Twitter Thread by Andy Jolley ■



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Short thread on how DfE sneaked out a £250 million cut to school budgets in the middle of a pandemic and how it will impact the poorest and most vulnerable pupils

No publicity, no great public announcement as @educationgovuk cut £1/4 billion from its Pupil Premium budget

Pupil Premium (PP) is extra funding to help disadvantaged children & those living in poverty, it's funding to help with levelling up & social mobility

Schools receive extra money for pupils claiming free school meals, it's currently £935 for secondary & £1320 for primary

The funding was calculated based on the second annual school census which is in January, the first census being early October

This gives schools time to encourage FSM registration & check everything before the dataset is used

As of last Januarys census there were 1.44 million pupils registered to receive Free school meals

Then we had COVID

Despite the government's furlough scheme & other support, we saw a huge increases in job insecurity and a rise in numbers claiming Universal credit

By October the number of pupils claiming free school meals had risen to over 1.6million

That's an extra 200,000 pupils below the UC threshold & entitled to FSM

It seems highly likely the numbers continued to rise, especially with a 2 month lag between UC claims & eligibility

For those who don't know, Schools have been working tirelessly throughout the pandemic, filling in for the failings in social care, becoming beacons in their communities

They've opened food banks, testing centres, provided laptops to vulnerable families, never closing

Then on December 17th, the last day of term for many, the government sneaked out a tiny change to their data collection. A change that will have huge implications for schools

@educationgovuk announced they would calculate PP using the October census data rather than January's

What this means in practice is that anyone who becomes eligible for FSM after the first week of October 2020, will not receive any Pupil Premium funding until they appear on the census next October

Whereas previously PP would have been triggered in January

So assuming FSM eligibility continued to rise at a similar rate, that's 200,000 pupils missing out on PP for a whole year

This deprives schools of around £250,000,000 in extra funding, hitting the poorest communities the hardest

Ministers argued "The move to the October census simplifies the school funding system, and provide both schools and the Department with greater certainty around future funding levels earlier in the year"

Of course that's utter claptrap

https://t.co/MsAlsVsw9M

@educationgovuk undermine their own argument by continuing to use the January data for alternative provision schools

They could have given notice of the change, used this Januarys data and then gone to October next year

This looks like a cynical move to suppress Pupil Premium spending during a period when poverty is rising and Free School Meal eligibility would have sky rocketed

@GavinWilliamson saved himself £1/4 billion by taking PP away from thousands of vulnerable children

It's hard to see this as anything other than a cost cutting exercise

@educationgovuk didn't give any notice, it was simply imposed

Schools will know FSM numbers & will budget accordingly, they will have spent money expecting to receive PP

Again it's the poorest hit hardest

Here's the kicker

Just imagine if @educationgovuk had been ADDING an extra £250 million to school budgets rather than taking it away

We’d see announcement after announcement, @GavinWilliamson doing the rounds of every TV studio, whimpering on about helping disadvantaged pupils

Perhaps I should add that I can see this government ending the Ever 6 PP funding as soon as it feels it’s politically convenient

They may hang on until there is a review of FSM, but my view is they will stop this funding at some point