a special school. If there are no state-funded special schools in the area, or there is not sufficient capacity in them, those children will often go to an independent school that provides that provision, which can be very expensive. Our free schools programme is designed to make sure that we are creating more state-funded special schools, particularly in areas running big deficits.

We also have a thing called the safety valve policy. Local authorities that are in real difficulty because of their higher needs budget can work with the Department to devise a plan about how they are going to bring that deficit down, but they can also, in the shorter term, have some extra funding from the Department.

- Q52 **Kim Johnson:** You just mentioned local authorities. At the moment, they are holding a £2.4 billion deficit. Do you think it is acceptable for local authorities to be placed in that position?

Nick Gibb: We absolutely do accept there is a challenge. That is why, when we allocate school funding to the high needs element, they have been having a higher proportion of that funding each year. That is why there has been an over 50% increase, and it goes up to 60%, does it, in the next financial year—

Tom Goldman: Yes, that's right—over five years.

Nick Gibb: Over five years—for the five years after 2019. That is to reflect those real challenges. As I said, we are providing direct support to those authorities that make up the lion's share of that overall figure to help them deal with the underlying problem and create more capacity for



special needs children, but also to help those authorities with some support in the shorter run.

Q53 Kim Johnson: I suppose we go back to the same problem about the recruitment and retention of staff to deliver those services, don't we?

I wanted to ask another question about funding, and particularly school funding. I imagine that you would agree that it is not great for kids to go to school with empty bellies. The fact is that school funding has increased by only 7p—it is at £2.41. How do you think schools are managing with that at the moment, particularly given the impact that massive food inflation will have on children?

Nick Gibb: I do accept that. There are more children now eligible for free school meals. We introduced the universal infant free school meals programme for all infant pupils. Due to the transition issues for universal credit, there are now more children eligible for benefits-related free school meals as well. So about a third of the pupil population is now eligible for free school meals. In terms of the universal infant free school meals, we have increased the amount per pupil to reflect increased food costs and we have backdated it to April 2022. We can send you further details of the actual figures.

Q54 Kim Johnson: I think it's great that that happens, although I would be pushing for universal free school meals for all children. But I was asking how far £2.41 goes in terms of providing hot, nutritious food for children in the circumstances we are facing at the moment, and particularly the food inflation.

Nick Gibb: We are aware of that. We are talking to the industry about these issues, and we have increased the amount. But I do know the challenges faced by schools and by the caterers and suppliers.

Q55 Chair: To take it back a second to the SEND challenge, we discussed TA pay yesterday, and we have had a lot of discussion already in the funding piece around how the teachers' pay deal is funded. One of the concerns that has been frequently raised with me, particularly by special schools in the primary space, is that successive awards have funded teachers' pay but not teaching assistants' pay, and that that places a particular burden on the special schools that need a very high proportion of teaching assistants.

I think you mentioned a figure in yesterday's debate of around 50% of staff costs in that specialist sector relating to teaching assistants rather than to teachers. Is there anything structurally that we need to look at to make sure that that is properly funded and properly worked into the funding system? I absolutely accept the point you are making that high needs has increased, will need to continue to increase and that that is reflecting demand out there in the system, but this very specific issue of teaching assistants' pay not having been funded seems to be creating an unsustainable pressure on a specialist school sector that we need to expand. If expanding that sector is part of the solution, do we not need to try to address that issue?



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Nick Gibb: Yes. I mentioned before that we take into account the pay for support staff and teaching assistants in the analysis of school costs that feed into the School Teachers' Review Body evidence that we submitted. So that is reflected in the overall calculations of what we felt was affordable for the teacher pay settlement—

Q56 **Chair:** That is reflecting the overall calculations across the system. Do we look at it specifically within the specialist sector?

Nick Gibb: I do not know whether you want to come in on the special schools, Tom, but that is why we provide extra funding for local authorities, with very significant increases in high needs funding. As I said, 60% by next year, 50% pay—

Q57 **Chair:** I guess that the challenge that the special schools would always put back on that front is that, because the local authorities are all starting from a deficit position, they themselves do not necessarily see that funding at the frontline, because the effect of it is to reduce the deficits, rather than necessarily to go through to the schools operating at the frontline.

