

SOUTHWARK COUNCIL - SCHOOLS FORUM

Date:	Thursday 16 January 2025
Location:	Southwark Council, 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2HZ
Time:	2pm

VOTING MEMBERS	Initials	ATTENDANCE
Maintained Nursery School		
Helen Rowe – Dulwich Wood Nursery Headteacher	HR	Attended
Maintained Primary School		
Susannah Bellingham – Brunswick Park Headteacher	SB	Attended
Kate Wooder – Bridges Federation Executive Headteacher	KW	Attended
Jane O'Brien – Heber Chair of Governors	JO	Attended
Janice Babb – St James the Great & St John's Catholic Federation (RC) – Co-Chair	JB	Attended
Megan Pacey – Dulwich Village CofE Chair of Governors	MP	Attended
Maintained Secondary School		
Catherine May – St Savior's & St Olave's Headteacher	CM	Attended
Maintained Special School		
Heidi Tully – Tuke Headteacher	HT	Attended
Pupil Referral Unit		
Michael Jarrett – SILS		Only just appointed so not in attendance
Academy Primary School		
Haley Foxworthy – Nexus Education Schools Trust (Assistant Director)	HF	Attended
Vacancy	N/A	N/A
Academy Secondary School		
Steve Morrison – Kingsdale Foundation School	SM	Attended
James Wilson – Bacon's College	JW	Attended
Matt Jones – Chair, Ark Globe Academy	MJ	Attended
Jessica West – Ark Walworth Academy	JWN	Attended
Felicity Corcoran – St Michael's Catholic College	FC	Apologies
Alison Harbottle – The Charter School East Dulwich	AH	Attended
Academy Special School		
Steph Lea – Spa Education Trust Executive Headteacher	SL	Attended
Non-School Representatives		
Nicola Howard – Early Years Private/Voluntary. 1 st Place Children's and Parents Centre	NH	Attended
Pia Longman – Southwark Diocesan Board of Education – Co-Chair	PL	Attended
Jane Button – 16 to 19 Year Providers. Southwark College Principal	JBN	Attended
Betty Joseph – Trade Unions	BJ	Attended
Vacant – Archdiocese of Southwark Schools'	N/A	N/A

LA OFFICERS	INITIALS	ATTENDANCE
Alasdair Smith – Director, Children and Families	AS	Attended
Aron Brown – Senior Finance Manager	AB	Attended
Eniko Nolan – Assistant Director of Finance	EN	Attended
Kate Bingham – Schools Finance Consultant	KB	Attended
Hayley Furniss – Governor Development Advisor (Clerk)	Clerk	Attended

OPTIONAL	INITIALS	ATTENDANCE
Anna Chiva – Assistant Director for SEND and Inclusions	AC	Attended
Nikki Tilson – Principal Advisor Learning and Achievement	NT	Attended
Hayden Judd – Divisional Accountant	HJ	Attended
Jenny Brennan – Assistant Director Family Early Help and Youth Justice	JBB	Attended
Lizzie Everett – Trainee in Education Team	LE	Attended

Quorum required – 40% which is 8
Members in attendance – 19

ITEM NO.	DETAILS	ACTION FOR
1	<p>WELCOME AND APOLOGIES All were welcomed to the meeting. Introductions were made around the room.</p> <p>Apologies received and accepted from FC.</p>	
2	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST None.</p>	
3	<p>SCHOOLS FORUM MEMBERSHIP UPDATE An updated Constitution document was shared prior. The Schools Forum was asked to adopt the amended section 2.5 as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An increase in the number of Secondary Academy reps in the Constitution to 6 - An increase in the number of Primary Community Maintained reps in the Constitution to 2 - An increase in the number of Primary Academy reps in the Constitution to 2 (creating one vacancy) <p>The updated Constitution as above was APPROVED by all school and non-school members.</p> <p>JWN, FC and AH were APPOINTED into the Secondary Academy vacancies. KW was APPOINTED into the new Primary Community Maintained Headteacher vacancy.</p> <p>Michael Jarrett is the new SILS Headteacher and automatically fills the Pupil Referral Unit representative vacancy. Due to the short timescale, he was unable to attend this meeting.</p>	

