

SCHOOLS FORUM

MONDAY, 13TH JANUARY, 2025

Present:

Geoff Cherrill (Maintained Special) – **Chairman**
Patrick Earnshaw (Academies - Secondary) – **Vice-Chairman**

Kate Carter, TEACH Academies Trust, Academies - Primary
Kate Curtis, Talbot Primary School, Academies - Primary
Chris Moody, CFO - Delta Education Trust, Academies - Primary
Heather Spring, Twynham Primary, Academies - Primary
Mark Avoth, Bourne Academy - Principal, Academies - Secondary
Michelle Dyer, Avonbourne Academies - Principal, 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
Vicky Peters, Priory View Preschool, Early Years
Linda Duly, Cuddles Day Nursery, Early Years
Richard Wharton, C of E Diocese Representative

Also in Attendance:

Councillor R Burton, Portfolio Holder for Children's and Young People
Councillor S 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
Sharon Muldron, Interim Director of Education and Skills
Tanya Smith, Head of School Planning and Admissions
Nicola Webb, Assistant Chief Finance Officer
Steve Ellis, Management Accountant - Education
Jeanette Yorke, Early Years Operational Manager

21 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Chris Barnett and Sean Preston.

22 Declarations of Interest

None

23 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 November were approved as a correct record.

24 DSG Financial Settlement 2025-26

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 Forum was advised that the schools and early years blocks were considered in separate papers on the meeting agenda. The DSG Settlement for 2025-26 was received on 18 December 2024. It included:

- Indicative allocations for the early years block, with the 47% increase of £17m to £53.5m reflecting the phased expansions of the free childcare entitlements for working parents and increase in hourly funding rates.
- Final allocations for the school's block based on the October 2024 schools census, with the increase of 1.7% to £280.7m through the schools NFF reflecting higher factor unit values and an increase in pupil characteristic data partially offset by a net reduction in pupil roll.
- Final allocations for the central school services block of £2.2m, providing an increase of 3.5% for on-going functions, including for the national insurance increase from April 2025.
- Indicative allocations for the high needs block are for an increase of £3.8m (6.2%) to £64.5m.

A draft DSG budget for 2025-26 was provided with in an Appendix to provide context for decisions on the meeting agenda. The funding gap for high needs pupils is projected to be £57.5m. The report also includes budget monitoring information for quarter three 2024-25. This indicates that the accumulated DSG deficit is projected at £108m for March 2025, rising to £165.5m by March 2026.

RESOLVED that

- 1. The contents of the report be noted.**
- 2. That the budgets within the central schools services block (CSSB) as detailed in paragraph 20 of the report be agreed.**

Voting: Unanimous

25 Innovation Fund

The Interim Head of Schools Inclusion 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.

This report provided further information relating to the proposals for the use of the £2.8 million Innovation Fund.

The Fund was proposed as a way to provide support to mainstream schools to enable them to successfully maintain more placements for pupils with SEND in their mainstream settings to reduce the number of new ECHNAs and use of Alternative Provision where possible. This report includes the content of those proposals, the breakdown of the financial costs, and potential consequences from the decision made by Schools Forum.

The forum raised questions about whether the £500,000 allocated for outreach would be distributed over a period of time. It was confirmed that this amount would serve as the annual allocation for the financial year, in addition to the existing funding for outreach. The forum was assured that the application process for this funding would be transparent, with clear criteria established. The SEND Sufficiency Progress Board would review the applications, and officers informed the forum that they could share relevant information about this process.

Additionally, the forum was informed that KPIs and service level agreements would be established to measure the effectiveness of the funding. These would outline key deliverables and emphasise the importance of early intervention. The forum agreed that safeguards were necessary for smaller schools, ensuring that funding bids would be accessible to all institutions.

RESOLVED that Schools Forum:

- Note the information in the report,
- Recommend agreement for provision of the £2.8 million funding for BCP Council to proceed with the proposed actions including a preference for it to be allocated to the most useful area of training based on the available information,
- consider the benefits of agreeing ongoing funding for the Inclusion Consultant roles as opposed to restricting the funding to one year and repeated approvals where posts would have to remain fixed term for short periods, reducing the potential pool of candidates who would apply, and
- consider the context of the current landscape when making its recommendation in relation to the Innovation Fund. If it considers recommending against the Innovation Fund, this report recommends that Schools Forum will need to consider what it sees as the alternative solution to the Innovation Fund to support the work with mainstream inclusion moving forwards
- once the decision has been finalised, at least two members of the Schools Forum will participate in the discussion to ensure that the Forum has oversight and can contribute to the final decision regarding funding allocation.

