

BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL
SCHOOLS FORUM

Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 June 2025 at 10.00 am

Present: Geoff Cherrill (Maintained Special) – Chairman
Patrick Earnshaw (Academies - Secondary) – Vice-Chairman
Kate Carter, TEACH Academies Trust, Academies – Primary
Chris Jackson, Avonwood Primary, Academies - Primary
Chris Moody, CFO - Delta Education Trust, Academies – Primary
Heather Spring, Twynham Primary, Academies – Primary
Mark Avoth, Bourne Academy, Academies - Secondary
Michelle Dyer, Avonbourne Academies, Academies - Secondary
Matthew Woodville, Twynham School, Academies - Secondary
Sian Phillips – Poole High School, Academies - Secondary
Ben Doyle, Principal - St Peter's School, All Through Academies
Russell Arnold, The Quay School - Headteacher, Alternative Provision Academy
Phillip Gavin, Christchurch Learning Centre - Headteacher, Mainstream PRU
Linda Duly, Cuddles Day Nursery, Early Years
Richard Wharton, C of E Diocese Representative

Also in attendance: Cllr R Burton, Portfolio Holder for Children's and Young People
Cllr Carr-Brown, Chair, Children's Services O&S Committee

Officers in attendance: Cathi Hadley, Corporate Director Children's Services
Chris Lee, Interim Head of School Inclusion
Lisa Linscott, Director of Education and Skills
Tanya Smith, Head of School Planning and Admissions
Nicola Webb, Assistant Chief Finance Officer

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Vicky Peters, Early Years representative.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made on this occasion.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 13 January were approved as a correct record.

4. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Outturn 2024-25

The Assistant Chief Finance Officer presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'A' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The report considered the end of year position for the DSG budget 2024-25. The budget was set with a funding gap of £28m, a similar level compared with the previous year, with the expectation that the innovation fund and other initiatives would start to have impact in reducing the demand for education health and care plans (EHCPs). This was alongside the creation of new SEND places in mainstream schools through capital investment to limit the use of higher cost independent provision.

It was noted that the three blocks—early years, central school services, and school block—were broadly balanced. However, the high needs block showed a significant funding gap, with the outturn exceeding previous forecasts. The outturn was a net in-year funding gap approaching £50m. This is £5m more than indicated at quarter three.

More children were remaining in mainstream schools but the growth in demand for EHCPs overall has more than offset any potential savings. The demand has continued to grow for independent school places, alternative provision, and bespoke arrangements for those unable to attend any school setting. The trajectory of the accumulated deficit has therefore continued a significant upward path from £65.5m for March 2024, to £113.3m for March 2025.

It was noted that national trends indicated that deficits were growing and nearly doubling annually. The statutory override for deficits had been extended to March 2028. Government support was anticipated in the local government provisional finance settlement later in the year.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

5. High Needs Update

The Assistant Chief Finance Officer and the Head of School Planning and Admissions presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'B' to these Minutes in the Minute Book. The Chair advised that he had received a number of questions on this prior

The report provided a summary of the high needs budget for 2025-26 and included details of new activities to support pupils with additional needs in mainstream schools – the inclusion fund and outreach plus.

The Forum was advised that the inclusion fund was funded by surplus school block funding as agreed by Schools Forum in January 2025. The report set out the how the fund would be allocated in 2025-26 following further consultation with headteachers.

Outreach Plus was a new service to support mainstream schools establish resourced provision with the aim of increasing specialist capacity for children with autism spectrum condition and social, emotional and mental health needs. Once fully implemented these two activities should deliver savings to the high needs budget through future cost avoidance.

A question was raised regarding the distinctions between the £550,000 allocated for specialist outreach and the £380,000 for training and support,

It was clarified that:

- The **£550,000** covered the extension of existing outreach support from specialist SEND services into mainstream schools.
- The **£380,000** was allocated for training and development, including trauma-informed schools training and mental health first aid training.