4	<p>APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES FROM 12 DECEMBER 2024 Minutes were AGREED as accurate. All actions were covered in the agenda.</p>	
5	<p>FEEDBACK FROM SUBGROUPS <i>High Needs</i> SL advised that she was unable to attend the 9 January sub-group meeting and there was no chair. For these reasons, it was felt that there was not enough time to provide any feedback. Therefore, there were no recommendations made.</p> <p>ACTIONS CARRIED FORWARD: High-level summary on the impact of the safety valve in relation to outcomes and attendance for students with SEND was to be shared.</p> <p>Provide an impact report on the funding management review and paying schools and providers on time.</p> <p><i>Schools Forum Governance Improvement</i> Updated action plan was shared prior. KB confirmed that no significant changes had been made since the last meeting; the actions are progressing well. There had been no sub-group meetings since the previous Schools Forum meeting.</p> <p><i>Schools Financial Support Panel</i> JB advised that, although grateful to have a pot of money to distribute, the range of requests are becoming more varied. Historically, they would be for restructuring, but requests are increasingly for exceptional legal support for a variety of reasons.</p> <p>There seems to be vexatious, preventable complaints which leave schools and senior leadership teams isolated and vulnerable. They are costly to defend and time intensive.</p> <p>Other requests have included the detangling of structural situations which have been quite substantial. A recent request from a well-regarded community school required sensitivity due to the headteacher having left, a new senior leadership team in place after joining a federation and a low Ofsted grade.</p> <p>The Schools Forum was assured that those who sit on this sub-group take a rigorous approach to ensure the school(s) receiving money have a secure financial future.</p> <p>Question was asked about whether the funding is being maximised, if there is any carried forward and what is being pushed to following years. For restructures, minimum and maximums will be given as it depends on who will be made redundant at the final stage. Over the last 18 months, funding has ranged between £45k - £80k. It tends to fall in the mid-range of these figures. The last six applications, regardless of reason, have not received the figure that was requested. It is not possible to share the carry-forward due to the above, but the money could easily be maxed out. The LA wants to be able to help schools that request financial support in the last 3 months of the financial year.</p> <p>Members asked about requests for support with legal proceedings for maintained schools with an acknowledgement that the problem will continue to grow and the difficulties this will bring if resources are not there. Advice is taken at the sub-group meetings and access to legal advisors from the LA is available. In one case, a parent had already withdrawn their child from the school and followed it up with legal proceedings for that and other schools. Continual complaints against a series of schools are rare. There is no pot of money to settle all parental complaints.</p>	HN Sub group

