

Minutes of the Schools Forum Meeting

Meeting title:	Schools Forum Meeting	
Date/time	04 December 2024, 17.30-19.00	
Members:	<p><u>School Members</u> Kevin Reynolds (Maintained Pri Headteacher rep) Robin Warren (Maintained Pri Headteacher rep) Sian Davies (Maintained Pri Headteacher rep) Lisa Neidich (Maintained Pri Governor rep) Sam Billington (Maintained Pri Governor rep) Chris Howard (Maintained Pri Governor rep) Andy English (Maintained Sec Headteacher rep) Farzana Chowdhury (Nursery School Headteacher rep)</p>	<p><u>Academy Members</u> Vacant</p> <p><u>Alternative Provision</u> Richard Brown (PRU rep, Headteacher)</p> <p><u>Special School Members</u> Jo Clare (Special School rep) Kevin McDonnell (Special School Headteacher rep)</p> <p><u>Non School Members</u> David Davies (Staff rep)</p> <p><u>Early Years Representative</u> Jenna Clark</p>
Additional attendees:	Cllr Anntoinette Bramble, Cabinet member for Education, Young People and Children Social Care Mayor Caroline Woodley, Cabinet member for Families, Early Years and Play Jacquie Burke (Group Director, Children & Education) Jason Marantz (DoE & Inclusion, Hackney Education) Joe Wilson (AD Send & Inclusion) Terry Bryan (AD School Estate Strategy) Patrick Alexander (Interim AD School Standards & Improvement) Donna Thomas (AD Early Years, Early Help and Well-being) Sajeed Patni (Interim Director of Finance (Services), Children & Education) Kathryn Lloyd (Interim Head of Education Operations, Hackney Council) Chris Scott (Group Accountant, Hackney Council) Suhail Kadir (Finance Manager - Schools) Ann Yiadom (Clerk to the Forum)	
Apologies:	Kathryn Lloyd	

	Item
1.	<p>1. Welcome and introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members were welcomed and introductions made
2.	<p>Minutes of the last meeting held 19 June 2024</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The minutes of the meeting held on 19 June 2024 were approved without amendments. <p>Action log</p> <p>The following outstanding actions were discussed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Matrix: JW explained that the matrix served as a diagnostic tool used as part of the DBV to determine whether a child should receive support and will be shared with SF member - JW to action Subgroup Purpose: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The purpose of the subgroup will be circulated for clarity.

- A Terms of Reference (ToR) document will be created and shared in advance to assess whether the subgroup still requires membership.

Matters arising

Member comment: Regarding item 5 of the previous meeting minutes, what learning has taken place from the development of the criteria used to distribute the additional DfE funding for schools in financial difficulty? Additionally, how were the criteria established and what steps have been taken since to improve the process?

The Director of Education (DoE) acknowledged the context of the grant, which was announced late and came with broad criteria provided by the DfE. The Local Authority (LA) was tasked with developing these criteria but noted that ideally, there would have been consultation with schools and the forum. The DoE confirmed the need to review factors such as school rolls and budgets and acknowledged the relevance of these challenges, especially as similar situations could arise in the future.

Action: A review of the criteria and the process will take place, with findings to be presented in a future meeting.

Member comment: Additional information mentioned in the minutes regarding the application of the criteria needs to be circulated. The Schools Forum was assured that the schools awarded funding are making good progress in reducing their deficits. The Forum would like to know if they will receive an update on the current status of these deficits, or if this information can be included in the report on closing balances for 2024/25.

The DoE agreed to include updates on deficit statuses in the closing balances report for 2024/25.

Member comment: Has an investigation been conducted into apparent inconsistencies in the application of the criteria and when would feedback on this be provided to the Schools Forum?

The DoE stated that this matter would be reviewed again and a detailed paper provided.

Action: A paper addressing the inconsistencies will be presented at the next meeting.

Member comment: Will the Schools Forum have a deep dive into the criteria and their application, as previously offered by the previous Director or has this already taken place or is it still awaited?

The DoE confirmed that this would be included as part of the paper at the next meeting.

Member comment: Re item 6 about growth fund and contingency and about allocation of funding to schools following closure, will the same process be applied in the current round of school closures? If so, when will this information be shared with schools and school's forum?

The DoE indicated that the funding arrangements would be reviewed.

The AD for Schools Estate, Terry Bryan(TB), highlighted that in the previous year, schools that took in additional pupils received funding based on per-pupil allocations, which created inequities. For example, schools like Princess May were disadvantaged as the arrangements did not adequately consider financial stability.