Tom Goldman: There has been what I think is a very fair challenge to us about the calculations we do on the funding for schools and how they relate to special schools, because the main calculation that we do each year in the run-up to the pay award focuses on mainstream schools. The reason for that is because the very varied nature of special schools makes that a far more complicated calculation to embark upon, and to try and work out. And yes, some special schools are very heavily reliant on non-teaching staff; other ones, of course, are much less reliant, because of the very different nature of the children being supported in different special schools.

So we have not attempted to do that calculation, because I do not think we are in a position to do so, and I am not aware that anyone else has managed to do a similar calculation for special schools that would capture in any way the variability in the sector.

Our approach has been more to say that we know what the situation in the mainstream schools is; we know that the situation in special schools and high needs can be more expensive than that; and therefore when we provide our support, we are always careful to err on the side of caution in relation to special needs and the high needs budget. Consequently, if we are giving an amount to mainstream schools, we will try to make sure that we are giving something that more than represents what you might consider otherwise as being a fair share for special schools.

For example, in the money that is just being handed out for teachers' pay, the amount that we are going to provide for special schools is £260 per place, which compares to the £30 to £50 per pupil that we are providing for mainstream schools.



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It is not as precise a calculation, which I regret, but I think that is where we are in terms of the data and the complexity of the data. However, we try to make sure that we take account of that when we distribute funding.

Chair: That is very interesting. Thank you. I will hand over to Ian unless the Minister wants to enlighten us from the note he has just been handed.

Nick Gibb: In-flight fuelling, in relation to Kim's questions on the £2.41. We have increased that to £2.53 from this coming September, to reflect those extra costs.

Q58 **Ian Mearns:** I would now like to move us on to the pupil premium, Minister. In 2021, *The Times Educational Supplement* reported that over a third of headteachers were forced to use pupil premium funds to plug holes in their mainstream school budget. Why is that the case, and what action will you take to ensure that disadvantaged pupils who are meant to receive the benefit of pupil premium funding actually get it?

Nick Gibb: Yes, we provide quite a lot of guidance to schools about the use of the pupil premium. It has increased from £2.6 billion a year to £2.9 billion. It is a very significant sum of extra money that schools receive—over £1,000 per pupil for secondary schools and, I think, over about £1,400 per pupil eligible for free school meals for primary school pupils. It is a lot of money.

We give quite clear guidance to schools, using evidence-based approaches from the Education Endowment Foundation, about the most effective ways of deploying the resources to help those children, and to close the attainment gap between children from disadvantaged backgrounds and other pupils. We generally say that about half the money should be spent on improving teaching more generally, which will help all children, and then the other 50% will be spent on a menu of programmes that we know are proven to be successful.

Q59 **Ian Mearns:** I know from experience that schools that attract an awful lot of pupil premium because of the nature of the children and the neighbourhoods they serve also have a number of other youngsters—living cheek by jowl—who are not attracting pupil premium but who have very similar problems in terms of the nature of the neighbourhood they live in, and similar backgrounds. Is there anything that can be done to help those youngsters who are just beyond that gap?

In the 2021 academic year, exam results showed that the disadvantage gap had widened, so is the pupil premium actually working? I know that the 2021-22 academic year followed the pandemic, but it is quite clear that we need to do some real work to narrow the gaps and help those pupil premium pupils.

Nick Gibb: Yes. You are right that it is as a consequence of the pandemic that we saw the attainment gap widen. The point I always make is that until the pandemic, we had closed the attainment gap by 13% in primary and, I think, by 9% in secondary. That success was a consequence of really good teaching in our schools and our reform programme. Those



reforms that we introduced have not gone away, so I am confident that post covid, as children catch up, we will see the attainment gap begin to close once again. Those reforms are still there: we still have a stronger curriculum; and we still have all the other things that we have changed in our school system, including how children are taught to read, taught maths and so on, and a knowledge-rich curriculum, which particularly helps children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In terms of the catch-up from covid, we are spending £5 billion—again, a very significant sum of money—to help all children who have fallen behind to catch up. Over £1 billion of that is for the national tutoring programme, which is one-to-one and small group tuition. That is why the subsidies have gone from 75% down to 50%; we had intended it to be 25%, but we are keeping it at 50%.

