

SCHOOLS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING of the Schools Forum held on Wednesday, 7 February 2024 at 4.30pm at the Guildhall, Portsmouth

Present

Dave Jones, Chair	LA Maintained	Primary Phase
Jackie Collins	LA Maintained	Primary Phase
Jack Jones	Academies	Primary Phase
Nys Hardingham	Academies	Secondary Phase
Nathan Waites	Academies	Secondary Phase
Kara Jewell	Early Years	
Chris Caddamy	Post 16 Provision	
Suzy Horton	Councillor	Observer

90. Apologies

Apologies were received from:

- Sharon Burt
- Jo Cooper
- Councillor Chris Dike
- Simon Graham
- Sally Hodgson
- Sean Preston
- Ruth Worswick

91. Declarations of Interest

Declarations of interest are outstanding from Councillors Tom Coles and Chis Dike.

92. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 11 January 2024.

DECISION

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 2024 were approved as a correct record.

93. Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

94. Membership Update

The following three tenures will come to an end:

- Jackie Collins - Head Teacher Primary Maintained Schools.
- Simon Graham - Head Teacher, Secondary Maintained School
- Nys Hardingham - Secondary Academy representative - Ms Hardingham has indicated that she would be happy to stand again, secondary academy trusts will be notified and asked to confirm if they are happy with the proposal.

There also vacancies for:

- Three secondary phase academy representatives.
- One primary and one secondary governor representatives.

95. Dedicated Schools Grant Budget 2024-25

Angela Mann, Finance Manager introduced the report.

The responses to questions from the forum are as follows:

Alison Egerton, Group Accountant explained that the High Needs Block funding formula is very different to the Schools Block. The formula provides specific funding for the number of pupils in Special Schools at the October census, a lump sum based on historic spend (based on 2017-18) and the rest is based on the characteristics of the Portsmouth population including the number of children that are in ill-health and the income deprivation affecting children index (IDACI).

The funding for places at special schools is the only funding that is directly related to the number of pupils with Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCPs).

Local Authorities (LAs) have not been given additional government funding related to the increase in the number of pupils with EHCPs in mainstream schools.

The £3.4m increase for the element 3 top up covers special schools, maintained schools, inclusion centres and alternative provision. There has been a considerable increase in the level of need this year, particularly in special schools. It also reflects the full year effect of the 66 places at the Wymering School from September 2023.

The number of EHC assessment requests that the SEND team has received have been reviewed. There has been a considerable increase in the number of assessment requests which is resulting in a rise in the number of EHCPs including a 30% increase in the number of EHCPs in 2022/23 with significant increases forecast for 2023/24 and 2024/25.

Within the £3.4m, £350,000 relates to the 1.84% increase on the banding levels. £0.8m relates to the increased numbers in mainstream schools. £2.3m relates to the element 3 for the special schools. Approximately £0.05m relates to the inclusion centres.

The impact of Wymering school is about £0.7m.

The increase in the budget for Mainstream Element 3 is based on forecasts which suggest that there be of 196 full time equivalent pupils.

The budget for Special schools builds in an additional 2 at Solent Academies Trust.

Mike Stoneman, Deputy Director of Education added that there is a black log of EHC assessments which is impacting on the forecast for 2024-25. If the

backlog did not exist we would have seen a significant pressure on the High Needs Block in 2023/24. Additional resources to support the EHC assessment recovery plan have been put in place to address the backlog.

Alison Egerton explained that Schools Forum could request a transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block but has not done that for a number of years, and is not necessary for 2024/25 due to the DSG carry forward. The plan is to work with the Education Service to review the DSG services and produce a five year DSG management plan.

It is projected that 70% pupils with EHCPs will go to mainstream schools. This and other figures in the council were used for financial modelling.

A lot of the pressure and EHC assessment requests are coming through Early Years. This is being reviewed as part of the DSG management plan to understand better what is driving this and what interventions can be put in place to support the children and their families.

The DSG carry forward is ringfenced until March 2026. From April 2027, the LA will be responsible for managing any deficit on the budget. The current balance will allow time to set up and implement appropriate interventions. The LA will work with everyone involved to ensure that needs are met. It is seen as needing a whole partnership response.

