

SOUTHWARK CHILDREN'S SERVICES - SCHOOLS FORUM
THURSDAY 14th March 2024
14.00 to 15.30
Via Teams
DRAFT MINUTES

1. Attendance and Apologies: - See Annex A

There were no apologies. The Clerk confirmed that the meeting was quorate.

2. Declaration of Interests

Members were asked to declare any pecuniary or other interests they might have that were greater than the interests of other members of the Schools Forum in any matter on the agenda for discussion. None were declared.

3. Minutes of the Meeting of 18th January 2024 and Matters Arising

These were agreed for accuracy.

4. High Needs Subgroup Feedback

The minutes of the meeting were circulated and noted by the forum members. The following points were raised.

- Headteachers and SENCOS were invited to attend the meeting to discuss developments to take forward in terms of supporting young people in schools with early interventions. The release of targeted intervention or more strategic leadership support ahead of EHCPs. The meeting was well attended.
- Options were presented that had been rolled out elsewhere, the key areas of need were highlighted. Social communication and autism, attachment challenges and associated behaviour, multi agency triage panels and system leadership and how training can be developed, both at leadership level and a pilot for an action learning set through Alfred Salter were discussed.
- Two preferred areas, targeted interventions on social and communication and the Alfred Salter offer. There was clear acknowledgement that there needs to be an understanding of the context of schools when considering training and additional resources that schools need. There was a suggestion that all schools would agree a date for a training session.
- It was fed back that there a number of services working within the inclusion agenda, work needs to be cohesive, coherent, and meet the need. Any multi agency panel created needs to link with the work undertaken by the Early Help Team for a whole school approach.
- Next steps include modelling the packages and piloting them in the spring term. The first panel will meet on the 19th March 2024.
- Feedback on the models was given to the Headteacher's Group. Membership of the group will be circulated and explore mechanisms to circulate information.

5. Permanently Excluded Pupils Funding Arrangements.

Where a pupil is permanently excluded from a school maintained by the Council (other than a special school, pupil referral unit or from a place which the authority has reserved for children with special educational needs) the Council must re-determine the excluding school's budget share in accordance with the Statutory Framework. Academies are covered by the same policy once a formal agreement with the Council is entered into, as per their Funding Agreement.

The report regularises the arrangements for making funding adjustments for permanently excluded pupils for maintained schools and academies, from the 2024-25 financial year.

The Schools Forum

Agreed to the arrangements for making funding adjustments for permanently excluded pupils from maintained schools and academies; and

The forum members noted that, following the agreement, the LA will invite each academy and free school to enter into an Exclusions Agreement.

6. DSG 2024-25 Funding Updates

The report sets out a number of adjustments to the 2024-25 DSG Funding levels following some DfE clarifications. It asks for Forum members to note the funding rates for early year's providers and the changes to the Schools Blocks top-slice.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS FOR SCHOOLS FORUM

The Schools Forum noted:

- The funding Base Rates for Early Year providers in the "Final Rates" column in table 1. The number of weeks that the Local Authority are funded for has increased. The providers have been informed of the new rates.
- The adjustments to the Falling Rolls and Growth Fund budgets for 2024-25 as set out in section 5 of the circulated paper. The adjustments are related to two schools that have closed which reduced the budgets by £40,000, it was decided to reduce the Falling Roles fund to the levels presented in the paper and slightly increased the Growth Fund to represent one full class of a formula allocation.

The DfE have released an estimator for schools which has been shared with schools, it allows schools to estimate the allocation of funding for pension costs. Payments and allocations are expected in May 2024, payments will be made to schools in early June 2024. A consultation process will begin for special schools on how the funding will be distributed.

7. DSG 2023-24 Budget Monitor and Financial Update

This report sets out the latest in-year budget monitoring for the 2023-24 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and provides an update to members on the latest school finance events.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS FOR SCHOOLS FORUM

The Schools Forum

- Noted the DSG end of year financial forecast position for the year ending 31 March 2024.

Overall Position

The report sets out the budget monitoring information and projected year end position for the budget areas funded by the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) as of February 2024 (Month 10). There are still some areas that are subject to change between now and the year end and thus these projections should be treated with caution. There is a small underspend on the Central Services Block.

Overspend of £305,000 on Early Years Block which is contingent on the final outcome of the January census, it is anticipated that the figure will come down potentially towards a balanced position.