The intention is not just to have this marketplace of tutors. The idea for us—and why we feel so strongly about the national tutoring programme—is that for advantaged children from middle-class families, hiring a tutor to help their child with maths or French is commonplace, and it is not commonplace for children from disadvantaged backgrounds who simply cannot afford the hourly rate of a tutor. We were trying to create a genuine market that schools could tap into and use, and to use the pupil premium to fund that, as one of those evidence-based approaches. There is a lot of evidence from the EEF that small group or one-to-one tuition is a very effective way of using pupil premium money to help children to catch up if they have fallen behind.

- Q60 Ian Mearns:** It is interesting that you say, though, that the use of tutors by some parents who can afford it is commonplace. I would contend, Minister, that there are significant regional variations in the market for that sort of tuition, and therefore in particular areas it may well be that the tutors who are available to do this additional catch-up work are not necessarily available to the extent that they would be in other parts of the country.

Nick Gibb: Yes, and we were trying to create a market. That was part of the purpose. We were saying, “There is this money available in x part of the country. You choose a company. Have you thought about tapping into that revenue stream by moving people up there?” In terms of covid recovery, we are quite flexible. We are giving schools a lot of discretion over how they deploy that funding. They can use it on their own teaching staff spending extra hours helping children to catch up, if they like.

- Q61 Ian Mearns:** Given the amount of money being spent on catch-up, and what we are focusing on here, the pupil premium, what regular assessments is the Department making to look at the effectiveness of how those budgets are being spent in schools to ensure that they are actually focusing in and achieving the outcomes for which the money is intended?

Nick Gibb: We monitor the effectiveness of programmes. The Treasury requires that for all such big-spending programmes—indeed, for little-



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spending programmes as well. We do monitor, but I do not have precise details to hand. We can send the Committee the details of the evaluation that has happened.

Ian Mearns: If you have ongoing assessments, the evidence from those would be very useful, I am sure.

- Q62 **Chair:** The tutoring intervention is a significant part of the catch-up spend. That change to the reduction in the subsidy—instead of from 60% to 25%, it will be from 60% to 50%—is very welcome, and has been widely welcomed. I have been told by some of the tutoring providers, though, that there is no increase in the overall amount of money available, which presumably means that it has to be targeted on a smaller group of pupils to get the 50% rate. Is that correct?

Nick Gibb: It is the same amount of money, but schools now do not have to find 75% of that cost; they only have to find 50% of the cost from their other resources—that is, the pupil premium.

- Q63 **Chair:** But if that is the case, the targeting—getting it to the right people—is all important. Has the Department changed its guidance on how it should be targeted? This Committee was previously very critical of the dropping of the 65% pupil premium requirement, for example. I remember sitting in your chair receiving that criticism.

Nick Gibb: The tables have turned.

Chair: The important point here is about where the discretion is for schools to target the money on pupils who need it most, and what the push from the Department is to ensure that it genuinely targets the disadvantaged, helping to close the attainment gap.

Nick Gibb: We give schools a lot of discretion in deploying these funds for catch-up. The worry I had—presumably, you had the same worry when sitting here—is that, by reducing the subsidies to only 25%, even with the same money, we might see less tutoring happening, because the schools just could not afford to find the 75%. By upping that to 50%, it is the same amount of money, but more tutoring happens, because more schools can just about afford the other 50%, whereas they could not afford the 75%. We should see more tutoring happening as a consequence of this change to the rules than we would have done had we stuck with the 25%.

- Q64 **Chair:** This is a four-year programme, and it is entering its final year. There was underspend, and this Committee also made some recommendations on underspend—not all of which I necessarily agree with. It suggested targeting some of the underspend on absence interventions. There is an argument that any underspend ought to be ploughed back into tutoring, but that does not necessarily seem to have happened. What has happened to the underspend in this area?

