



Bishop Wordsworth's School

Exeter Street, Salisbury, Wiltshire, SP1 2ED

Telephone: 01722 333851

Fax: 01722 325899

E-mail: admin@bws.wilts.sch.uk

Website: www.bws-school.org.uk

Head Master: Dr S D Smallwood BSc (Hons) PhD NPQH

3 May 2016

Dear Parents/Supporters of the School

It is likely that there will be a news item on school funding in the Salisbury Journal this coming Thursday, prompted by our recent requests to parents for financial support. For the avoidance of doubt (and knowing the risk of editorial selection) I thought that it might be both interesting and useful for you to read the whole of my responses to the request for comment. I suspect that there will be no surprises here, but there might be sufficient information for you to see a fuller picture that might otherwise be the case. My responses are shown *in italics*.

As always, we are hugely proud of what Bishop's Boys achieve; parents' support helps us to provide the opportunities for all of that to happen.

Best wishes

Stuart Smallwood
Head Master

29 April 2016

Dear Dr Smallwood

In a letter to parents, dated April 19, BWS asks for a voluntary contribution towards GCSE costs. It would appear that BWS is the only state-funded secondary school in our area that does this. Another recent letter asked for a voluntary contribution of £30 to £50 a month towards education costs. Again, other schools in the area say they do not do this. Parents have contacted the Journal to raise concerns about this issue.

Why is BWS regularly asking parents for money, while other schools are not doing so to anywhere near the same extent? Is there extra financial pressure on BWS that other schools don't have?

In common with many other schools in the maintained sector we are finding the funding settlements difficult to manage. The amount of money that we get for every 11-16 age pupil is flat lining (and has done so for some time) despite the fact that staffing costs continue to rise. Funding for sixth form students has decreased in cash terms by around 20% in the last 4 years, and as we have a large sixth form for the size of school we are hit hard by this reduction. The school receives £4,000 per year for every post-16 student on roll, which is less than we receive for younger students! 11-16 schools do not face these challenges. We also have a stable, highly qualified teaching staff (which is also by definition expensive) – great for delivering quality in the classroom but a challenge for a fixed budget. Other schools are facing great difficulties too of course, and some of these have featured in the pages of the Journal in recent months.

Does BWS receive similar per-pupil funding to other schools in the area?

No – we receive virtually no pupil premium funding or other funding to support learning. This makes a significant difference and is a factor which affects many other schools (both selective and non-selective) countrywide. All schools in Wiltshire suffer from the inequitable levels of funding under the current national arrangements; Wiltshire is one of the worst funded counties in England. The other Salisbury schools will suffer from this too, but we have no access to other sources of funding and also we have faced disproportionate cuts in recent years. It is also worth noting that although 11-16 school budgets were 'ring fenced' in 2016-2017 we are faced with very significant increases in costs due to the increases in pension contributions, employers NIC and also salary increases. These have not been publicised widely, but they are really hitting hard; other organisations pass their costs on to schools, but school budgets rarely rise to compensate. The Journal could play a powerful part in lobbying for more resources for schools of course...

What do you say to the parents who have written to the Journal, describing this as “ridiculous money grabbing?”, or those who say the school is manipulating parents into thinking they have to pay towards exam fees?

*We are incredibly lucky in that our parents are overwhelmingly supportive. There is absolutely no manipulation or pressure on parents to contribute, and there never has been. Our parents **choose** to support us because they recognise the high quality of what we provide for their boys. They recognise that the all-round education provided by Bishop’s is unique and that without sufficient resources it simply cannot happen. It is also true to say that we are completely honest and open with the entire school community. When things are difficult then we tell people what they can do to help, and when we have good news then the whole school community celebrates with us (eg there are over 1000 followers on the BWS Twitter Feed). That’s what parents should expect from a school.*

These are genuine opinions expressed to us by parents who are concerned about the regularity with which the school is asking for money.

*In common with many other schools we value the tangible support of parents, alumni and friends of the school. Many public bodies (for example schools, hospitals and universities) take a similar approach, especially in times of austerity. Hopefully a new National Funding Formula for Schools (due to be in place by 2019-2020) will help to establish a level playing field across the country. John Glen has been **really** helpful in working with Wiltshire schools to get a fairer settlement.*

Finally, I would hope that the Journal will take the opportunity to focus on some of the really positive outcomes that are there to celebrate in all of our local schools. We are all struggling to meet the challenges of tough financial settlements but at the same time schools across Salisbury and South Wiltshire are doing wonderful things for the youngsters in their care. I think that deserves some column inches too – I am sure that you would agree.

We plan to run a news story about this in next week’s paper and hope that you can find the time to respond to the points raised. The deadline for doing so is Tuesday evening.

Many thanks

Joe Riddle

News Editor

Salisbury Journal

01722 426508 – joe.riddle@salisburyjournal.co.uk - @journaljoe