
Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation

Neil McIvor
Chief Data Officer and Chief Statistician
Department for Education

27 March 2020

Dear Neil

STATISTICS ON SCHOOL FUNDING IN ENGLAND

I am writing to you to summarise the Office for Statistics Regulation's review of the Department for Education's new experimental statistics on school funding. Overall, these new statistics are very welcome, addressing a gap in the provision of official statistics on schools and helping support informed debate. The letter outlines the positive aspects of the statistics that we identified, including around accessibility and user engagement, and also aspects that could be improved, especially fuller presentation of the context surrounding school funding.

The background is that the Authority has previously written to the Department for Education regarding concerns with the way school funding statistics have been used within public debate. Until recently, there has been no single consistent and comprehensive set of official statistics on school funding, to which all participants in public debate could refer and sources previously available all presented a different analysis of school funding figures. It has therefore been difficult to form an authoritative view of school funding. To inform public debate on public services expenditure such as school funding, there is a vital need for good quality and clearly explained statistics. In May 2019, we wrote a [letter](#) to the Department, recommending the publishing of set of official statistics that comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics.

The Department's new experimental statistics on [School funding: between financial years 2010 to 2011 and 2020 to 2021](#) addresses the gap in these statistics. We have reviewed the statistics against the code of Practice for Statistics against the three pillars, trustworthiness, quality and value. Our main findings are:

- The statistics acknowledge the difficulty that users may face with understanding and navigating the existing statistics on school funding and clearly explain the different sources and elements of school funding used. It provides information on policy and operational changes to school funding arrangements that impact the comparability of data over time.
- Data are presented in both cash and real terms and cumulative allocations of school funding have been broken down to allow users to understand year on year changes. Assumptions of imputed or estimated data is explained however, it would be helpful to expand these explanations to provide supporting evidence for the methodological assumptions. For example, top-up funding for post-16 students contained within high needs block has been imputed based on the assumption that funding grew at the same rate as in previous years.
- Accessibility for users has been considered. The 'Technical Information' section includes hyperlinks to related DfE publications and the accompanying data tables. To further improve

accessibility, we would encourage better signposting throughout. This includes signposting to related DfE publications and tables within the main body of text; to the relevant data tables where the chart source is currently “DfE” and to links within the data tables to the statistical release definitions section to aid users who might come across the data tables before reading the release.

- The statistics team has engaged with some known users for feedback, including the Institute for Fiscal Studies and are aiming to publish earlier in the academic year to enhance timeliness for users. We would encourage the statistics team to continue to seek feedback from a range of users to understand the relevance and public value of these statistics.

We welcome the publishing of these statistics by the Department and are grateful for how effectively the team engaged with us during the statistics development and for inviting us to provide feedback. We will keep in touch with the statistics team as part of our ongoing monitoring of statistics on school funding.

I am copying this letter to Mike Jones, Deputy Head of Profession for Statistics.

Yours sincerely



Ed Humpherson
Director General for Regulation