

EDITING 4

A National Audit Office report has found that school funding for the most disadvantaged areas of England has fallen, while funding for the most affluent areas has increased.

The report found that the average per pupil funding in the most deprived fifth of schools fell by 1.2% between 2017-18 and 2021. In contrast, this funding increased over the same period by 2.9% for pupil in the least deprived fifth of schools.

It follows the government's introduction in 2018-19 of a national funding formula. This brought in a minimum level of funding for schools per pupil across England.

As schools in more affluent areas of England traditionally had lower funding level than the most disadvantaged, paying schools per pupil meant that affluent area schools received a funding boost.

This also comes after it came to light in April this year that disadvantaged schools in the north east are set to have their budgets cut by between £5-7 million.

Each pupil eligible for free school meals means a school receives a Pupil Premium grant from the government, used to help improve their exam results.

But as lockdown has lowered many families' income, more children are eligible for free school meals, meaning the government – had they not changed their rules – would have to pay out more money to disadvantaged schools.

So, instead of basing funding on the number of pupils eligible every January, the government will base it on those eligible in October, before a noted rise in eligibility.

News that funding has moved away from the most deprived schools also coincides with the publication of a report showing that Covid has had a disproportionate impact on disadvantaged pupils.

Official government data demonstrated how those eligible for free school meals – some of the most disadvantaged children in the country – had higher rates of Covid-related absences from school the autumn terms, as opposed to their more affluent peers.