The High Needs block remains the main risk area in the DSG but is currently forecasting a small underspend of £185k for the current financial year. There is ongoing work around processing of EHCP's and improving SEND data as part of the general Safety Valve work and as a result, there may still be variation in this forecast before the final outturn is reached. There continues to be pressure from growing numbers of EHCP as well as inflationary costs from the independent sector. As this is a need led budget this forecast is highly variable. Although the current position is positive and that remains good news, it remains extremely challenging to meet the savings requirements to maintain a sustainable High Needs block going into future financial years and there are still significant challenges ahead from rising numbers and inflationary pressures.

Southwark continue to be a part of the Safety Valve programme with the DfE, and the recent monitoring has been accepted by the DfE. This means the final instalment of the additional funding for 2023-24 has been approved, and will be received before year end, bringing the total for 2023-24 to £3.7m.

Although the current forecast for the Maternity scheme looks to be an underspend, there may still be further claims made before year end and so this figure may increase before final outturn. The rates for next years de delegation have been lowered, the balances will be reviewed next year.

Payments for support staff to release their time for trade union activities a paper will be presented to a future forum meeting.

Headteachers and governors were reminded that the current financial situation for schools with falling rolls and the current economic climate is very challenging. it remains important that headteachers and governors continue to follow the guidance and closely monitor the budgets. Financial sustainability training for governors is available. Data on birth rates moving forward may assist with budget planning, however, projections are changing rapidly. The number of primary applications has fallen by 14% for next year, this is the largest fall year on year. Individual school projections are available and can be shared.

8. Updates from Education Directorate (or their nominated officer)

The following points were raised.

- Arrangements have been confirmed around the closure of Ann Bernadt, the decision was made by Cabinet in early March.
- Strengthen the Early Years sector and the pathway into schools.
- Consultation on the possible closure of Comber Grove Primary School. Councillors can challenge the potential closure.
- Proposals on a seminar on moving forward with Keeping Education Strong, the number of school applications have reduced significantly this year.
- SEND strategic partnership board which involved schools, health, and parents.
- Good inspection results continue, 98.1% of the schools are good or better which is great result and a testament to the hard work of the headteachers in the schools.
- Establish a young person's group on SEND which will be circulated to leaders in schools.

11. Forward Plan and Dates of Future Meetings Verbal Update

13th June 2024

12. AOB

- Details of the officers and titles to be included in the minutes.
- Kate Bingham will be conducting a comprehensive review of the Schools Forum using the DfE Good Practice guide. The DfE provide an assessment tool, members will be contacted on training, papers and how individual representatives engage with their constituent groups and how effectiveness can be improved.

Annex A
SCHOOLS FORUM ATTENDANCE SHEET
14th March 2024

VOTING MEMBERS

NAME	CONSTITUENCY	PRESENT
Janice Babb	Primary School Headteacher (RC)	Yes
Susannah Bellingham	Primary School Headteacher (Com)	Yes
Vacant	Primary School Headteacher CofE	
Vacant	Primary School Headteacher (Com)	
Jane O'Brien	Primary School Governor (Com)	Yes
Vacant	Primary School Governor (VA)	
Helen Rowe	Nursery School Headteacher	Yes
Heidi Tully	Special School Headteacher	Yes
Nicola Howard	Early Years – Private/Voluntary and Independent Settings	Yes
Steve Morrison	Academy	Yes
Vacancy	Academy (Primary)	
Vacancy	Academy	
James Wilson	Academy	No
Steph Lea	Special School Academy	Yes
Yomi Adewoye	Pupil Referral Units	Yes
Catherine May	Secondary School Headteacher	Yes
Vacant	FE SEN	Awaiting nomination from LA
Pia Longman	Diocesan Boards	Yes
Betty Joseph	Trade Unions	Yes

Senior Officers in Attendance

Alasdair Smith Director, Children and Families	Yes
Anna Chiva Assistant Director for SEND	Yes
Aron Brown Senior Finance Manager	Yes
Kate Bingham Schools Finance Consultant	Yes
Nikki Tilson Senior Advisor	Yes
Richard Hunter Senior Advisor	No
Neil Gordon-Orr Strategic Manager, Education Access	Yes
Hayden Judd Divisional Accountant	Yes
Andrea Dennis Accountant	No
Eniko Nolan Departmental Finance Manager	Yes
Jenny Brennan, Family Early Help & Youth Justice	Yes
Sarah Cooper	Clerk