

BUDGET

Union leader slams school 'underfunding'

■ 'As always it is the poorest schools that are the hardest hit' claim

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A UNION leader has slammed "government underfunding" of education, after it was revealed that a fifth of teachers believe funding for poorest pupils is being used to plug budget gaps.

The comments follow a recent National Foundation for Educational Research survey which found 22 per cent of teachers said money is being syphoned away from the pupil premium – extra funding to support disadvantaged children.

The survey, which approached 1,246 primary and secondary teachers and senior leaders working in English state schools, also suggested that many schools are cutting back on areas including staff, IT and trips.

Julia Simpkins, Bolton divisional secretary of the National Education Union, said she is concerned about the figures highlighting a national squeeze on school budgets.

She said: "It all comes back to the government not funding education properly, and it is always the poorest schools that are hardest hit.

"If the government doesn't start putting money back in to schools then that problem is going to get bigger and bigger.

"Schools have already cut back on everything they can cut."

According to the report, staffing was the most frequently targeted area for school savings.



CONCERN: Julia Simpkins

Sixty three per cent of those surveyed said their schools were cutting back on teaching assistants, while 50 per cent said support staff, and 39 per cent said teaching staff.

Parents in Bolton have recently voiced concerns over the issue, after it was announced that 11 teaching assistant jobs could go at SS Osmund and Andrew's RC Primary School in Breightmet.

Ms Simpkins said: "Because the schools need extra money to do the normal things, they are taking money from anywhere they can.

"Schools should be funded properly so that they can afford to pay their teachers, the teaching assistants, buy text books and equipment they need, and pay their bills.

"Then they can use this special pupil premium money for things it should be used for:

"It is over the last year that schools have started to say they will be getting rid of classroom assistants, who are often the people that deliver teaching to pupils who need extra support."

Ms Simpkins added: "The union is absolutely concerned and we have called a weekend of action this weekend at schools across across the country.

"We will be holding a stall in Horwich on Saturday to raise parent's awareness of what is going on in our schools."

Ms Simpkins' comments come amid national concerns over a tightening of school budgets.

Sir Peter Lampl, founder of the Sutton Trust who commissioned the NEFR survey, said: "It is very worrying that schools are losing teachers as a result of spending cuts.

"The result is that they are also increasingly plugging funding gaps with the pupil premium."

However the government has insisted education funding and teacher numbers have increased.

A Department for Education spokesman said: "Thanks to the hard work of teachers and our reforms standards are rising, with 1.9 million more children in good or outstanding schools than in 2010 and 15,500 more teachers in our classrooms than in 2010.

"There are no cuts in funding and over the next two years every school will attract an increase in funding through our fairer formula.

"By 2020, core school funding will rise to a record £43.5 billion – the highest ever and 50pc more per pupil in real terms than in 2000.

"We have given heads the freedom to decide how best to allocate their funding to meet the needs of their pupils and this includes ensuring the Pupil Premium improves the attainment of the country's most disadvantaged children."



PROTEST: Campaigners against cuts at SS Osmund and Andrew's RC Primary