

Wednesday 28th September 2022

Dear Parents/Carers

It is with great sadness and frustration that I feel compelled to write to you about the profound and worrying impact of recent unfunded staff pay awards, energy increases and other rising costs on The Eveleigh LINK Academy Trust and its schools and families.

The pay awards for teaching and support staff were announced over the summer, after school budgets had been set. These pay awards are truly deserved, and in truth, do not go far enough to reward our staff, encourage talent into the profession and address the cost of living crisis that our staff are facing. However, there has been no extra money from Government for schools to fund these staff pay awards! The fact that academy trusts and schools have been left to pick up this cost, is nothing short of negligent, short-sighted and irresponsible.

The success of any country depends on ensuring any future generations are provided with the best possible education. An education that provides our children with the skills, qualifications and experiences they need to positively contribute to society and the world around us. At a time when other countries are continuing to invest in and support education, our country is sadly not.

The impact of this upon our schools and families is profound and deeply concerning.

Our trust submitted a balanced budget to the Education, Skills and Funding Agency just prior to the summer break. The untimely announcement of the unfunded pay awards added an extra £100k of teaching costs and £150k of costs for support staff – a total cost of £250k of additional and unexpected cost to the organisation. As a result our trust is now setting a budget with a huge in year deficit. Energy costs had already been increased in our budget by 120% in 2022/2023 alone and before any future price increases.

So why am I taking the time to write to you?

In over 13 years of leading schools, I have never been faced with such a worrying situation which feels totally beyond my control and causing high levels of stress and anxiety to me and many others.

As a Trust, we have worked hard in recent years to balance our ever-stretched budget while continuing to provide the best possible education for our children and young people. We are proud of the impact our schools have on the life chances of our young people and the difference we make to our families and communities.

The pandemic posed us many challenges as a Trust and as a education sector. Indeed, many of our staff, families and children are still feeling the impact of it. In response to the pandemic, we made a strategic decision to invest in additional academic support and pastoral care to provide the additional support necessary to aid their recovery and to invest in our children's future.

However, at a time when we should be investing heavily in provision for our children and families and providing the best possible environment in which to learn, we are now faced with difficult decisions to cut costs and investment, decrease services and diminish the quality and breadth of what we offer.

One of my biggest worries is that these additional costs and the rise in inflation means there will be less to invest in provision for our most vulnerable. The pandemic hit our most vulnerable children and families the hardest. These children and their families will now face unaffordable cost of living rises which will only serve to widen the socio-economic divide – leaving even more children hungry, cold and without even the basic foundations they need so they can learn. To compound this, as a Trust, we face having even less money available to help them.

I recently wrote to our local Members Of Parliament and the Education Secretary requesting that they support schools and families by providing:

- Additional funding to Trusts, schools and Local Authorities to cover the full cost of teaching and support staff pay awards this year and beyond
- A grant to cover any ongoing rise in energy costs, as well as the introduction of an energy cap for public sector organisations
- Additional funding to enable schools to provide additional provision and services to support our most vulnerable children and their families
- An expansion of the free school meals criteria to enable more families to access this much needed support

Please can you also use whatever influence and voice that you have to support the calls for additional funding for schools. Thank you very much for your support.

Your Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Figg', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mr Joseph Figg
Chief Executive Officer