These elements were part of the actions referenced in previous minutes and would be clarified with Schools Forum representatives to ensure appropriate coverage. The elements which would be affected by any reduction in funding would be considered moving forward. It was also noted that outreach plus was funded separately.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and that it be noted that discussions with Forum members regarding the finer details of the training funding would begin shortly.

6. Schools Forum - Exceptional Circumstances Funding for 2025/26

The SEND and Inclusion consultant presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'C' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The report provides an update on:

- The Exceptional Circumstances Funding for 2025/26.
- The resolution of previously unpaid funding from Autumn 2023 to Spring 2025.

A revised criteria and funding model was now in place for 2025-26 that will be reviewed after 2 months to determine future frequency of calculation moving forwards. Previously unpaid funding amounts had now been paid to all eligible schools.

The Chair read out a query received prior to the meeting for the benefit of all members. Concerns were raised that the payments recorded as having been made were, in fact, inaccurate. She highlighted that the agreed policy—confirmed in April 2023 and again in November 2023—had not been followed. This policy included a 3% threshold, a payment of £650 per year (pro-rated by term), and the inclusion of EHCPs that were outside the 20-week statutory window. It was also noted that delays in EHCP processing had unfairly impacted census data, and that these late plans were supposed to be included in the funding calculations.

This oversight was acknowledged, and it was confirmed that the local authority would honour the previously agreed policy. The data team had been tasked with recalculating the payments to include the delayed EHCPs, and the Forum was assured that this work would be completed by the end of the academic year, with additional payments issued by the end of July 2025. Schools would receive supplementary payments to reflect the correct amounts. The complexity of the situation was acknowledged and the officers response to this issue was appreciated and this would be reported to head teachers.

The new funding formula that would take effect from April 2025, covering the 2025–26 financial year was outlined. The first set of data for this model

would be available at the end of July 2025, and eligible schools would be informed and paid accordingly. The new model would no longer include EHCPs outside the 20-week window. A review would be conducted after the first year of implementation.

It was asked whether a written policy document would be produced to formalise these arrangements. It was confirmed that the intention was to develop a comprehensive financial policy covering all funding elements.

It was asked whether the new formula would include post-16 pupils. It was explained that the data was sourced from the census and but the ages included in this would need to be clarified. It was agreed that a response to this would be sourced and provided to all Forum members. It was suggested that including post-16 pupils could skew the percentages, especially for settings without post-16 provision, and suggested that projections might be needed to assess the impact. It was agreed that this would be followed up on.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and that response to the issues raised above be provided to Forum members.

7. Schools Forum Special School Banding Review

The SEND and Inclusion Consultant presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'D' to these Minutes in the Minute Book. The report provided an update on progress made with the Special School Banding Review. The Forum was informed that BCP paid among the highest rates for special school banding in the region. A new model was being developed to reflect current needs and costs. Special schools were working together to trial the new framework. Pending further consultation it was expected that the new model would be implemented from September 2025

A representative from the special schools confirmed that discussions with BCP had been ongoing and that the work was progressing constructively. In response to a follow-up question regarding the mainstream banding review, the Forum was advised that a two-week pilot using would begin in early July. Schools that had expressed an interest would be contacted to finalise arrangements, and the outcomes would be shared more widely to inform future planning.

It was requested that both the special and mainstream banding reviews be added to the September agenda for a further update. It was acknowledged that the timing presented challenges but reassurance was given that the pilot would be designed to minimise the burden on schools whilst generating meaningful data.

RESOVLED that the report be noted.

8. Forward Plan

The forward plan was reviewed and noted.

It was agreed that a proposed finance policy report would be added to the September agenda, subject to confirmation from officers.

9. Dates of Future Meetings

The date of the next meeting was noted as Monday 29 September.

10. Any Other Business

Additional comments were made regarding forum membership and the need to reconstitute representation. Members were encouraged to suggest candidates for vacant positions. Forum membership would be reviewed and reconstituted in September.

The meeting ended at 10.40 am

CHAIRMAN