

VIEW FROM THE HOUSE

Sure Start Palfrey does it best – So says Ofsted in their recent inspection report. And so far Sure Start Palfrey are the only one in the country to have achieved the double, 2 consecutive “outstanding”. I’ve seen the work, the innovation and creative way the staff work with the community. Congratulations to them all. There were cuts in the budget but the work continued. However there is a limit to what services such as Sure Start can do without further investment.

Indiscriminate cuts without thinking through the consequences have resulted in Walsall Adult and Community College (WACC) losing funding from £380,000 to nil. Bizarrely the Prime Minister on the same day in his speech on extremism and integration announced a review to look at issues including how people learn English.

WACC is the ESOL Plus Mandation provider in Walsall teaching English to jobseekers whose first language is not English. They have hubs at Whitehall School and Palfrey Community Centre. The rate of JSA in Walsall South is currently 4.3%, well above the national rate of 2.5%. Moreover, the 2011 Census found that there are 2,575 households where English is not a main language. This represents 6.88% of households and is well above the national average of 4.28%.

Everyone who lives here should be able to speak English or learning to speak it. This is vital to be part of society and for social cohesion. That is why high quality tuition is needed. The Prime Minister appears to be undermining his own strategy. I have protested to the Minister and await his response.

That is the problem with pursuing the short term strategy of so called austerity cuts. I asked for figures for the grants from Central Government to Walsall MBC. This grant to local authorities provides your services. The figures make disappointing reading for Walsall. They show the grant to Walsall MBC has fallen by 15.1% in 2015/16 compared with 2014/15, equivalent to a cut of £22.6 million or £83.90 per year, per head for everyone living in Walsall.

And finally, a lively crowd gathered in the shadow of St Paul’s at the Crossing on 15 August for the Unity Celebration. We stood together as WE ARE WALSALL. And at 12 noon we heard the Reveille and fell silent to remember those who gave “their today for our tomorrow”. A reminder why we need to oppose injustice, racism and oppression whenever we find it.

Valerie Vaz MP

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