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**The Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP**  
Secretary of State for Education

Sanctuary Buildings 20 Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT  
tel: 0370 000 2288 [www.education.gov.uk/contactus/dfe](http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus/dfe)

Peter Aldous MP

Daniel Zeichner MP  
Co-chairs of the East of England APPG

Cllr Matthew Hicks  
Chair of the East of England LGA

By email: [peter.aldous.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:peter.aldous.mp@parliament.uk)

*Dear Peter, Daniel & Matthew,*

6 February 2023

Thank you so much for your email of 20 December, about the report 'Levelling Up the East of England 2023-2030: The East of England's Progress Towards Achieving the Government's Twelve Levelling Up Missions'. I am sorry for the delay in responding.

I would like to begin by explaining that the Autumn Statement announced significant additional investment in core schools' funding. The core schools' budget will increase by £2 billion in both 2023-24 and 2024-25, over and above totals announced at the 2021 Spending Review.

Schools' funding is £4 billion higher this year than last year and it will rise by another £3.5 billion, on top of that, next year. Taken together, that means an increase of over 15% in just two years.

Of the additional £2 billion for 2023-24, £400 million will be allocated to local authorities' high needs budgets, with a new condition placed on local authorities to ensure that a fair share of that will be passed directly to special schools and alternative provision.

The government is making an unprecedented level of investment in high needs funding for children and young people with complex special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Including the additional funding following the 2022 Autumn Statement, high needs funding will be rising to £10.1 billion in 2023-24 - an increase of over 50% from the 2019-20 allocations. Every local authority in England will see a minimum per-head increase of 9.8% in their total high needs allocations in 2023-24 compared to 2022-23. This extra funding will help local authorities and schools with the increasing costs of supporting children and young people with complex SEND.

Alongside our continued investment in high needs, the government remains committed to ensuring a financially sustainable system where resources are effectively targeted to need. The consultation on the SEND and alternative provision Green Paper closed on 22 July, and the government will confirm the next steps in implementing our reform programme later this year.

On supporting rural schools, the schools national funding formula (NFF) accounts for the particular challenges faced by small schools in rural areas through the “sparsity” factor. This recognises that some schools are necessarily small because they are remote and do not have the same opportunities to grow or make efficiency savings as other schools, and that such schools often play a significant role in the rural communities they serve. This is why we made changes to the sparsity factor that saw the total amount allocated through the sparsity factor increased from £26 million in 2020-21 to £95 million in 2022-23, and increases again to £97 million in 2023-24.

Changes to sparsity funding will continue to benefit small, remote schools in 2023-24. From 2022-23 we began measuring schools’ remoteness more accurately, by road distances, this led to a significant increase in the number of schools eligible for sparsity funding - to over 2,500 schools attracting sparsity funding in total.

We are also targeting significant support for 55 Education Investment Areas (EIA), 24 of which are Priority EIAs. As you know there are 3 priority EIAs in the East of England: Fenland and East Cambridgeshire, Ipswich and Norwich. We have convened partnership boards to advise on local educational priorities and development of a targeted plan to improve outcomes at key stage 2 and key stage 4 in each of these priority areas. That work is underway, in discussion with local schools, trusts and other partners. Officials in the East of England Regional Team will be happy to keep you informed as it progresses over the coming months.

Moving on, I should explain that the Skills for Life ‘Unlock your Potential’ campaign, aimed at adult learners, brings together all the government backed Department for Education skills opportunities for adults to improve their skills.

We are delivering the campaign nationally, helping to raise awareness of the different skills training offers available to adults and signposting them to the ‘Skills for Life’ website. You can access the website here: [tinyurl.com/3ta59eey](https://tinyurl.com/3ta59eey).

The website showcases hundreds of government funded skills opportunities. It promotes online learning options and free essential skills courses, such as numeracy, English and digital, sector specific qualifications, Skills Bootcamps, Free Courses for Jobs and in-work training, as well as personalised support and guidance from the National Careers Service.

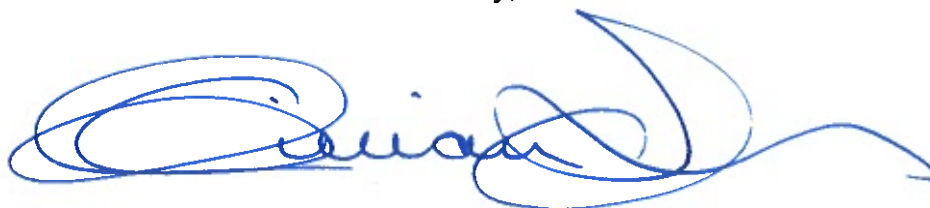
On a local level, we are supporting mayoral combined authorities and local authorities to deliver localised campaigns through creative toolkits and shared insights.

As I am sure you can appreciate, this is a challenging agenda, but it is right to be ambitious and we are determined to improve outcomes for children in every region of the country, including the East of England. We will continue to work with local stakeholders to understand and meet local needs.

I was grateful to receive your kind request for a meeting. Whilst unfortunately diary pressures preclude such a meeting in the immediate future, I look forward to working with you.

Thank you for taking the time to write to me on this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gillian Keegan', with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

**The Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP  
Secretary of State for Education**