**Revealed: how wealthy parents widen cash gap between state schools**

**Huge sums are raised by PTAs in affluent areas but headteachers in less well-off districts still struggle for funds**

Elite state schools in England are collecting millions of pounds in donations from parents while schools with poorer pupils struggle to raise any funds at all, a far-reaching *Observer* investigation shows.

England’s 30 most successful parent-teacher associations (PTAs) raised £3.6m for their schools, the study found, while schools with the highest proportion of pupils from low-income families usually do not have a PTA, and those that do raise very little money from parents.

As headteachers across the country battle to cope with insufficient budgets and some schools are forced to [close early on Fridays](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/jul/04/figures-reveal-english-schools-cant-afford-to-teach-five-days-a-week), the stark inequalities in education funding, caused by wealthy parents shielding their children’s state schools from the deep cuts that schools with poorer pupils must endure, are revealed in detail for the first time.

Labour’s shadow education secretary, Angela Rayner, said the *Observer*’s research revealed the shocking extent to which state schools are now relying on private donations to keep them afloat after nine years of Tory cuts.

“Once again, it is the most disadvantaged children who are paying the highest price for austerity, with soaring class sizes, fewer staff and teachers, and less dedicated support for the pupils who need it the most,” she said.

[Jules White](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/jules-white), a headteacher and leader of the [Worth Less? school funding campaign](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/mar/08/damian-hinds-faces-criticism-from-head-teachers-worth-less-parents-letter), called the six- and seven-figure donations some state schools receive “jaw-dropping”. “What we should be doing in state schools is maximising opportunity for every pupil, not creating a system of haves and have nots,” he said. “But because the overall system is so badly underfunded, affluent parents are trying to help, with unfortunate consequences. Funding disparities between different state schools are being exacerbated, putting some children at an even greater disadvantage.”

The 30 highest-earning PTAs identified by the *Observer* are overwhelmingly in the south-east of England. None were in the north, half were in London, with a further nine elsewhere in the south-east. The majority of the schools they support were rated “outstanding” by Ofsted, with the rest rated “good”. Six raised more than £100,000 a year for their schools.

An analysis of academy accounts found even more extreme examples of private donations made directly to schools (rather than via PTAs). Some academies received more than £1m in direct donations from philanthropists, parents and corporate donors.

Cardinal Vaughan Memorial school, a Catholic boys’ comprehensive in Holland Park, west London, raised £631,770 in unrestricted donations from parents, alumni and other benefactors. The headteacher, Paul Stubbings, said: “Like all state schools at the moment, we have been placed in an impossible position by government funding: we need to contend not only with cuts, but also rising staff costs, including unfunded pay awards, rising national insurance and pension contributions and, of course, inflation. The choice is stark: we have to cut provision or raise funds. At the Vaughan, we have done the latter to ease the former.”

Stubbings asks families to donate regularly on a voluntary basis over five years and says 60% of families at the school have chosen to do so. The school needs these extra funds to cover its operational costs and avoid teacher redundancies, he said.

Of the schools with the highest-earning PTAs, only 5% of pupils on average were eligible for free school meals, lower than the national average of 15%. Schools with high proportions of pupils from low-income families often do not have PTAs.

The *Observer* also looked at the 30 mainstream state schools with the highest proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals in England, where two out of three children are from disadvantaged backgrounds. Most were in the north, while just three were in London. Several were rated “inadequate” or “requires improvement”. Just nine said they had an active PTA – more than two-thirds do not even attempt to raise any funds from local families. Of those with PTAs that responded to requests for information, the average annual amount raised was £1,700.

One PTA, the Friends of Queen Elizabeth’s school in Barnet, north London, raised £894,000 – more than any other PTA that year. Most of this figure – almost £700,000 including gift aid – was from donations and legacies. Queen Elizabeth’s is a grammar school where 97% of children achieve A\*-B grades at A-level and just 2% are eligible for free school meals.

According to its accounts, Tonbridge Grammar school in Kent, another high-achieving school, received £1.1m as the beneficiary of a will, which it says will primarily be used to support its most disadvantaged pupils. Less than 1% of the pupils at the school are eligible for free school meals.

A Department for Education spokesman said: “There is more money going into schools than ever before. We know schools face budgeting challenges, which is why we have introduced a wide range of support to help schools reduce costs.

“The secretary of state has made clear that as we approach the next spending review, he will back headteachers to have the resources they need to deliver a world-class education in the years ahead.”

He added that since 2011, around 0.7% of schools’ total income had come from voluntary donations, and said: “When requesting voluntary contributions, schools must make clear to parents that they are under no obligation to donate.”

• To find the highest-earning PTAs, the Observer performed a number of keyword searches on the Charity Commission website to build a database. Special schools and independent schools were excluded. Free school meals and Ofsted data were added for schools supported by PTAs. The *Observer* also surveyed 30 mainstream schools with the highest proportion of children on free school meals about any PTA income. PTAs, which are unincorporated charities, are not required to register with the Charity Commission unless they earn over £5,000, and the searches will not capture PTAs with non-standard names.

**Πηγή:** <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/jul/14/wealthy-parents-stoke-school-divide>