In response to a question, Mike Stoneman explained that it is a very challenging situation. Discussions will start next week regarding the DSG management plan and he would welcome wider support.

As requested by Schools Forum, a working group of headteachers and LA officers recently developed proposals to carry out some measures/interventions which could support inclusion in mainstream schools and reduce the demand for EHC assessments - to be funded from a portion of the DSG carry forward. It was paused because of the pressure and forecast overspend on the High Needs Block in 2024-25 and 2025-26, and the proposals will be reviewed as part of that process and will ensure value for money

Alison Egerton explained that the DSG management plan has to come back to Schools Forum for endorsement. It is therefore important for Schools Forum members to be involved in its development. Mike Stoneman confirmed that he will shortly be inviting School Forum Members to be involved.

The Speech and Language Service has the potential to make a difference and we are fortunate to have some additional funding through the SENDAP Change Programme that we hope will have a positive impact.

The DSG management plan is a forecasting tool. It will be used to look at all the different pieces of work that could be done to change the forecast.

The current number of EHCP applications is known and the budget assumes the same proportion receive an EHCP as before which will create a £2.5m pressure for 2024-25 and a further £1.1m for 2025-26.

There are plans to increase special places in inclusion centres at a cost of £300,000 for 2025-26.

Angela Mann explained that officers have voiced their concerns with about funding levels with the DfE at various groups including South East Officer Groups.

Mike Stoneman added that this has also been discussed with the DfE and across the South East network of LAs at DSC and Assistant Director level.

Angela Mann explained that the following have also been considered when setting the budget:

- Children in Early Years and how these may change with the new entitlements which are for working parents. Some of whom may already be using the Early Years settings.
- Children in Early Years settings who will transfer to Year R in September.
- Pupils leaving Y11 and where they might be going.
- Children likely to get EHCPs this year.

If the numbers are lower, what will be used from the DSG reserve will be less. However, there are some risks including the increase in pupils with complex needs at special schools in 2023-24. For the forecasting, it has been assumed that this complexity of need will stay the same.

The numbers of children can be brought to a future meeting.

Mike Stoneman stated that he would be happy to bring benchmarking data to a future meeting.

The surplus in Year R and KS1 varies across the city, but overall the number of surplus places is increasing due to the lower birth rate. This is partly offset for the rise in in-year transfers that we have seen in recent years. .

Alison Egerton explained that the decision lies with the Cabinet Member. The Schools Forum simply decides whether or not to endorse the recommendations.

During the discussion, School Forum members raised the following:

- The scarcity of special school places is having an impact on schools.
- In-year transfers tend happen after Christmas which impacts on the census and therefore funding.

- That Early Years providers didn't always make the link between the valued support that they receive from the authority and 5% retention which funds it.
- The increase in number of pupils with high needs in mainstream schools who previously would have been in special schools.
- Members have not had sufficient time to digest the report and share it with colleagues. They would welcome a more open and transparent approach regarding the DSG management plan.
- It is important to invest in order to prevent rising costs. Education practitioners should be involved in the discussions and decision-making.
- The difficulty that the High Needs Block presents the LA was acknowledged along with the huge amount of pressure that is on many public services, particularly as other agencies who would have previously been involved no longer have the resources.
- More information was requested about schools and inclusion centres

DECISIONS

The Schools Forum:

- 1. Approved the proposal to de-delegation of the Education functions related to the Monitoring and Brokering grant for 2024-25 at £10.42 per pupil for primary and secondary pupils.**
- 2. Endorsed the determination of the Schools Budget for 2024-25 as set out in Appendix Endorsed the proposal to use carry forward balances to fund the shortfall in 2024-25 and manage any potential financial pressures during the financial year.**
- 3. Endorsed the 2024-25 Element 3 Top-up values for Special Schools, Inclusion Centres, Alternative Provision Settings and Mainstream Schools as set out in Appendix 2. 2 www.portsmouth.gov.uk**
- 4. Endorsed the Early Years Funding Formula for under twos, two, three and four year-olds as set out in section 7, and Appendix 1.**

The next meeting will be held on 22 May.

The meeting concluded at 5:45pm