Voting: Unanimous

The Forum recognised that progress had been needed on this item but was mindful that the Schools Forum had to monitor it and might need to consider future funding allocations.

The Chair advised he would reach out to Schools Forum members to confirm who would participate in the final discussion. **ACTION**

26 Mainstream Funding and Transfer to High Needs 2025/26

The Assistant Chief Financial Officer 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 Schools Forum would be consulted on the local mainstream school funding formula and was requested to make recommendations to Council to cover the differing levels of funding transfer that could be finally agreed as decisions from the DfE remain outstanding. The report sets out the outcome of applying the 2025-26 National Funding Formula (NFF) to the October 2024 schools census data and options for the local mainstream schools funding formula linked to the final decision regarding a transfer of funding to high needs. It also sets out the 2025-26 growth fund budget for approval.

BCP Council confirmed to the Forum that they would seek a transfer of 1% from the DfE, even if the Schools Forum were not in agreement.

The Schools Forum was informed that BCP Council had not consulted all schools prior to making the decision, as required by the Schools Operating Guide. However, they confirmed that extensive consultation had taken place regarding the innovation fund. It was noted that information from the DfE was received too late for effective consultation with all schools this year if the DfE timetable was to be met. However, consultation could still be done, and the Schools Forum reconvened if considered necessary. The Inclusion Fund and the Forum papers from previous meetings had been shared with the DfE. The funding transfer would be used for the innovation fund and not set against the deficit.

All Members:

1. **RESOLVED** that a transfer of £1.1m, being surplus school block funding, be supported as a transfer to support expenditure on high needs pupils in the light of the December settlement for 2025-26 and outcome of the national funding formula (NFF) for mainstream schools.

Voting: 11 in favour; 0 against; 3 abstentions

The following options were also considered and rejected by the Schools Forum:

- a. Transfer 0.5% with NFF allocations to be reduced by 0.11% being the maximum the Schools Forum alone can agree

Voting: 11 against; 0 in favour; 3 abstentions

- b. Transfer 1.0% with NFF allocations to be reduced by 0.61% being the amount needed to fully fund the proposed innovation fund and requiring approval of the DfE.

Voting: 11 against; 0 in favour; 3 abstentions

School Members:

- 2. RESOLVED that the growth fund budget requirement of £150,000 as set out in paragraph 17 of the report be agreed.**

Voting: Unanimous

- 3. RESOLVED that the Forum recommend to Council the following preferred options for the local mainstream formula for each level of transfer which could be finally agreed as set out in paragraph 29 of the report:**

- **Option 2a (all schools contributing) in regard to a 0.5% transfer.**

Voting: 7 in favour; 3 against; 3 abstentions

- **Option 3a (all schools contributing) in regards to a 1% transfer**

Voting: 6 in favour; 4 against; 3 abstentions

Options 2b (Excluding MPPFL only), 3b (Excluding MPPFL MFG at minimum) and 3c (Excluding MPPFL MFG at minimum Capping gains) were also considered and rejected by the Schools Forum.

The Forum requested to be informed about the outcomes of each request and to be advised on what had been agreed upon. Members of the Schools Forum expressed their respect for the democratic process of the Forum, however, they stated that they did not believe it was morally sound to top-slice funding from schools that were already receiving the minimum per pupil funding.

The Chair informed the Forum about two vacancies for primary school members and urged members to suggest any suitable candidates to fill those positions.

27 Central Retention and De-delegation Consultation

The Head of School Places, Funding and Admissions 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.

Maintained School Forum members must be consulted on proposals for the central retention and de-delegated budget shares and agree these.

This report provides proposals for:

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- the central retention of services for the 2025/26 financial year where the LA retains a statutory duty to undertake activity to support maintained schools only (both mainstream and specialist);
- de-delegation of services for the 2025/26 financial year applicable only to mainstream schools. These are services where schools retain the statutory duties, but better efficiency could be achieved through central delivery by the LA.

Following some discussion, Schools Forum did not agree to the recommendation outlined in the report. Instead, they suggested holding a meeting with all maintained headteachers to reach an agreement regarding this report outside of the meeting.

28 Forward Plan

The Forward Plan for the Forum was noted.

29 Dates of Future Meetings

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 23 June.

30 Any Other Business

None.

Duration of the meeting: 10.00 - 11.54 am

**Chairman at the meeting on
Monday, 13 January 2025**