

Education money

It is clear from the reports of discussions within government and within the Conservative Parliamentary party that many think more money should be given to schools that have low funding levels today. There is general agreement to the idea of the pending reform, that a larger share of the money should go as a per pupil sum for each student at the school to reflect the basic costs of provision where ever it may be in the country and whatever the social background. There is also agreement among many that the better funded schools should not have cash taken away from them when the more lowly funded schools get more.

The Treasury clearly hoped that the new formula would take money from the generously funded and give to the poorly funded without major increases in total funding. It is never easy getting through these redistributational reforms, as the losers always speak more volubly than the winners. It looks as if on this occasion there will need to be some pump priming money as the formula is altered, to prevent big losers. It will also be needed to give sufficient to the winners for them to think they have made a reasonable gain.

Labour asked a Question in the House about this yesterday. The junior Minister, Mr Gibb, replied. He was unable to reveal more of the detail, as the government is still finalising its position on its response to the consultation concerning the new formula. I had a conversation with him afterwards to remind him of the position of Wokingham and West Berkshire.

Wokingham and West Berkshire schools remain at the low end of the table for per pupil money. It does not cost us less in Wokingham to educate a child than it does in the big cities. Teachers pay is based on national rates, whilst property costs are quite high. These matters need to be reflected in a common per pupil sum throughout the country which is a sufficiently high proportion of the total money awarded.

Meanwhile this week in the Commons Ministers have returned to explaining that there do have to be sensible controls on the total level of public spending, given the continuing deficit. More work is being done on spending priorities, and on raising the general level of efficiency and quality in public service. The answer to the need for better public services lies partly in economic growth generating more revenue, and partly in better management. Working smarter can be a win for taxpayers, keeping down cost, for service users, bringing up quality, and for employees, with better paid and more rewarding jobs. I raised these issues with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury when she answered a question about public sector pay yesterday.