	<p style="text-align: right;">AS arrived 2.20pm</p> <p>Is there insurance in place at the LA to cover legal advice? No, there are in-house lawyers for SEND tribunals for example, but there is not any insurance for parental complaints, nor costs for early ill-health retirement. The Schools Forum was advised that, due to the size of the council and its schools, it may be possible to buy into a legal service, but it would be a decision made by the LA.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">MJ arrived 2.25pm</p>	
6	<p>DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT 2025-26 SETTLEMENT Report was shared prior which AB briefly read through.</p> <p>The Schools Forum noted the provisional 2025-26 DSG allocation of £421.9m before recoupment (funding that goes direct to academies & free schools, including growth, per place funding for high needs and the NNDR adjustment).</p> <p>Pupil Premium rates have not yet been received.</p> <p>Question was asked about why teachers' pay and pensions were not included in the report. These are not included as a dedicated schools grant; they are mentioned in a later paper.</p>	
7	<p>CENTRAL SCHOOLS SERVICES BLOCK AND SCHOOLS BLOCK – 2025-26 CENTRAL RETENTIONS Report was shared prior which KB read through.</p> <p>The Schools Forum noted the 2025-26 Central Schools Service Block allocation (para 10).</p> <p>In order to make the next decision, an update on the investment around attendance from the statutory changes and where the money from penalties for non-attendance goes was requested. It was confirmed that there is no revenue coming in from the penalties. They are part of the dedicated schools grant for the LA which is used to cover all services in all schools, whether maintained or academy.</p> <p>Confirmation was requested on where the money from penalties goes. The new regulations allow freer use of the money, but it is usually to help fund things like uniform if a pupil goes to a new school. A report on new data from last term is being drafted to review the impact of the changing duties. This can include what the money is spent on. It must go towards support for those children.</p> <p>Question was asked if the money will go back into supporting the families. The amounts are not huge. The LA administers penalties so there is a requirement to review how much it takes do this. This is covered in the additional duties.</p> <p>If it is being used for that, whether it's being used twice was asked. As you'll see in the paper under item 11, £0.5m has been invested in the new team to increase capacity to deal with the increased penalty notices. It's more about supporting the prosecution process and the impact of the new penalty framework. Last term, the number of penalties was the same as a whole year previously so it is increasing significantly.</p> <p>AS added that the statutory duties and where they may be funded from were unknown when the decision was made over a year ago to invest. More on accountability is included in the paper. The funding duties in relation to DSG are now clearer.</p>	

	<p>It was queried whether more could be allocated as a result of the increase in penalties.</p> <p>Potentially but it relies on people paying the penalties. It may be being received in small amounts weekly.</p> <p>The other aspect is due diligence and its effectiveness in allocating this resource. Identifying what success would look like and desired outcomes from the investment will enable a more informed decision on this next year.</p> <p>This was noted. Success may look quite different in primary and secondary, and special settings is completely different. It is worth exploring but at the moment, there is a lack of choice.</p> <p>All school and non-school members APPROVED the final proposed budget for the total contribution to ongoing responsibilities for all schools in Table 1 (paragraph 12) – an increase of £267k from £910k agreed in Dec 24 to £1.177m</p> <p>The Schools Forum noted the de-delegated services projected budgets individually detailed in Table 2 (paragraph 15) for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) School Improvement (primary schools only) (b) Behaviour support services – Summerhouse (primary schools only) (c) Free school meals eligibility (primary schools only) (d) Contingency (e) Staff costs supply cover (maternity scheme) (f) Staff costs supply cover (trade union) <p>The Schools Forum noted the education functions projected budgets for maintained schools from the Schools Block detailed in Table 3 (para 20).</p> <p>Due to there being no members in the correct categories present at the last meeting; the following was carried forward to this meeting: Buying into the following de-delegated services at the rates listed in para 16 and para 17:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Contingency - The Maintained Special School (HT) member DID NOT AGREE (b) Staff costs supply cover (Maternity Scheme) - The Maintained Special School (HT) member DID NOT AGREE (c) Contingency - The Maintained Nursery (HR) member AGREED (d) Staff costs supply cover (Maternity Scheme) - The Maintained Nursery School (HR) DID NOT AGREE 	
8	<p>2025-26 SCHOOLS FUNDING FORMULA</p> <p>Report with appendix of proposed rates was shared prior, AB briefly read through.</p> <p>A request to understand the value for money for low prior attainment funding was made and how members go about this process for each of these items.</p> <p>This is the national funding formula; they are set by the DfE, and schools are funded by them. Every LA has maintained slight variations on the National Funding Formula. Wherever things are at the time, there is a mandated demand to move towards it. In terms of choice, there is very little – all rates are at the maximum. It ends up in one budget for each school which is based on pupils, EAL funding for example.</p> <p>Comment was made that, looking at the table in the report, there is an increase in every area.</p> <p>That's the distance from the funding formula; it is slightly above, and the maximum distance can be 2.5%.</p>	