Member comment: Can options be explored, such as setting a minimum funding threshold rather than basing allocations strictly on the number of pupils received.

The Chair supported the suggestion, noting that it would be helpful to compare the difference between intended and actual pupil numbers and the resulting impact on funding allocations.

Action: The LA committed to reviewing last year's funding process and providing options for a fairer process.

Member comment: Regarding the growth funding, can a breakdown of allocations be shared and clarification provided on what happens to grant funding, such as pupil premium and universal free school meals (UFSM), for pupils from closing schools; does it follow them?

The DoE explained that pupil numbers are provisional and will be confirmed after the census. For example, 114 pupils transferred to Nightingale, and 19 to Princess May, reflecting a significant difference that will inform future reviews.

SP added that the data from the October census is being finalized, which will indicate where pupils have moved. Based on this, funding will be distributed according to the Schools Forum's agreement from the last meeting. An update report will be provided, outlining how much funding remains, which will then be allocated according to other criteria. It was agreed that distribution would be done on a per-pupil basis, and the report will include relevant factors. An interim report may be provided initially, with a final update on remaining funds at year-end, which may be discussed at the meeting after next.

Member comment: Schools with incoming pupils will require a level of assurance regarding the funding they will receive. Schools such as Seabright and Hoxton had to make plans without clarity on funding. As Christmas is approaching schools are having to plan ahead with a lot of movement happening and further movement being predicted including additional schools on the border closing. As such it is essential that arrangements are made sooner rather than later.

The Chair acknowledged the valid point raised and noted that TB had referenced the mechanism of a minimum funding arrangement, which would provide schools with more confidence. The Chair hopes the LA can present this to the Schools Forum as soon as possible.

TB agreed with the Chair's point, emphasizing the importance of ensuring schools know the level of funding they will receive. While funding was previously allocated on a per-pupil basis, waiting for census data does not give schools enough time to plan and adjust, which has been recognized. Schools Forum needs to review various funding models that will be presented in order to understand the most reasonable and equitable option, with these discussions expected to take place by the next meeting.

Member comment: Having received children in both the first and second rounds of school closures, the need for better communication and improved timescales is essential, as is knowing the migration of children, which is currently happening, and as such, having a clear timeline is important.

TB reassured the forum that information regarding funding from last year would be shared. However, it is also important to give Schools Forum the opportunity to review what the LA is proposing for the next round of arrangements. TB will check with the finance team to ensure the LA will be in a position to provide the relevant information early in the new year, and ideally even sooner.

Action: LA to review funding arrangements and present models for Schools Forum consideration. A commitment was made to provide relevant information early in the new year

Member comment: Regarding the school contingency allocation, specifically the amount allocated to anonymous schools, including one with a Pupil Admission Number (PAN) reduction, how was the criteria for the contingency allocation applied, and would all schools reducing their PAN be eligible? Additionally, why was the

	<p>report anonymous while other reports named schools? Also the LA needs to review how schools are being funded.</p> <p>The DoE clarified that the school contingency is a ring-fenced pot of money allocated by the Schools Forum for schools facing unforeseen circumstances, which could include historic issues such as falling rolls—now a more widespread problem. It is acknowledged that while it would have been appropriate to give names, the criteria were discussed at the Primary Consultative Group and should have been framed more as principles. Forum members are assured that the matter would be revisited with schools. However, the DoE could not locate the £150k allocation and speculated it may have been recorded in another way. The DoE confirmed they would bring a more comprehensive understanding of the overall situation to the next meeting, although the pot is relatively small and unforeseen circumstances do not always follow a set timeline.</p> <p>Action: DoE to bring further clarification and assurance to the next meeting regarding the allocation and application of school contingency, to provide assurance that school leaders were consulted.</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p>Progress Report: SEND DBV Programme Collaboration with the DfE</p> <p>A presentation was shared with Schools Forum members detailing the progress of the SEND Delivering Better Value (DBV) programme. It was noted that while the government announced the removal of safety valves, the current programme will continue until its conclusion.</p> <p>Member comment: There is an interest in understanding the audit tool and framework used to inform decision-making and as such it is being requested that this information, if not confidential, be shared with the forum, specifically referring to the details presented on "Workstream 2" in the slides.</p> <p>It was noted during the presentation that the cumulative mitigation programmes highlighted represent opportunities, not fixed targets, and should be approached with that understanding.</p> <p>Action: audit tool and framework used in decision-making to be shared with SF members and, if possible, provide further details at the next meeting.</p> <p>Member comment: Regarding the "Workstream 1 - Early Intervention" slide, there are concerns about the practicalities of getting assessments completed. There are issues such as CAMHS referrals taking up to 18 months and delays in assessments or school placements until children "settle." <i>What mitigations are being taken to address these delays?</i></p> <p>The AD for SEND, Joe Wilson (JW) explained that early intervention measures include using the "Team Around the School" (TAS) approach at the initial stage. Dedicated Speech and Language Therapists (SALT) and additional area SENDCOs are involved. Work is being done with Private, Voluntary, and Independent (PVI) settings to implement systems ensuring timely identification and support with professional oversight. Although data from Phase 1 is not yet available, early results show a 30% reduction in EHCPs issued before age 4 compared to last year. While this is just one parameter, it suggests the impact of early intervention efforts.</p> <p>Chair comment: Regarding the deficit of £89m and projections of £51.5m by 2025-28, <i>How will the remaining gap be addressed?</i></p> <p>JW noted that a statutory override is currently in place to manage the deficit.</p> <p>SP added that the override allows the deficit to remain on the balance sheet, similar to the national situation. While the override is set to end in March 2026, there is speculation it may be extended to avoid significant financial pressure on councils.</p>

