

# Schools Forum

## Minutes

Tuesday 21 January 2025

### PRESENT

Voting members	Non-voting members
<p><b>School Members</b> Anne-Marie Strachan (Thames Federation) Imogen Lavelle (The Good Shepherd) Dave Colins (Brackenbury School) Karen Cunningham (St John XXIII Catholic Primary) Joe Brown (Old Oak Primary School) Kathleen Williams (Holy Cross Primary) Michele Barrett (Randolph Beresford / Vanessa Nursery)</p> <p><b>Academies and Free Schools</b> Gary Kynaston, Hammersmith Academy (Chair) Daniel Cundy (Senior Principal, AP Academies) Sophia Martin (Principal, AP Academies)</p> <p><b>Non-Schools Members</b> Jane Gleasure (Little People, Early Years)</p>	<p>Mark Hopper (Trade Union Representative)</p> <p><b>Observers</b> Aiden Smith (Governor, Jack Tizard School) Alex Parker Ozioma Onwochei (Principal Accountant) Caroline Baxter (Finance Manager) Sahej Grover (Finance Trainee) Valerie Irolla (Principal Accountant)</p>

### **Officers**

Jacqui McShannon (Director of Children's Services)  
Peter Haylock (Director of Education and SEND)  
Tony Burton (Head of Finance for Children's Services and Education)  
Tiffany Yip (Assistant Committee Coordinator)  
Daryle Mathurin (Head of Assets and Resources - Education and SEND)

### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

## **2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate record.

## **3. SCHOOLS BLOCK MAINSTREAM BUDGET 2025/26**

Tony Burton (Head of Finance for Children's Services and Education) presented the item which set out the final school's block allocation of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2025/26 following the receipt of final funding allocations and the Authority Proforma Tool (APT) in late December 2024. He highlighted that per national funding guidance in indicated pupil funding had increased by 1.72% for Hammersmith and Fulham mainstream schools, versus a 2.3% increase nationally. Total funding allocations had decreased in cash terms year on year due to the reduced number of pupils in mainstream schools.

The Teachers Pay Additional Grant (TPAG), Teachers Pension Employer Contribution Grant (TPECG) and the Core Schools Budget Grants (CSBG) which were separate grants in the 2024/25 financial year had all been incorporated into the final 2025/26 schools block allocation. A 2025/26 baseline adjustment was made by the Department for Education to incorporate these grants into the mainstream funding allocation of £6.815m.

Tony Burton noted that responses from the school's block 2025/26 budget consultation supported the principles for allocating the 2025/26 schools block budget and the transfer of 1% of the school's block budget to the high needs block for the 2025/26 budget. Minimum funding guarantee was set at minus 0.25% and mirrored the National Funding Formula (NFF) factor rates allowing for a percentage uplift of 0% on the inner London NFF rates. Should the disapplication for 1% transfer from the school's block to support the high needs block be rejected by the Minister of State, the alternative 0.5% transfer model would be used to distribute block funding to schools.

Tony Burton also pointed out that the reduced pupil numbers in mainstream primary schools had caused the de-delegated and education functions budgets to decrease year on year and noted that maintained schools license was now paid directly by schools. Due to the tightening of regulations, a separate falling rolls fund could not be established.

The Central Services Schools Block reduced in three ways for 2025/26:

- A 1.5% reduction in core funding per pupil
- A reduction in total funding due to the reduction in pupil numbers in mainstream schools
- A reduction in the historic central services allocation of 20% year on year, impacting its ability to support high needs block.

Karen Cunningham (St John XXIII Catholic Primary) asked if pupil placement planning would take place to address gaps in schools rolls. Peter Haylock (Director of Education and SEND) responded that with a reduced number of

two form entry schools, the scope for planning around rotating plan reductions was limited.

Alex Parker (Observer) asked for further clarification on the pupil funding increases. Tony Burton explained that funding allocation was determined by the number of pupils on roll. The model mirrored the NFF, including a core rate to reflect some of the grants being incorporated into the mainstream budget. MFG would provide protection on a per pupil basis for pupil led funding levels in the National Funding Formula year on year. Tony Burton suggested that funding levels in Hammersmith and Fulham were likely to converge with the NFF over a number of years and it was therefore possible schools in the borough may experience constrained funding growth versus the national picture over the medium term. However, more would be known after the government spending review this year and once the development of the NFF in the medium to longer term was better understood.

Alex Parker further asked how the 1.7% per pupil funding increase was calculated. Tony Burton replied that the schools block baseline included the full year effect of the additional grants received in 2024/25.

Alex Parker also asked what minus MFG meant. Tony Burton noted that MFG gave protection only to pupil-led funding. If that was not met, MFG would allocate funding to schools up to -0.25% on pupil-led funding level.

Peter Haylock noted that despite the 1% high needs block transfer, pressure on high needs block had not reduced. While pupil numbers had decreased, demand for SEND support was increasing and the complexity of cases was also increasing. The high needs reference group would meet the week after to review key areas, aiming to meet as much needs as possible in maintained schools.