Nick Gibb: The whole notion of underspend is based on the accuracy of the budgeting in the first place. When we set up the programme, we had to find a figure to talk to Treasury about and we wanted to get out there



the best tutoring programme that we could. Inevitably, we would never have got that right down to the exact pounds and pence, because it was based on an estimate of what the uptake would be. It has been a very successful programme. We have had more than 3 million courses of catch-up tutoring for pupils. We have a target of 6 million, which I am determined that we will deliver.

Inevitably, underspends go back to the Treasury, but you will have heard other discussions about where we are using some of those underspends, with the extra discretion that we have been given by the Treasury in order to fund the teacher pay deal—across the all the different budget lines that the Secretary of State outlined in OPQs yesterday. It is a tribute to the Treasury that it has given us some discretion about those underspends, which would normally automatically go back to the Treasury.

- Q65 **Chair:** Will you be working up a bid to the Treasury for future funding in this space, given that the existing programme is nearing its end? There was a recent report from Public First, Action Tutoring and various organisations involved in this space arguing that parents and pupils valued the benefits of tutoring and calling for all parties to put something in their manifestos about future funding for tutoring without going into specifics. Is that a discussion that you were working up to on the next steps in this space?

Nick Gibb: My ambition for tutoring is for it to be a sustainable part of schools' use of the pupil premium in helping disadvantaged students to catch up with their peers and be on the same level of attainment as all pupils in the school. We know that it is an effective, evidence-based approach, endorsed by the Education Endowment Foundation, so it certainly is in and should continue to remain in the menu of options for schools to use the pupil premium to help disadvantaged pupils. Whether or not we have such programmes in the future will be for massive internal discussion and discussion with the Treasury when the moment comes.

- Q66 **Ian Mearns:** We talked earlier, specifically on maths teachers, about recruitment and retention. I am now thinking about your assessment overall of the issues surrounding the recruitment and retention of teachers. How big a factor would you say the resolution of the pay award is in improving both recruitment and retention? What is the Government's long-term plan to improve the competitiveness of teacher pay beyond 2024-25?

Nick Gibb: We always listen to advice from the School Teachers' Review Body. It looks at issues of retention and recruitment when it comes up with its recommendation. We are about to send it the remit letter, as we do every year, for next year, and that remit letter is still being discussed.

The pay award for this year was 6.5%, and last year it was 5.4%. These are significant pay awards. In fact, the 6.5% pay award was the highest pay award for 30 years. We have a Government who are absolutely determined to bring down the rate of inflation. We have seen some interesting news today about grocery inflation and so on. One of the Prime



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Minister's priorities is to halve inflation by the end of this year, so I am confident that by 2024 we will see that inflationary pressure on schools significantly lower than it has been.

Do not forget that this inflation has been caused by supply constrictions arising from covid and by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which has pushed up gas prices and so on. The Government are determined not to allow those shocks to the system to embed permanent inflation in the economy. I remain confident that we will have inflation lower next year than this year. That will all be taken into account by the School Teachers' Review Body next year.

Q67 Ian Mearns: I think it is a widely held view among many people that there are other economic factors than covid and the invasion of Ukraine that have impacted inflation as well, but that is possibly a debate for another time.

There is £1.425 billion that must be found in this financial year and the next from within existing departmental budgets to fund the teachers' pay award. You said that the Secretary of State outlined some of the places that that was coming from. Could you remind us what she said yesterday?

Nick Gibb: We are reprioritising programmes centrally, so none of that £1.425 billion will come from any programmes or funding that go to the frontline. It will not affect NFF—the core school funding. It will not affect special needs; it will not affect the capital pots that schools can bid in for maintenance; it will not affect the devolved form of capital going to schools. Any programme that directly sends funds to schools will not be affected by the reprioritisation, which is taking place centrally, but this is the only way that we could deliver a fully funded pay award to schools without it and without either higher taxation or more borrowing, both of which would cause damage elsewhere in the economy and to inflation. That is why we have done what we have done. I have said that some of that contribution is delivered with extra flexibility from the Treasury in terms of underspends that would normally go back to the Treasury. They have allowed us to keep those underspends.