	<p>Given that the distance could be 0%, whether a strategic change to allocations in certain areas could be made was questioned.</p> <p>Not much additional funding can be put in to achieve that 2.5%. There is no SEND element that money could be into. These were the priorities that were agreed in December. The MFG (Minimum Funding Guarantee) rate was achieved, and the rest was set aside to improve all rates to the maximum. This has been done evenly following that principle.</p> <p>Another member clarified that, in the above discussion, the implication was that if low prior attainers aren't doing well, the funding should be removed as it's ineffective, but this is not possible as each school will perform differently and no more could be put into any other areas. The resolution would be to look at individual schools with low attainment.</p> <p>Member asked about the limit on primary and secondary funding.</p> <p>Each year, the LA must move towards the 2.5%. Once at those rates, they cannot be changed. Other boroughs face issues in receiving an allocation that cannot be given to schools directly when too much is received. If more is received next year, Southwark could be in the same situation which would need to be dealt with if it came to that.</p> <p>Clarification was requested on how eligibility for low prior attainment funding was determined.</p> <p>GLD (Greater Level of Development) is used for the primary phase, but for secondary, it's the KS2 results. Y9 data was used for schools that had it, but if not, the LA average was used.</p> <p>All school and non-school members CONFIRMED its earlier agreement to the priorities used in the operation of the 2025-26 funding formula for mainstream schools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To set the minimum funding guarantee (MFG) at the maximum level allowed. • Ensure formula rates that are in the National Funding Formula (NFF) matching zone do not fall below that zone. • Set FSM formula rate to £3.00 to match Mayor of London's KS2 funding rate • Set lump-sum formula rate to the maximum • To apply any remaining resources to those formula factor rates furthest below NFF rates <p>All school and non-school members RECOMMENDED the proposals as set out in the paper for formal approval. This does not make any changes to funds received.</p> <p>Legal challenge was raised again at this point in reference to the increase in the notional SEN funding which could create parental complaints.</p> <p>The forum was reminded that maintained schools have the benefit of legal support from the LA.</p>	
9	<p>HIGH NEEDS BLOCK – 2025-26 ALLOCATION</p> <p>Report was shared prior which AB briefly read through. The forum was requested to acknowledge the level of work that has put into allocating the funding and meeting the safety valve criteria.</p> <p>Question was asked about the intention of reopening or restoring a second site given that funding allocated for PRUs are per pupil.</p> <p>The building is a space issue, but it's not proposed to reduce the commissioned numbers.</p>	

