

Additional Government Funding for Extra SEN School Places

I have received a letter from Helen Watson, Interim Director of Children's Services at Wokingham Borough Council regarding extra Government funding for additional SEN school places in Wokingham.

I welcome the extra money the Government is providing to Wokingham to make additional provision for special educational needs. The Borough does need extra school places to meet demand and this expansion should take care of the requirements of families.

Dear Mr Redwood

Wokingham Borough Council was successful in securing funding from the Department for Education (DfE) to build two new and much needed special schools in the borough. As you are aware, the schools are proposed to be located at Rooks' Nest Farm in Finchampstead and it is hoped will open by September 2026.

The original plans for the schools called for each school to have 100 places, but after consideration of a business case the DfE have agreed to both school's capacity being increased to 120 places. Obviously, this is fantastic news for the Borough and is worth around £5m to £8m additional capital funding and the opportunity to support 40 more of our most vulnerable young people in their own community. There were two key reasons for this request:

1. Demand for Special School Places

The original capacity of the two planned special schools was based on pre covid data but post lockdown the demand for special school places in Wokingham continues to increase rapidly. In the last five years, the number of children with Special Educational Needs & Disability (SEND) has increased by 20% to 25%.

This is leading to several problems, including:

- Children with SEND are being placed in schools outside of the borough, which can be disruptive to their education and social life.
- Children with SEND are being placed in mainstream schools, where they may not receive the support, they need.

The benefits of increasing the size of the schools include:

- Improved educational outcomes for children with SEND.

- Reduced cost of transport for children with SEND.
- Reduced pressure on mainstream schools.
- Increased choice and flexibility for parents.
- Increased capacity to meet the growing demand for special school places.
- Reduced disruption to children's education and social life.
- Increased access to specialist support for children with SEND.
- Reduced financial hardship for parents of children with SEND.

2. Improved operation and financial viability of the schools.

Working with our existing special schools and Trusts in the area, it is clear long term financial viability of the school's increases with size. The two key considerations being class sizes and the proportions of fixed and variable costs to operate the schools.

In terms of class size for the cohorts we are looking to support, namely Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD) and higher level Social Emotional Mental Health Needs (SEMH), classes of 8 or 9 represent the sweet spot in balancing staffing resources with a manageable group, 120 places allow for this across all age groups in both schools.

I'm sure you will agree this is fantastic news for the Borough.

Yours sincerely

Helen Watson
Interim Director of Children's Services

[A summer urging change](#)

I have spent weeks this summer researching and writing how the government and Bank of England could give us a better future. I have set some of these views on this website, in tv and radio interviews and through comment in papers. I have sent the main ideas to Ministers and advisers.

In the next few weeks I will be publishing an updated and improved version of my Central Banks lecture. This will reinforce the need for changes to their model, forecasting and current policy stance.

I will be launching another booklet on wider ownership, setting out how we could help many more people to become owners of property, shares and businesses. It will set out ways to boost public sector productivity by involving officials in ownership and participation of delivery for public services.

I am just finishing a third on a supply side revolution so the UK makes and grows more. This will need targeted tax cuts and a pro business approach in government departments.

These three pieces will provide a policy framework for a decent ownership and supply side revolution, against a background of a more stable and supportive money policy. They will also provide many individual proposals government could adopt even if it is unable or unwilling to embrace the new vision,

[Will the Bank now relent as the economy slows?](#)

The Bank of England's way of fighting its inflationary mistakes of 2021 is to slow or stall the economy. They want to stop price rises by ensuring people cannot afford to buy so much, and to stop wage rises by increasing unemployment. This is all most unpleasant.

I have often pointed out it ignores two ways of sorting out inflation. The first is to avoid excessive money and credit growth. It is true the Bank without saying so has now flipped from monetary excess to monetary tightness. The second is to promote more supply, which the Bank and government working together could and should do.

Yesterday the updated survey of UK business found that the average figure had fallen to 47.9 where 50 is the tipping point from no growth to growth. Services were at 48.7 and manufacturing at 43.3, so both sectors are now in retreat. This mirrored the Euro area whose Central Bank made the same mistakes in 2021. Their overall figure is 47, with services at 48.3 and manufacturing at 43.7.

Euro area interest rates have been held lower than ours and their Bank is not selling bonds off in the market at huge losses. When will the Bank of England get the message that it may now be lurching to too tough? It needs to get better at forecasting inflation and to build a model which reflects the realities of the lag between raising rates and the impact on jobs and activity.

[More funny numbers from the OBR](#)

So we learn that UK state borrowing was £11.3 bn less in the first four months of this financial year than the OBR forecast. Spending was up so the

main reason for a further large error once again was understating tax revenues. Income tax was up by a massive 13% . the OBR often understates revenue when the economy grows a little.

I renew my question to Ministers. Why do you make the OBR five year forecast of the deficit the key control on your economic choices? As the OBR cannot get within £10 bn for the immediate year why believe the 5 year forecast? If the OBR model regularly understates tax revenue why accept advice to hike tax rates?

The numbers were further distorted by the transfer of £14 bn to the Bank of England to pay losses, taking the total to an astonishing £24 bn in just four months. The Bank's decision to sell bonds at the low prices it has driven them down to instead of holding them to repayment has added to the misery and inflated government ex Bank borrowing and spending.

Spending on benefits was up £11bn, on staff costs £8.2 bn and grants to Councils up £3 bn, making a total increase of £24 bn so far this year. If the government would introduce a freeze on public sector recruiting save for key personnel like medics and uniformed roles the government could start to control some of these outgoings.

Debt interest remains very elevated, More than half the stated costs do not entail any cash payments out or additional borrowing given the way the accounts treat indexation of some bonds.

The government needs to look through these confusing numbers and forecasts. The underlying reality is it could cut the rate of increase in spending, boost public sector productivity and cut some tax rates to grow the economy and revenues more.

Wokingham gets more money per head than neighbours according to IFS

I have had a few emails from constituents repeating Lib Dem claims that Wokingham gets little or no government funding and is short of money to spend.

The IFS has recently published a study of spending per head on five main service areas, including local government and schools. This combines government grants and local revenues.

The table beneath shows Wokingham in second place after West Berkshire amongst local areas:

Place	Schools per head	Local government per head
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total

West Berkshire	£941	£881
	£1822	
Wokingham	£892	£844
	£1736	
Bracknell	£ 879	£783
	£1662	
Reading	£831	£803
	£1634	
Hampshire	£797	£796
	£1593	
Windsor and M	£873	£682
	£1555	

These figures show that Wokingham is not treated badly or without money in the way the council has been saying. I have made the case for better funding for social services and schools in Wokingham and am pleased to see the government has increased the financial support it offers.