## **RESOLVED**

1. It is recommended that the January 2025 APT for the recommended model is submitted to the ESFA for the 2025 to 2026 schools budget share. This is with the revised uplifted NFF rates detailed in paragraph 4 and in appendix 1 with area cost adjusted NFF rates, MFG value of minus 0.25% per pupil and a 1% block transfer (£1.23m) to support High Needs in 2025/26. The recommended model will be submitted on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2025 and is subject to Ministerial approval.
2. That Schools Forum agreed that in the case that the Minister of State rejects the recommended model at the 1% transfer level, that the alternative model with 0.5% block transfer (£0.615m) is adopted for 2025/26.
3. That maintained school representatives at Schools Forum agreed to the proposed 2025 to 2026 de-delegation budget of £0.555m.
4. That maintained school representatives at Schools Forum agreed to the proposed 2025 to 2026 education functions budget of £0.289m.
5. That Schools Forum agreed to the central services school block budget allocations proposed for 2025/26.

#### **4. EARLY YEARS BUDGET 2025/26**

Tony Burton (Head of Finance for Children's Services and Education) presented the report on the initial allocation of early years block funding for 2025/26 including the extended entitlements for working parents of two-year-old children and children from age 9 months.

- There is very constrained funding growth in the DfE funding allocation for 3 and 4-year-olds offer at around £0.04 increase per hour, or 0.6% increase in general. There was a £0.12 increase per hour for school nurseries to ensure teachers pay and pension grants for 2025/26 continued to benefit primary schools with nursery provision in 2025/26.
- The £1.1m maintained nursery school supplementary grant funding included the allowance for maintained nursery school share of teachers pay and pension grant and the September 2024 early years block grant for teachers pay.
- 2-year-old and under 2-year-old offers received increased funding from the DfE of 7.37% and 6.99% respectively on the basic entitlement rates year on year.

Tony Burton also updated that the total central spend on the Early Years budget was proposed at £0.79m. Given the reduction in central spend limit, it was proposed that early intervention services and outreach were to be delivered via H&F maintained nursery schools via an increase in the lump sum budget provision within the 3 and 4-year-old budget model.

Jane Gleasure (Little People, Early Years) enquired how that would be delivered. Tony Burton explained that the allocation was pre-empting a reduction in central spend. The change was only confirmed in December and discussions were underway with maintained nursery schools about the plan going forward. Private and voluntary nursery providers would continue to benefit from the services provided after the proposed change in delivery.

Michele Barrett (Randolph Beresford / Vanessa Nursery) added that there was initial discussion around increasing support in areas that required improvement, and liaison would continue with the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) and childminder sector.

Jane Gleasure noted that they were at a disadvantage compared to maintained schools and maintained nursery schools, facing pressure from inflation and challenges to early years intervention provision in the borough. She was keen to know how funds would be distributed between the PVI and maintained sector and expressed that she would like to be involve in the decision-making process.

Michele Barrett replied that nothing had been finalised yet but would be in place before April. Tony Burton added that the proposal was to shift provision of early intervention to maintained nursery schools and preserve the services delivered to support PVI services specifically. Meanwhile, SEN Inclusion fund continued to expand for early SEND support. Daryle Mathurin (Head of

Assets and Resources - Education and SEND) further explained that the plan would be co-produced with PVI providers.

Michele Barrett noted that the maintained nursery sector was under a lot of pressure, and nationally many were looking at closures within the next year or so if no change was in place. Jane Gleasure highlighted that pressure was also coming from the increasing level of social and emotional needs. The Chair assured that those concerns were understood, and work would be done to address them.

## **RESOLVED**

1. Schools Forum noted the engagement, and briefings were undertaken with schools and early years providers from 6th January 2025 ahead of Schools Forum.
2. Schools Forum approved the proposed deployment of central budget in Table 4 above and noted the impact of the impact of passthrough requirement on available central funds from 25/26.
3. Schools Forum noted the proposed 2025/26 Early Year budget across all entitlements including the revised base rates, deprivation and local formulas proposed.

## **5. HIGH NEEDS BLOCK 2025/26 UPDATE**

Tony Burton (Head of Finance for Children's Services and Education) updated the Forum on the final high needs block allocation of the dedicated schools grant for 2025/26 following the receipt of final funding in December 2024. The provisional high needs block allocation represented a 7% increase per head of population for 2025/26. The minimum funding guarantee for special schools was currently under review locally to meet needs. It was noted that the high needs block continued to face significant pressure.

Alex Parker (Observer) asked which category of the budget covered top-up fundings and the costs for schools which specialised in high needs. Tony Burton replied that the top-up funding for all providers was given under placement costs. Funding for both academies and maintained schools was included in placement costs or alternative provision.

Alex Parker followed up by asking what the SEND Service category covered. Tony Burton answered that it covered language teachers, directly provided services and some occupational therapists provided by the Council but not education, health and care plans casework.

At the end of the meeting, Tony Burton noted that the Scheme for Financing Schools and Financial procedures which went to Schools Forum in October 2024 had been adopted after consultation with maintained schools. Details would be published on the Council's website soon.

Meeting started: 2.00 pm  
Meeting ended: 3.11 pm

Chair .....

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