Q68 Ian Mearns: Is it too much to ask what the most significant underspend is that the Treasury has forgiven the Department for?

Tom Goldman: The two largest ones, as I understand it, are on the national tutoring programme, as the Minister has already mentioned. There are also some underspends coming through on 16-to-19 expenditure, because the number of students in post-16 provision is lower than had been forecast at the time of the spending review and therefore, to maintain the promised per student levels of funding, it is not spending all the money that was set aside for it at the spending review. Again, we are being allowed to retain and recycle that underspend to pay for the teachers' pay award.

Q69 Ian Mearns: From my perspective, given the national skills agenda, an underspend at the post-16 level begs questions for another day that we



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must return to.

It has been reported in *Schools Week* that the Department will fund 3% of the pay award from its existing budget—we have talked about that. Is there anything else that is significant that we should be concerned about from within that existing budget—the 3%?

Chair: To add to that, the Secretary of State said yesterday where the funding is not coming from; you have repeated that, and you have talked about reprioritisation, but in what we have heard to date it is not clear what is being reprioritised. Beyond the underspends that have already been referenced, where else is the reprioritisation?

Ian Mearns: Or is it a work in progress? If it is a work in progress, for goodness' sake let us know.

Nick Gibb: Some of it is still being worked on. Some of it is things that we might have done that we will not do. They are not programmes that are announced or worked up; they are things that we just had to reprioritise towards funding schools, rather than conducting those programmes.

Q70 **Ian Mearns:** I started off by talking about the recruitment and retention crisis. You have quite rightly said that the 6.5% is the best settlement in 30 years, but unfortunately it is still below inflation. Therefore, out in the market, which is the workplace, teachers will in real terms be slightly worse off than they would have been if they had gotten a pay award in line with inflation.

Nick Gibb: Don't forget that 40% of teachers will get more than the 6.5%. They are also rising up through the main pay spine or the upper pay spine, or they are promoted. They will get very significantly more money than the 6.5%.

Q71 **Ian Mearns:** That would have happened if they had got a 10% pay rise anyway, though, wouldn't it? You are rising up the pay scale with an annual increment and so on.

Nick Gibb: That does not really happen necessarily in all other walks of life.

Q72 **Ian Mearns:** We can have an argument about what the rate for the job is—is it the lower spinal column point or the upper spinal column point?—but people progress up the spinal column points because they gain experience. As they gain experience, their pay rises to the upper spinal column point.

Nick Gibb: I agree but, as I talked about earlier, when we are trying to tackle these shocks what we cannot do is allow all of us to have inflation-busting pay rises. If you allow that to happen, and the doctors are demanding 35%, you will just embed inflation in our economy. Then, all the costs that households and schools are facing will escalate and continue in perpetuity, and we just cannot have that. When you then have to deal with it, the pain is even worse. I think we are doing absolutely the right thing with a 5.4% pay rise last year, 6.5% this year, funded in a way that



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will not contribute to inflationary pressures. I think it is a sensible approach to take in the current economic situation that we are in.

- Q73 **Ian Mearns:** I suppose I can make one observation, which is that the envelope from which the pay review body makes its decision is actually given to the body by the Government in the first place. They are not just picking a number out of thin air; they are working within the envelope that they have been given by the Government.

Nick Gibb: We gave an envelope of 3.5%. They are very independent.

- Q74 **Ian Mearns:** I have a funny feeling that they may have received subsequent advice.

Nick Gibb: I am not sure that that is true. They are very independent of Government. We give them our evidence. The Secretary of State gives oral evidence to the Committee as well. They then look at all the factors that you have been discussing here. We in this Committee have been discussing retention, recruitment, and not meeting targets, particularly in subjects such as physics, and so on. We said in our remit that we wanted to get to £30,000 starting pay, and that is being delivered for September. That is a 7.1% increase in pay for people coming into the profession for the first time, compared with last year.

Chair: We need to make some progress. I will bring Kim in quickly.

