



17th January 2024

Dear Parents and Carers,

We are writing to share with you, the challenges that our school is currently facing, along with a number of other schools in the borough. For some time the school governors have been managing significant budgetary pressures due to external factors which have impacted disproportionately on our school. These issues are not unique to The Ridge - all schools are facing larger budget constraints than ever before and many schools across the country are expected to be in deficit next financial year. However for us at The Ridge, this challenge has come earlier than for many others.

At The Ridge Primary School, we have always aimed to provide our pupils with the best possible education, nurture and care that we can and have a track record of successfully managing our finances to achieve good outcomes for our pupils. However, over recent years, the lack of investment in education has made this increasingly difficult.

As a small school we have fewer pupils to generate funding in the formula used to allocate school budgets. However many of the costs are the same as those for much larger schools. Increasing costs, including the high price of gas and electricity, inflation on services and resources and unfunded pay rises, have all had a big impact. Another factor is that we do not receive much in the way of additional funding because our school has only a small number of pupils entitled to free school meals (FSM). The number of pupils entitled to FSM is important, not just because these pupils receive a free lunch but because it is also an element in allocating how much money a school receives. Additionally, it allows access to extra grants, such as those for training, books or other support and resources.

Since the lockdowns, there are more pupils who need extra support. However, the funding we receive from the Local Authority for pupils with Special Educational Needs does not cover the cost of the additional support required. As health and other support services become more stretched, schools are being asked to fill the void. The cost of services which previously were provided free by the Local Authority or Health Service is now falling to schools.

The bottom line is that our costs are rising at a far faster rate than the funding we are being given to meet them. Over the past few years we have been working hard to balance keeping our expenditure as low as possible, ensuring value for money, whilst maintaining the quality of education and pastoral care that our pupils deserve. However despite our best efforts, our school has exhausted its reserves and is facing a significant deficit this current financial year, with an even bigger deficit projected in 2024/25.



The reason that we are sharing this with the wider school community is to ask for your support. There are many ways that you can help.

- Even if your child is in Years Reception to Year 2 and receives Universal Free School Meals already, if you think you may be eligible, apply for Free School Meals using the application form here: <https://customer.dudley.gov.uk/free-school-meals/create/>
For every child who is entitled to Free School Meals (not Universal Free School Meals), the school receives additional funding from the government.
- If your child is in Reception, Year 1 or 2 or is in Key Stage 2 and has a Free School Meal entitlement, please make sure your child has ordered a school meal on Census Days when our funding is calculated (The Spring Term Census is on Thursday 18th January 2024)
- Please continue to support our requests for voluntary contributions towards the cost of swimming, school visits, cookery ingredients and extra-curricular activities.
- Join Easy Fundraising. If you haven't signed up yet, it's easy and completely FREE. 8,100 brands will donate to us when you use easyfundraising to do your everyday online shopping - at no extra cost to you! Every donation you raise makes a difference to us. Please sign up & share today - [Easy Fundraising](#).
- If your child is in Year 3-6, please continue to send your child into school with their own pencil case containing the essentials they need, eg: pencil, transparent ruler, pencil sharpener, eraser, colouring pencils, glue stick.
- Support the work of the Ridge Friends Association so that they are able to raise enough money to support forest school, enhance the school environment and provide extras for the children such as treats at Christmas and the end of year.
- Please let us know if your employer offers a community support fund or other grants which we may be eligible for.

Thank you for all that you already do: we are very grateful for your support for our school. Over the coming months we will be exploring new methods of generating income and looking at other ways that you can help. However, if you have ideas, we would love to hear them. In the meantime we remain committed to giving all our pupils the very best that The Ridge can offer.

Kind regards

Mrs D Hudson
Headteacher

Mrs J Simmonds
Chair of Governors