	<p>Chair comment: On post-16 tracking, what measures are being taken to strengthen tracking and ensure positive outcomes for young people.</p> <p>JW explained that children with EHCPs are tracked as they transition into new settings, but challenges arise when young people change courses, particularly in college settings. The local authority aims to enhance advice for young people, focusing on preparing them for adulthood. For children becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), officers are in place to make contact, provide career advice, and offer support. However, further work is required to improve outcomes.</p> <p>Member comment: Members previously expressed concerns that underfunding mainstream SEN provision could undermine inclusion efforts. While the recent funding announcement is positive, clarity is needed on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The adequacy of the settlement. 2. The meaning of "cost avoidance measures" and what they include. 3. Safeguards to prevent the system from deterring EHCP assessments when appropriate. <p>JW highlighted that 'Cost avoidance' measures include prioritizing local over independent provision where possible, although the volume of need in Hackney currently limits this. The local authority is also focusing on helping pupils complete their journeys in independent schools and transition smoothly. Safeguards for EHCP assessments ensure that children who genuinely require them receive them. Enhancing early interventions like language programmes can prevent issues from escalating to the point of statutory interventions.</p> <p>Member comment: Concerns were raised about the lack of a post-16 quality assurance (QA) mechanism similar to the School Improvement Partner (SIP) programme. A suggestion would be to invest in a QA process aligned with the DBV strategy to ensure consistent standards.</p> <p>Member comment: What mechanisms are in place for accessing early interventions. It is appreciated that there is a focus on not issuing EHCPs but what is in place to access the early interventions and where do they originate?</p> <p>The programme initially involved 15 providers, with a mix of PVI settings selected based on high levels of requests. The local authority plans to evaluate this phase and roll out learnings into a broader framework. A strict DfE timeline requires grant funding to be completed by March, but findings and learning will be shared with stakeholders in the spring.</p> <p>Member comment: there is a misalignment between the aspiration to provide early help and the reality of managing needs on the ground. The current offer does not adequately reduce the number of EHCPs. The Plan-Do-Review cycle fails to act as early help and instead leads to missed opportunities. While the aspiration is evident, the mechanism to achieve it is lacking.</p> <p>The purpose of the SEND DBV programme is to establish effective local mechanisms to address this gap and ensure that early help aligns with the needs on the ground.</p> <p>The DoE acknowledged the member's point as valid, and discussions have been held regarding aligning with the graduated approach. This matter can be revisited in the appropriate forum to explore solutions further.</p> <p>Action: Detailed discussions on aligning the graduated approach with early help mechanisms to be brought back to the relevant forum for review and next steps.</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p>Schools Block Budget 2025-26</p> <p>An overview of the report was provided, highlighting the key decisions and consultations required by the LA, some of which involve different voting rules.</p>

The first paper addresses block transfers from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block. Such transfers have occurred in each of the last few years. The in-year deficits have been improving following a serious financial situation in previous years, with year-on-year positions showing gradual recovery. The paper also illustrates how much greater the deficit would have been without the block transfer. While there is an expectation that the statutory override might be extended, it was emphasized that it cannot continue indefinitely and will need to be addressed sooner or later.