	<p>Member raised concern that the number of spaces will remain the same. A decision has been made about consolidating the site and it was noted that when this will be cannot be ascertained and will be shared by SILS, AS also offered to circulate once available. Alternative provision work is being done, looking at how the two sites can be resourced. There is a requirement to clarify delivery outcomes and there needs to be transparency with this.</p> <p>It was understood that having a split site is complex and expensive but, in order to make a decision on rates of funding allocation next year, knowing if the two sites are required and if the expectation has changed must be known. AS advised that he was unable to share the plans at this point. If the decision was made to remain one site, time would be needed to determine costs for two sites before reaching that stage. The recommendation is to proceed this year and then determine the next stage.</p> <p>As addressed under item 5, query was raised about the safety valve update requested from the High Needs Subgroup at the previous meeting. The member who raised this was not present at the time it was addressed having arrived late.</p> <p>Member asked if the open conversation about the increase in funding for special schools in the banding review is to continue. It was confirmed that there is a need to be receptive to issues as they arise.</p> <p>Non-member clarified that the business of the Schools Forum is predominantly in relation to finances which relates to outcomes. Members responded that data on outcomes is required to make informed decisions, and not everything will be based on finances.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Special School’s funding rate should be set at the levels set out in Table 2 (paragraph 16). All school and non-school members AGREED, apart from the Maintained Special School member who DID NOT AGREE. 2. Top-up rate for SILS is maintained at the same level for 2025-26 as set out in paragraph 17. All school and non-school members AGREED 3. Top-up for Resource Base and SEN Unit provision is set at the levels set out in Table 3. All school and non-school members AGREED 4. Top-up rates for EHCP banded pupil maintained at the levels set out in Table 4. All school and non-school members AGREED 5. Top-up rates for Hospital Schools are set at the levels set out in Table 5. All school and non-school members AGREED 6. To maintain the SENDIF budget contribution of £100k from the High Needs budgets. All school and non-school members AGREED 7. Central budgets are set at the levels set out in Table 6. All school and non-school members AGREED 	
10	<p>EARLY YEARS BLOCK – 2025-26 ALLOCATION, INCLUDING CENTRAL RETENTION Report was shared prior which AB briefly read through.</p> <p>i) All school and non-school members APPROVED the funding rates for Early Year providers of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3- and 4-year-olds base rate of £6.70 per hour (paragraph 18) • 2-year-old (deprived households) base rate of £10.20 per hour (paragraph 18) 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2-year-old (working households) base rate of £10.20 per hour (paragraph 18) • Under 2's base rate of £14.38 per hour (paragraph 18) • Deprivation rates for all age groups as set out in paragraph 21 • Disability Access Funding rate for all age groups of £2,000 per year (paragraphs 14 to 17) • Early Years Pupil Premium rate for all age groups of £1.00 per hour. (paragraph 25) • 3- and 4-year-old rate to distribute the teacher pay and pension increase funding is raised to £0.68 per hour (paragraph 24). <p>ii) All school and non-school members APPROVED that the central retentions budget should be set at £1,115k as per paragraphs 31 to 36.</p> <p>iii) All school and non-school members APPROVED the increase of the SENDIF budget to £1,150,000 as per paragraphs 26 to 30.</p>	
11	<p>SCHOOLS FORUM COMMISSIONED REPORTS</p> <p>Report was shared prior, KB and JBB gave an overview. The report included an update on the increase in the Central Schools Service Block costs relating to EWO (Education Welfare Officer) services as per action from previous meeting. The report showed that welfare support comes from cross-family early help, not from just one source.</p> <p>There are 7K persistently absent children in the borough so a team of three could not deal with that effectively. Increasing capacity has been the purpose of the investment, enabling support for vulnerable children who do attend school and those who do not attend school. The frequency of meetings depends on data, so this is still a work in progress.</p> <p><i>It was suggested that, in reporting back, it may be worth focusing on preventative measures to stop more children joining the list of persistently absent. It would be beneficial to know the starting point to be able to track impact.</i></p> <p><i>Member commented that schools deal with 90% plus of absenteeism, and it would be useful to know where the 7k children sit. Areas of focus should be on interaction between teams to avoid duplication, data tracking and understanding how family early help works with the EIT (Education Inclusion Team).</i></p> <p>The EIT would allow the family work to be done by early years. EIT would do the consultation, facilitation of meetings and prosecution routes.</p> <p><i>Member added that understanding the point at which the EIT take over would be beneficial.</i></p> <p><i>Receiving an analysis of data showing where schools have taken up the offer was requested. It was noted that schools spend money on attendance so spending money twice to get the same outcome should be avoided. It should be streamlined to ensure the best possible use of money.</i></p> <p>Some schools won't use penalties or exclusions, so it depends on the school. Data could be separated to show which are engaging with the offerings. Emphasis placed on phases as they will differ. Building relationships with parents is the most effective way to tackle non-attendance.</p>	