- Q75 **Kim Johnson:** Thanks, Chair. Minister, on the issue of where you are going to find the funding to support the pay claim, I will just say that it is not hard-working public sector workers asking for a pay increase that has crashed our economy. There has been some suggestion that money might be found by hiking up visa payments and NHS fees for migrants. Is that something that is being pursued?

Nick Gibb: Yes. That money is not for education; it is the contribution by migrants to the health service charge and also the visa fees. I think that will create about £1 billion of extra revenue. That does not come to the DFE. I am not sure which Department it is being allocated to. It will fund one of the pay settlements but not the DFE.

- Q76 **Kim Johnson:** But you would agree that teachers have experienced a real-terms pay cut in the last 13 years and they are entitled to this pay increase?

Nick Gibb: I think they are entitled to it and I think they deserve it. We want a properly rewarded and motivated teaching profession. We have discussed the rise in standards that we have seen over those 13 years in reading, maths, secondary education and GCSE achievements. You do not get those rises in standards just through a few policy tweaks; you get them from having 468,000 hard-working professionals going in every day and teaching children. We need to make sure that they are rewarded for that. That is what the 6.5% pay award is designed to contribute to, on top of the 5.4% last year. We will see what is recommended for next year.

- Q77 **Nick Fletcher:** First, I thank you for the new school we are getting in my



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constituency, Bawtry Mayflower—that is really good news. On capital funding, what is your response to the conclusion in the NAO's report on the condition of schools that the Department lacks information on the extent of the issues with school buildings throughout the country?

Nick Gibb: Well, they talk about 700,000 pupils—and by the way, 300,000 of those pupils are already benefiting from a new or refurbished school—but the figure itself is slightly misleading, because it is based on the bids that schools submit to the school rebuilding programme before they are assessed. We then have our specialists who assess those bids before allocating. We are spending very significant sums of money on the capital maintenance of our school system—£15 billion since 2015. It is interesting that whenever I am asked that question, either here or in the House of Commons, it is often prefaced by “Oh, and thank you for the CIF funding we are getting for our school and for the school rebuilding programme that is happening here.” That is indicative of the fact that a lot of money is going out of the door and we are spending a lot of money. There are 500,000 schools under the school rebuilding programme, which succeeds the priority schools building programme, which came before it.

We are building new schools much more efficiently than we used to under the previous scheme—what was it called?

Chair: Building schools for the future.

Nick Gibb: Yes—the building schools for the future scheme. We are building about one third more cheaply and efficiently than under that scheme. But we take the condition of the estate very seriously.

The other thing we have done is that we are on our third condition data collection since we came into office in 2010. We have been looking at the whole school estate, sending out surveyors and looking at the condition so that we know precisely what condition schools are in.

Q78 **Nick Fletcher:** Do you think the report is wrong, then, and that you do actually know the state that the estate is in?

Nick Gibb: Yes, we do. We are in the middle of condition data collection 2. We have already done condition data collection 1 and the schools have had all the results from that. Prior to that there was an initial one that we did after 2010, to understand the condition then, so we do understand. As I say, the figures are slightly misleading because they come from bids to the school rebuilding programme before they were assessed by our specialists.

Q79 **Chair:** I think the point that the NAO was making was that the condition data collection you have done is more advanced than anything that has been done before, but it is about visual inspection rather than structural inspection. I think the concern the NAO were particularly focusing on was the structural risks in schools, which are very difficult to predict without full structural surveys.

Nick Gibb: As you know, we have written to all responsible bodies in charge of a school—whether that is the local authority, the multi-academy



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trust or the diocese—and asked them to report back on whether they think their schools have RAAC, particularly if they were built between those dates when RAAC was around. We pursue those responses and, where there is a real prospect of there being RAAC, we send in surveyors. That is more than a visual site assessment. Where any classroom or building shows real risk of collapse, we take immediate action and pupils are removed from the school.

- Q80 Nick Fletcher:** With regard to the hospital building programme, the Secretary of State for Health is talking about modular building and using the same design for all hospitals throughout the country. Is that something you are going to do with schools? Is it something that you are already on with or something you will look at?