The Chair acknowledged the government's commitment to increase High Needs funding by £440 million (4.3%) in 2024/25, bringing the total budget to £10.4 billion, a substantial increase since 2019/20. While this is appreciated, Hackney continues to face financial pressures due to escalating demand. Given this, the Chair requested officers explain the specific factors driving the need for a 0.5% transfer, other than the fact it has been done in the past? Are there alternatives to address the financial challenges? And why is the request for 0.5%?"

SP explained that in terms of the position in the DSG management plan, including the DBV plan presented earlier, projections of the deficit going up are still being observed. The table in 3.6 shows an in-year overspend of £5 million in 2019/20 and £4 million in 2020/21. Projections show 300 new EHCPs this year, so the trajectory is still upwards. The DSG plan assumes the transfer happens, and even with that, further mitigation will be required.

In previous years, while there have been high Needs Block increases of £5-6 million annually, there was still an overspent as the trajectory of demand is upwards. Regarding today's announcement, Hackney's allocation will increase by around £4 million, consistent with previous years. This is why the block transfer is still being requested.

Member comment: Questions raised by the chair are good questions and it is clear that officers could not have done financial modeling on the impact of the £4 million increase. The Schools Block transfer was originally proposed as a short-term mechanism over a decade ago but has since become customary. It would be reasonable for the forum to ask the LA to do further modeling based on today's announcement and consider requesting a smaller figure, especially as schools face significant pressures. As such, the decision should be deferred to allow for more modeling.

Member comment: There seems to be a mismatch between the description of reducing deficits and the reality in two of Hackney's three maintained special schools. Both schools had significant deficits this year compared to smaller or no deficits in previous years, which can be attributed to historic underfunding of SEND by the government. The contentious nature of the 0.5% transfer, which was meant to be temporary, is acknowledged, but a clarification is required on whether something has been misunderstood.

CS explained that the increase in the grant is a headline figure, noting that the funding rates for children with high needs had been frozen, creating additional pressure on schools. While there is an increase in cash funding, he emphasised the need to consider inflation and costs, including the existing cohort of children receiving funding.

SP acknowledged the historic underfunding of the system, stating that while the government's announcement provided additional funding, it addressed needs that had existed for years. He remarked that this funding would have been helpful much earlier.

The Chair asked if the 0.5% transfer would still have been requested—or if more would have been asked—had the government not announced the increase.

SP responded that 0.5% is the maximum amount that can be transferred with the agreement of the Schools Forum.

Member comment: The sentiment of the paper is supported, and it is agreed that the Schools Forum shares responsibility across all schools. The idea of more financial modeling is also supported but the impact of delaying the decision needs to be understood.

CS explained that decisions regarding the block transfer need to be submitted by late January, which presents a tight timeline. While national funding allocations include additional amounts, Hackney is a "floor authority," receiving the minimum uplift. If additional funding were provided nationally, the gains cap might increase, resulting in minimal improvement for Hackney.

Member comment: The decision concerns whether to transfer the maximum amount. The announcement and lack of financial modeling makes it difficult to justify transferring the full 0.5%.

The DoE expressed that there is still some clarity required regarding the announcement and acknowledged the ramifications of delaying the decision. He suggested modeling could be done over the spring or summer to prepare for future decisions, even if a decision was made at this meeting.

Action: The LA to carry out financial modeling regarding the transfer of 0.5%

A member raised an objection to an inference of mismanagement of special schools by another member which was then clarified with the explanation that historic LA decisions were being referred to, not special schools. The position special schools were in is understood.

Member comment: It has been helpful in previous years to see a breakdown of the impact of the 0.5% transfer on individual schools. While the impact was minimal, it assisted the forum in decision-making.

SP clarified that the government's announcement concerned investment in SEND expansion rather than revenue funding, which was the focus of this paper.

SF members, by majority vote, agreed to the following:

- Approve a transfer of 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block.
- Endorse the proposals for the Local Funding Formula (LFF) for 2025/26.