	The Schools Forum noted the summary of the Education Welfare funding, resources and services provided in the report.	
12	<p>UPDATES FROM DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES</p> <p>AS provided a verbal update on this item.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Talking to three primary schools around possible closures. - Reported to cabinet in February regarding PAN (published admission number) reductions reflecting reducing rolls. - Work is being done with senior council leadership and government around raising local issues and the SEND system. - Government's Child Social Care Reform bill was set before Christmas which included wellbeing but no mention of mental health. Funding challenges presented to council on the increase in duties. - Fair Funding review is a potential concern as the borough currently receives a good portion. <p>NT mentioned currently working with Isos Partnership (who deliver improvements in public services) which has primary maintained heads within the group. There are more spaces available, so anyone interested was welcomed to join.</p> <p>MJ advised that he had met with Isos recently and would be advising of plans to engage with this work going forward.</p>	
13	<p>FORWARD PLAN</p> <p>Forward plan was shared prior. The area of focus for the next meeting will be High Needs Banding Review. The forum was asked if anyone wished to add any items for consideration.</p> <p>It was confirmed that there will be an item on Summerhouse behaviour support. There had previously been an increase in funding and when this was agreed, it was undertaken that a report would come back to Schools Forum.</p>	
14	<p>DATE AND DRAFT AGENDA FOR NEXT MEETING</p> <p>Thursday 20 March 2025, 2pm at 48 Union Street.</p>	
15	<p>ANY OTHER BUSINESS</p> <p>None.</p>	

Item	Action	For
5	<p>ACTON CARRIED FORWARD:</p> <p>High-level summary on the impact of the safety valve in relation to outcomes and attendance for students with SEND was to be shared for next meeting.</p> <p>Report on the impact the funding management review and paying schools and providers on time has had at the next meeting.</p>	High Needs Subgroup

Item	Decision Made
3	<p>The updated Constitution as detailed in the minutes was APPROVED by all school and non-school members.</p> <p>JWN, FC and AH were APPOINTED into the Secondary Academy vacancies.</p>

	KW was APPOINTED into the new Primary Community Maintained Headteacher vacancy.
7	All school and non-school members APPROVED the final proposed budget for the total contribution to ongoing responsibilities for all schools in Table 1 (paragraph 12) – an increase of £267k from £910k agreed in Dec 24 to £1.177m
7	Buying into the following de-delegated services at the rates listed in para 16 and para 17: (a) Contingency - The Maintained Special School (HT) member DID NOT AGREE (b) Staff costs supply cover (Maternity Scheme) - The Maintained Special School (HT) member DID NOT AGREE (c) Contingency - The Maintained Nursery (HR) member AGREED (d) Staff costs supply cover (Maternity Scheme) - The Maintained Nursery School (HR) DID NOT AGREE
8	All school and non-school members CONFIRMED the earlier agreement to the priorities used in the operation of the 2025-26 funding formula for mainstream schools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To set the minimum funding guarantee (MFG) at the maximum level allowed. • Ensure formula rates that are in the National Funding Formula (NFF) matching zone do not fall below that zone. • Set FSM formula rate to £3.00 to match Mayor of London’s KS2 funding rate • Set lump-sum formula rate to the maximum • To apply any remaining resources to those formula factor rates furthest below NFF rates <p>All school and non-school members RECOMMENDED the proposals as set out in the paper for formal approval. This does not make any changes to funds received.</p>
9	HIGH NEEDS BLOCK – 2025-26 ALLOCATION 1. Special School’s funding rate should be set at the levels set out in Table 2 (paragraph 16). All school and non-school members AGREED , apart from the Maintained Special School member who DID NOT AGREE . 2. Top-up rate for SILS is maintained at the same level for 2025-26 as set out in paragraph 17. All school and non-school members AGREED 3. Top-up for Resource Base and SEN Unit provision is set at the levels set out in Table 3. All school and non-school members AGREED 4. Top-up rates for EHCP banded pupil maintained at the levels set out in Table 4. All school and non-school members AGREED 5. Top-up rates for Hospital Schools are set at the levels set out in Table 5. All school and non-school members AGREED 6. To maintain the SENDIF budget contribution of £100k from the High Needs budgets. All school and non-school members AGREED 7. Central budgets are set at the levels set out in Table 6. All school and non-school members AGREED
10	i) All school and non-school members APPROVED the funding rates for Early Year providers as detailed in the minutes. ii) All school and non-school members APPROVED that the central retentions budget should be set at £1,115k as per paragraphs 31 to 36. iii) All school and non-school members APPROVED the increase of the SENDIF budget to £1,150,000 as per paragraphs 26 to 30.