

EAST SUSSEX Schools' Forum

Minutes of a meeting of the Schools' Forum held remotely with Microsoft Teams on 14 November 2025

MEMBERS

Primary

Richard Blakeley (Parkside Primary)

Laura Cooper (St John's CE School)

Primary Governors

Robert French (Weald Federation)

Secondary

Emily Winslade (Priory School)

Caroline Barlow (Heathfield Community College)

Secondary Governor

Allan Pinner (Uckfield College)

Academies

James Freestone (King Offa Primary Academy)

Gavin Bailey (Swale Academy Trust)

Sam Cornelius (University of Brighton Academies Trust)

Zoe James (MARK Education Trust)-Chair

Sally Hill (Aquinas Trust)

Special Academy

Jonty Clarke (Beckmead Trust)

Pupil Referral Unit

Neil Miller (LSEAT)

Non School Members

Justin Wynne (Trade Union representative)

Hannah Caldwell (Post 16 East Sussex College Group)

ESCC representatives

Cllr Bob Standley (Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability)

Carolyn Fair (Director of children services)

Elizabeth Funge Assistant Director Education

Sarah Speedie (H of Ed SEND & Safeguarding)

Honor Green (Head of Finance for Children's Services & Schools)

Sarah Rice (Finance Manager – Schools)

Edward Beale (Finance Manager – Education and Schools)

Kirsten Coe (Finance Manager – Reporting and Systems)

Sarah Allen (Clerk)

1 Welcome and Apologies (Note)

1.1 It was confirmed the meeting was quorate, recognising the apologies below.

Apologies have been received from:

James Freestone

Sam Cornelius

Laura Cooper

2 Agenda Item 2: Minutes Of Previous Meeting 12 September 2025(Approval)

- 2.1 The minutes for the meeting held were agreed as a true record and will be signed by the Chair.

3. Agenda Item 3: Matters Arising and Declaration of Interests (Discussion)

- 3.1 Matters arising - none
3.2 Declaration of interest -none

4. Agenda Item 4: High needs block -Nathan (Approval)

This item was in relation to High Needs Funding which included an overview of the LA's current financial position and a request for an inter block transfer from the Schools Block into the High Needs Block.

4.1 Recommendations:

Schools' Forum were recommended to agree an interblock transfer for 2026-27 and to confirm the amount of the transfer.

4.2 Comments:

Questions were raised asking whether the proposal would address the size of the deficit, through the interblock transfer, or whether the deficit would still remain.

It was also asked whether the purpose of the interblock transfer was primarily because the DfE expects the Local Authority to consider it first in order to help mitigate the level of the deficit. It was clarified that the proposal would not fully address the deficit, and that the interblock transfer should be considered by the local authority in order to help reduce the deficit as much as possible.

Concerns were expressed that the current proposals will exacerbate the challenges faced by schools and feel punitive.

Forum members highlighted that schools are being asked to do more for students and families with reduced resources and there is a strong consensus among maintained secondary schools that the move was detrimental.

Acknowledging the challenges, it was emphasised that proactive local decision making is essential to maintain control. Although the situation is difficult, the information from the forthcoming white paper is limited and decisions had to be made now to manage the county's position effectively.

Forum members raised concerns about the impact of funding reductions on maintained and academy mainstream schools and how reducing school budgets could negatively impact efforts to increase mainstream places and alleviate pressure from private providers.

--It was emphasised that the local authority has been investing in schools over the years, including increasing top up values for mainstream schools, allocating £5 million to inclusion

projects, and supporting schools through the change programme. It was also noted that there was ongoing investment in specialist facilities and mainstream schools to help mitigate pressures.

It was noted that local authorities are facing significant deficits across the country and some opposition from schools regarding interblock transfers. They also highlighted concerns regarding upcoming teacher pay increases without extra funding.

It was noted that in many local authorities, an interblock transfer is made every year and for higher amounts than being proposed in East Sussex. Reducing the deficit required system-wide change with schools as active partners in managing a challenging, national environment.

Forum members raised concerns about high costs of independent non maintained schools and stressed the need for short and medium term planning to invest in state schools and reduce tribunal cases.

It was noted that East Sussex had kept costs for independent special schools lower than many authorities and continued to invest in specialist facilities.

The challenge of tribunal cases was also highlighted and it was stressed that addressing the issue required partnership with mainstream and special schools to provide alternatives and support the local authority in defending tribunals.

A comment was made about special school funding in East Sussex. Concerns were also raised about variable quality of independent provided.

Members were requested to vote on 2 interblock transfer proposals. Results as below:

	No. of 'Yes'	No. of 'No'	No. of Abstentions
£1.963m Inter Block Transfer	2	8	1
£1m Inter Block Transfer	5	6	0

5. Agenda Item 5 – Funding Factors – Exceptional Circumstances (Information Only)

This item was in relation to the LA highlighting its intention to ask for a Disapplication request so that some funding could be provided for Exceptional Premises (rents) costs for three small schools.

5.1 Recommendation:

Schools' Forum were asked to note the LA's intention to submit a request to use an 'Exceptional Circumstances' Funding factor for 2026/27.

5.2 Comments:

No Comments / objections to the LA submitting a request.

AOB
No AOB

Meeting concluded at 09:58
Next Meeting -to be held Friday 16th January 2026