

The Forest School

I was sad to receive a copy of the resignation letter of the Head teacher of the Forest this week. I wish her well in retirement and understand her wish to pass the leadership of the school on to someone else.

In the letter she draws attention to the current level of the Forest budget. I agree with those in Wokingham who would like our schools to have bigger budgets, as they are at the bottom of the league tables for receiving public money. I campaigned on the Conservative party Manifesto in 2015 that proposed a move to fairer funding in this Parliament. I worked with MPs from other parts of the country in the previous Parliament who shared the problem of relatively low levels of financial support for their schools. This Parliament I have urged successive Secretaries of State to press on with putting in a suitable scheme that rebalances the cash going to each school so that those getting least are better treated.

The present Secretary of State has promised to introduce such a scheme and is consulting on the details. I have urged her to give more to the poorly financed schools. I have also asked for further transitional relief. Some was awarded in recent years as the Coalition government agreed with me and the MP Group making the case for fairer funding.

I did have a meeting at the Forest to discuss budgets and to suggest ways to attract more money. The immediate pressures have been created by a shortfall of pupils applying to the school, which the Forest attributed to the opening of Bohunt. The main sums of money are given to schools on a per capita basis to cover the costs of each pupil. This will remain true under the new funding scheme, so it will be important for a school that wants a decent budget to recruit pupils up to its capacity. With more pupils and more income it is possible to offer a wider range of subjects and to have more equipment and staff. If fewer pupils attend then it does mean fewer staff and may also entail a narrower range of subjects.