- Approve primary school de-delegated budgets separately for the following lines (**voting to be limited to maintained primary school representatives only**):
 - School contingencies
 - Support to UPEG and bilingual learners
 - Free school meals eligibility
 - Licences / subscriptions
 - Supply Cover (Trade Union)
 - School Improvement (SRAS)
- All eligible members agreed

- Approve secondary school de-delegated budgets separately for the following lines (**voting to be limited to maintained secondary school representatives only**):
 - School contingencies
 - Support to UPEG and bilingual learners
 - Free school meals eligibility
 - Licences / subscriptions
 - Supply Cover (Trade Union)
 - School Improvement (SRAS)
- All eligible members agreed

- Approve the Growth Policy 2025/26.

Agreed

- Agree the Growth Fund will not exceed the growth allocation within the DSG.

Agreed

	<p>Member comment: What is the status of academies not contributing to union facility time? Academies being part of the scheme means one sector is subsidizing the other sector.</p> <p>It was noted that national guidance suggests LAs should offer academies the option to trade and buy into the scheme at the same rate, but there is no obligation for academies to participate. If academies do not buy into the scheme, they cannot claim for union facility time.</p> <p>The Chair suggested that it might be necessary to write to academies to encourage their participation.</p> <p>Action: DoE to follow up with Lolita.</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>Agreement of Final DSG Budget for 2024/25 (current year update)</p> <p>The forum was informed that reporting will include updates as the year progresses. An additional column will be added to reflect updates for the remainder of the year, ensuring ongoing transparency and clarity in reporting.</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>Outcome of Early Years Entitlement Funded Rate Survey</p> <p>The LA has a statutory duty to consult early years providers and the Schools Forum before making decisions regarding the Early Years Entitlement Funded Rate. The new entitlement, now expanded to include children as young as nine months, requires the LA to communicate updated rates to settings by March 2025 to allow providers sufficient time to plan their budgets. However, the current timeline has proven challenging, as providers require this information earlier to prepare effectively. The timeline has not been robust, creating delays in enabling providers to make timely budgetary decisions.</p> <p>The January census determines the funding allocated to the LA through the Early Years DSG (Dedicated Schools Grant). However, the delay in receiving this data affects the speed at which new rates can be set. To address this, the LA is exploring the possibility of using the Autumn Term Census data for earlier calculations, but this would require changes to the process.</p> <p>A survey was conducted in October 2024, targeting early years settings, including schools, to gather feedback. The response rate was low, with only 35% of respondents agreeing that the LA should use Autumn Term Census data for rate calculations.</p> <p>Despite this, the calculation process could proceed based on Autumn Census data; however, the DfE does not provide final funding information until January, delaying rate finalization until then. The LA aims to streamline the process to maximize the accuracy of data received and ensure funding rates are set more promptly in future years. Efforts will be made to initiate the consultation and calculation process earlier to alleviate challenges for providers.</p> <p>There are two processes: a base rate, which funds all settings, and a supplementary rate based on graduate qualifications, deprivation, and eligibility for the Early Years Pupil Premium. The consultation showed that the majority provided their agreement. A summary paper outlines the feedback and next steps.</p> <p>PRU Budget</p> <p>The AP Commissioner, Karen Thomson, emphasized the importance of adhering to Schools Forum regulations and the responsibility to annually review new arrangements. She highlighted the launch of a strategy for AP, with a focus on exclusions and inclusion. New Regent College has not yet received an update on its budget.</p> <p>KT indicated that a paper will be presented at the next Schools Forum to provide an update on the budget and the new AP strategy. While the paper was initially intended to be shared earlier, Hackney has taken a measured approach to ensure the strategy is accurate and aligned with place planning. The strategy focuses on service development, access, and resource allocation.</p>

7.	Dates for 2024/25 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wed 5 Feb 2025• Wed 7 May 2025• Wed 2 July 2025
Summary of actions agreed: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agenda item 2: A review of the criteria and the process will take place, with findings to be presented in a future meeting.• Agenda item 2: A paper addressing the inconsistencies will be presented at the next meeting.• Agenda item 2: The LA committed to reviewing last year's funding process and providing options for a fairer process.• Agenda item 2: The LA will review funding arrangements and present models for Schools Forum consideration. A commitment was made to provide relevant information early in the new year• Agenda item 2: DoE to bring further clarification and assurance to the next meeting regarding the allocation and application of school contingency, to provide assurance that school leaders were consulted. • Agenda item 3: Audit tool and framework used in decision-making to be shared with SF members and, if possible, provide further details at the next meeting.• Agenda item 3: Detailed discussions on aligning the graduated approach with early help mechanisms to be brought back to the relevant forum for review and next steps. • Agenda item 4: DoE to follow up with Lolita (re academy contributions to union facility time)	