Nick Gibb: We use this thing called smart modes of construction. It was a particular initiative of Lord Agnew's to make sure that we were constructing schools in the most efficient way with smart methods of construction—I am looking behind for in-flight refuelling because this is going slightly beyond what I have prepared for—and that is why we have brought the costs of constructing new schools down very significantly from building schools for the future.

- Q81 Chair:** Something that came up in the PAC meeting on this report, on which I guested, was the fact that there is a read-across between the condition of the school estate and teacher retention. We have heard evidence, and the PAC has heard evidence as well, from organisations such as the NAHT saying that whether people's surroundings are high quality or whether there are problems are factors in their decisions as to whether to continue in teaching. Given that the permanent secretary said very clearly to the PAC that she believes that she could have achieved better value for money had the whole of the DFE's bid been approved by the Treasury instead of the extent that they got, do you think that is something that needs to be factored into future discussions on this issue—that actually this is part of the solution to a long-term retention strategy as well as being a safety issue and a question about capacity?

Nick Gibb: There is definitely truth to the fact that the better quality the building, the more likely you are to want to work in it. I visit schools all the time and I have to say that I see some beautiful school buildings around the country, including even the older buildings. There are some beautiful Victorian school buildings. They can last significantly longer than the design life of the school itself if they are maintained properly, and that is why we have spent £15 billion since 2015 on maintaining and improving the condition of our school buildings.

- Q82 Anna Firth:** Before we leave the issue of capital funding, there are a number of primary schools in Southend that are really quite old, and the chair of governors of Fairways Primary School in Belfairs has expressed a concern that the school building funding that has gone to Southend in the last few years seems to have gone predominantly to academies and multi-academy trusts; can you assure me and the Committee that funds are equally distributed between local authority-maintained schools and



academies?

Nick Gibb: Absolutely. The SCA—the school condition allocation—goes to big multi-academy trusts and local authorities. Because they know their schools better than Whitehall, they then decide where that should be prioritised. There is also the CIF—the condition improvement fund—that schools can bid into if they are a stand-alone school or a small multi-academy trust. We assess those bids and announce which have been successful every May. Yes, the allocation is fair. I do not know whether you want to add anything else, Tom.

Tom Goldman: No.

- Q83 **Ian Mearns:** I thought for a moment that my colleague Nick was going to call for a return to CLASP. I do not know if anyone remembers CLASP. In its early iterations, it led to problems but, in its later iterations, it actually provided some very good, long-lasting buildings from which my own local authority and schools have benefited. Given the overall state of the school estate across the whole country, it has been estimated that— and there are still real-terms decreases in investment—about 700,000 youngsters are learning in schools that need major rebuilding or refurbishment. How can we justify that, Minister?

Nick Gibb: That is the figure from the NAO report and, as I said, it is based on bids that were put in. We take this issue very seriously. We take seriously the issue of improving the general quality of the school estate for all kinds of reasons, including pupil attainment and retention of teachers. That is why, as I said, we are spending very significant sums—£15 billion since 2015.

We also take the safety of schools seriously. Where there are problems with old CLASP buildings, RAAC or asbestos in schools, the DFE will intervene and support with both expertise and, in particular cases, funding to ensure that children are safe in those schools. We take it very seriously. There are colleagues whom I have worked with where that has been happening—we have gone in and found a different site for those children while the contractors go in and sort out the problem. That is happening up and down the country.

- Q84 **Ian Mearns:** I am glad you mentioned asbestos because the incidence rate of mesothelioma among people who are, or have been, in the teaching profession is still much higher than the national average. Is the Department doing anything about that?

Nick Gibb: The relevant regulator is the Health and Safety Executive. We work very closely with it. A survey of asbestos management in schools was conducted in 2019. It found that schools are managing it very well. If it is in situ and if it is protected and not being worked on in any way, the HSE advise that it is best left in place. Where it is showing signs of danger and risk, it will always be a priority for the school rebuilding programme and for funding from CIF and SCA to ensure that schools are safe.

Chair: This has been a very useful and informative session, so I am



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grateful to all our witnesses, and to Minister Gibb in particular.