

EAST SUSSEX SCHOOLS' FORUM

Minutes of a meeting of the Schools' Forum held remotely with Microsoft Teams on 16 January 2026

MEMBERS

Primary

Richard Blakeley (Cross In Hand CEP School)

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 Freeston (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) -Guy Walsh

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 (Head of Ed SEND & Safeguarding)

Ed Beale (Finance Manager -Education & Schools)

Sarah Rice (Finance Manager-Schools)

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

Kristen Coe (Finance Manager - Reporting and Systems)

Jane Spice (Early Years Sufficiency and Organisation Manager)

Gary Langford -(Senior Manager: School Organisation and Admissions)

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:
Laura Cooper

Neil Miller - Guy Walsh attended instead.
Cllr Standley

2 Agenda Item 2: Minutes Of Previous Meeting 14 November 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: DSG 26/27 Budget - Information

Ed Beale led on this paper.

This was in relation to the LA's 26/27 DSG allocations that are funded by the DfE.

4.1 Recommendations:

Schools Forum were asked to note the DSG allocations for the Schools, Central School Services, High Needs and Early Years Blocks.

4.2 Comments:

Members noted that post-16 top-up funding allocations had not increased and asked whether current funding levels are sufficient to meet demand.

It was requested when top-up funding proposals would be brought to Schools Forum, noting that there is currently no additional funding allocated.

Members were advised that top-up funding will be reviewed during the year, with further discussions to take place.

Members were informed that a meeting has been arranged with High Needs Block working group to discuss funding pressures and future arrangements.

It was confirmed that place funding will be recouped where applicable.

A question was asked as to why there was a reduction in both pre-16 and post-16 HNB funding for Special Schools.

It was noted that this reduction is due to the maintained school converting to academy status.

5. Agenda Item 5: Growth Fund - Gary Langford (Approval Required)

Gary Langford led on this paper. Gary outlined the proposals and requested Schools Forum approval for funding to be used for a Growth Fund.

5.1 Recommendation:

Schools Forum were asked to approve an allocation of £958,100 for the 2026/27 Growth Fund.

5.2 Comments

Members asked whether targeted support could be put in place to enable the Growth Fund to be allocated more quickly.

Members sought clarification and noted that Growth Fund allocations are not permitted to be rolled forward into the 2026/27 financial year.

Comments were made that there is limited flexibility within the current Growth and Falling Rolls Funding arrangements.

Confirmation was sought questioning if any unspent Growth Fund will be returned to schools and were advised that this would be redistributed to all schools.

Members were requested to vote on Growth Fund. Results as below:

| Number voting 'Yes' | Number voting 'No' | Number of abstentions |
|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| 12 | 0 | 0 |

6 Agenda Item 6: Central School Services Block - (Approval Required)

Ed Beale led on this paper. This was in relation to the funding of On-going responsibilities and the Historic Commitments which is funding that LA's are given, from the DfE, for specific areas of spend.

6.1 Recommendation:

Schools Forum were asked to note and approve the proposals for the Central School Services Block for 2026/27.

6.2 Comments:

Members queried the inclusion of funding for non-SEND pupils. It was noted that no spend had occurred in this area and so there was flexibility to move the funds to alternative eligible areas.

It was asked whether there were alternatives to the current use of 'Historic Commitments' funding, including whether it could be used to offset pressures elsewhere and potentially moved to another block.

It was discussed that the position of the DSG is looked at in its entirety, commenting that expectations are clear that DSG pressures are considered as one funding block.

Members referred to Table 2 (Admissions and Functions and Exclusions) and asked what factors are driving the costs in this area, noting that it is influenced by a combination of funding pressures.

Members were requested to vote on Central School Services Block. Results as below:

| Number voting 'Yes' | Number voting 'No' | Number of abstentions |
|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| 13 | 0 | 0 |

7 Agenda Item 7 - DSG Budget 2026/27 - Early Years (Approval Required)

Jane Spice led on this paper. There have been various additions / changes made to the Early Years DSG budget, for 2026/27, by the DfE.

7.1 Recommendation:

Schools Forum were asked to note the changes to the early years' education entitlements due to the government's early years funding reforms, which came into full effect from September 2025 and approve the Early Years DSG Budget from April 2026.

7.2 Comments

No Comments

Members were requested to vote on - DSG Budget 2026/27. Results as below:

| Number voting 'Yes' | Number voting 'No' | Number of abstentions |
|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| 13 | 0 | 0 |

8 Agenda Item 8 - Follow up to previous Schools Forum meeting (Discussion)

Elizabeth Funge and Sarah Speedie led on this item. This was a follow up to the previous Schools Forum meeting and the letter sent to Headteachers regarding the inter block transfer request.

8.1 Comments:

Members sought reassurance that forthcoming White Papers would result in additional funding for schools.

Members queried the difference between *new places* and *designation*, noting that current designation funding is focused on facilities.

It was questioned how emerging needs are being supported within the current arrangements.

Members asked whether there is a cap on capital funding. It was noted that a set annual capital allocation is received from the DfE (reference year 2025/26) and commented that developing a programme is challenging due to uncertainty over future funding levels.

It was discussed schools' appetite to progress capital projects and commented that there is a need to move forward rather than wait for further clarity.

It was queried whether capital funding is open to post-16 settings and were advised that it is.

Comments were made that specialist facilities within mainstream schools can be more beneficial for budgets.

Members noted that this option should be promoted further with schools.

Members thanked the Local Authority for actions taken following the previous meeting and expressed willingness to work collaboratively to put plans in place.

AOB

It was highlighted that there are some vacancies, on Schools Forum, in the Primary Phase. This is for both Primary Schools and governor representation. Adverts will be sent out shortly.

ACTION: Ed to circulate a copy of the advert for onward distribution.

Meeting concluded at 09:24

Next Meeting -to be held Friday 15 May 2026