

EAST SUSSEX SCHOOLS' FORUM

Minutes of a meeting of the Schools' Forum held remotely with Microsoft Teams on 10 January 2025

MEMBERS

Primary

Richard Blakeley (Parkside Primary)
Laura Cooper (St John's CE School)
Vicky Anderson (Catsfeld CEP School)

Primary Governors

Peter Hughes (South Malling Primary School)

Secondary

Emily Winslade (Priory School)
Helen Key (Chailey School)

Secondary Governor

Monica Whitehead (Claverham Community College)

Special School

Vacancy

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

Kirsty Prawanna (Glyne Gap)

Pupil Referral Unit

Neil Miller (LSEAT)

Non School Members

Phil Clarke (Trade Union representative)
Joanna Sanchez (Diocese of Arundel and Brighton)
Jon Gilbert (Diocese of Chichester)
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
Nathan Caine (H of Ed SEND & Safeguarding)
Honor Green (Head of Finance for Children's Services & Schools)

Sarah Rice (Finance Manager - Schools Accountant)
Edward Beale (Finance Manager - Education and Schools)
Kirsten Coe (Funding 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.

Neil Miller- (Guy Walsh attended as a substitute)
James Freeston
Peter Hughes

2 Agenda Item 2: Minutes Of Previous Meeting 15 November 2024 (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: Growth Fund / Falling Rolls Fund -Gary Langford (Approval)

4.1 Recommendations:

The Schools Forum was asked to approve an allocation of £868,100 for the 2025/26 Growth Fund.

Schools' Forum was updated on spend in the 2024/25 financial year and to seek approval for funding in the 2025/26 financial year.

4.2 Comments:

There were no comments.

Members were requested to vote and approve Growth Fund/Falling Rolls Fund. Results as below:

Number voting 'Yes'	Number voting 'No'	Number of abstentions
10	0	0

5. Agenda Item 5 - DSG Budget 2025/26 - Edward Beale (Information Only)

5.1 Recommendation:

Schools' Forum were asked to note the DSG allocation for schools, Central School Services, High Needs and Early Years Blocks

This was to provide information on the 2025/26 DSG allocations that have been allocated, to the LA, from the DfE.

5.2 Comments:

It was questioned whether the East Sussex Academy Trust funding would be taken from the High Needs Block funding for the Alternative Provision.

Action: Ed will send out a confirmation email, to the AP representative, regarding the figures stated in the paper confirming funding arrangements for them.

There were queries regarding the allocation of £13.3 million for SEN support and £3.3 million for education out of school, as stated in the document. Members asked what these figures comprise of. It was clarified that the amount relates to services provided to local schools or to direct provision for children with SEND who are unable to attend school.

A question was raised about why the post-16 commissioned places top-up funding shows no change for 2025/26, taking into consideration that rates are expected to increase next year. It was clarified that the current year's budget is projected to be underspent meaning the increase can be accommodated within the budget that has already been allocated.

Members also enquired whether the £2 billion increase in funding for schools will have an impact. Although increases are expected, we are working on planning and forecasting. School-level budgets are expected to be circulated in January and February, once they have been approved by the Department for Education (DfE).

6. Agenda Item 6 - DSG Central School Services Block 25/26- Edward Beale (Approval)

6.1 Recommendation

Schools Forum are asked to note and approve the proposals for the Central School Services Block for 2025/26

This is 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.

6.2 Comments

There was a question regarding the decision to retain the historic commitments funding to offset High Needs block pressures in 2025/26, as this information hadn't been provided at the time of the discussion around de-delegation. It was noted that the final DSG figures hadn't been released by the date of the forum at which the decision was made.

A question was raised asking for clarification on what the budget was for in relation to 'Places in independent schools for non-SEND pupils'.

Action: Ed will confirm, via email, to GW

It was mentioned that it has been challenging to explain to headteachers why certain decisions were made at the Schools' Forum. This comment was acknowledged, and it was reiterated that the LA had circulated a communication to all schools to explain the decisions made at the forum.

Members were requested to vote and approve DSG Central School Service Block 25/26. Results as below:

Number voting 'Yes'	Number voting 'No'	Number of abstentions
8	2	2

7. Agenda Item 7 - DSG Budget 2025/26 - Early Years - Jane Spice (Approval)

7.1 Recommendation:

Schools Forum is asked to note the changes to the early years education entitlements as a result of the government's early years funding reforms, which will take effect in stages from April 2025 to September 2025 and approve the Early Years DSG Budget.

There have been various additions / changes made to the Early Years DSG budget, for 2025/26, by the DfE and so a paper is being presented here.

7.2 Comments

A question was raised as to why East Sussex's funding rate is below the national average. The funding formula, which includes the area cost assessment, results in East Sussex not doing so well in this assessment.

It was asked if the funding provided for the holiday period comes from the funding stated. It was clarified that the funding covers 38 weeks of the year. For full-day care provision, the funding is stretched to cover the holiday periods.

Members were requested to vote and approve DSG Budget 2025/26-Early years.

Number voting 'Yes'	Number voting 'No'	Number of abstentions
11	0	0

8. Agenda Item 8 - High Needs (EHCP) Top Ups 2025/26- Nathan Caine (Approval)

8.1 Recommendations:

That Schools' Forum agrees the proposed uplifts to mainstream school, special school and FE College High Needs Top-Ups.

This is in relation to uplifting Top Up rates for Mainstream Schools, Special Schools and FE Colleges for 2025/26.

8.2 Comments

A question was raised to for paragraph 2.9 regarding whether there is any guidance for schools on the level of staffing required, depending on the special educational needs of pupils.

It was clarified that:

Mainstream schools: The matrix addresses the level of provision needed.

Special schools: The figures calculated took into account the broad level of staff-pupil ratios needed for different levels of need.

There is an expectation to establish how special schools will support the mainstream offer. We aim to work collaboratively with both special and mainstream schools to provide broader support.

There were questions raised regarding paragraph 2.9 about the plans for developing systems for schools that require exceptional funding which schools currently request from the local authority. In line with recommendations from Isos, we will be drawing up proposals for a peer-led system to look at these which will aim to establish transparency and equity across all schools.

It was enquired whether the top-up for special facilities attached to mainstream school impact the budgets that have been presented. More detailed work is needed and this will be brought to the High Needs working group for further consideration.

The top-up for special schools will be implemented in April 2025. Both mainstream and special schools will be included within the same financial year.

Concerns were raised regarding the health costs schools are being asked to meet and why they are being drawn from the education budget. The cost of equipment has increased. Discussions with health colleagues are ongoing and this issue has been raised.

Members were requested to vote Mainstream Top Up.

Number voting 'Yes'	Number voting 'No'	Number of abstentions
11	0	0

Members were requested to vote Special School Top Up

Number voting 'Yes'	Number voting 'No'	Number of abstentions
9	0	2

Members were requested to vote FE Colleges Top Up

Number voting 'Yes'	Number voting 'No'	Number of abstentions
10	0	1

AOB

Nathan Caine raised a request for members to join the High Needs working group. Members of the Schools' Forum should contact Nathan if they would like to be a part of this working group.

Meeting concluded at 09:34
Next Meeting -to be held Friday 11th July