

Minutes of the Schools Forum – 21st May 2026

Microsoft Teams Meeting.

Status: Draft.

Name	Establishment	Representing
Claire Whiting (CW) Chair	Redhill Primary Academy	Academies – North Cluster
Penny Hustwick (PH)	Hollinswood Primary School	Maintained Schools Governors
Alison Ashley (AA)	Kickstart PRU	Academies - PRUs
Laura Armato (LA)	Amethyst Academies Trust	Academies – Central Cluster
James Youngman (JY)	Learning Community Trust	Academies – Special Schools
Christobel Cousins (CC)	Lilleshall Primary School	Maintained Primaries – Newport Cluster
Darren Lennon (DL)	Linden Centre PRU	Maintained PRUs
Joe Edgar (JE)	Haberdashers' Abraham Darby Academy	Academies – South Cluster
Jen Thomas (JT)	Dothill Primary School	Maintained Primaries – Wellington Cluster
Nicola Davis (ND)	The Bridge Special School	Maintained Special Schools
Rachel Cook (RCo)	Newdale Primary School	Maintained Primaries – Central Cluster
Rebecca Carey (RCa)	Director of Education & Skills	Director of Education & Skills
Tim Davis (TD)	Head of Business, Education & Care Finance	Representative of the Director of Finance
Andy Wood (AW)	Senior Accountant - Schools	Representative of the Director of Finance

1. Apologies - AW.

1.1 The apologies given for this meeting were as follows:

- Sarah Roberts – High Ercall Primary School – Maintained: Wellington Cluster.
- Joseph Piatczanyn – Meadows Primary Academy.

2. Minutes of the 19th March 2026 meeting and matters arising - CW.

2.1 The minutes of the 19th March 2026 were accepted as a true and accurate record. Copies of the minutes can be found here:

[Minutes of 19th March 2026.](#)

2.2 There were no matters arising that would not be covered in the agenda for this meeting.

3. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) outturn Financial Year 2025 to 2026 - TD

3.1 The Forum was provided with a paper which can found at the following link:

[DSG outturn 2025 to 2026.](#)

DSG at Local Authority Level.

3.2 TD advised that the DSG accounts for the financial year 2025 to 2026 have now been closed . There was an in-year deficit of £4.5m which when added to the deficit brought forwards resulted in a cumulative deficit of £9.2m.

3.3 The main areas of high needs spend, all increased due to a combination of inflation and demand pressures, namely special schools, EHCPs, PRUs and alternative provision and independent placements.

3.4 The local authorities' outturn is likely to reflect the national picture as the national DSG deficit has been increasing year-on-year, for example from £1.7bn at 31st March 2024 to £3.6bn on 31st March 2025.

3.5 For FY2026/2027 the high needs allocation for Telford & Wrekin is £42m. Whilst this is a cash increase of £2.5m, this is almost completely related to the absorption of legacy grants within DSG. It is therefore anticipated that the DSG will again have a substantial overspend in financial year 2026/2027, adding to the deficit brought forwards.

Maintained Schools Balances.

3.6 Maintained schools ended the 2025/2026 with revenue balances of £8.9m. Of these balances £2m were earmarked as single status provisions. On a like-for-like basis, once converting schools' balances were removed, revenue balances increased by around £1.3m. Capital balances reduced by around £100k.

3.7 Whilst the balances seem high, the variance between school is stark in that some are in a deficit position whilst some have balances which are above the BCM threshold (5% of budget for secondary schools, 8% for other schools) which will be investigated during the summer months.

4. Local SEND reform plan - TD.

4.1 This agenda item was a verbal brief, and the main points were as follows:

- Local Authorities have until 19th June to submit their reform plan to the DfE,

- If approved, this triggers the DfE clearing 90% of the DSG deficit at the end of financial year 2025/2026,
- A decision from the DfE is not expected to be notified to local authorities until the Autumn,
- If not approved, the DfE will work with local authorities to resubmit a revised version, in which case a decision will not be reached until the Spring term of 2027,
- The first draft has been submitted to the authority's DfE advisor for comments,
- Financial data is only requested until financial year 2027/2028 but SEND data is requested until calendar year 2029,
- The plan currently projects a significant deficit for T&W in 2026/2027, due to no like-for-like increase in high needs funding and cost and demand pressures,
- The DfE have not yet stated what funding will be allocated in 2027/2028, in our plan submission it has been assumed that it will be sufficient to cover inflationary pressures but not demand pressures,
- Our plan is focused on delivering more support in mainstream schools, but it will take time for the impact of this to show in financial terms.

4.2 AA asked if the DfE have plans to manage the number and costs of tribunals. RCa responded that we will need to solve problems before they get to the tribunal stage. AA asked if the admissions criteria could be amended to speed up the process.

4.3 RCo stated that there is a fear of the unknown. Is there a piece of work looking at two- and three-year-olds coming through to schools? RCa stated that there is the desire to have children on a pathway before hitting schools similar to the need to track pupils leaving primary to enter secondary phase. Unfortunately, this will not be in place for September 2026.

4.4 ND questioned why the DfE are spending significant sums on publicity around SEND; this could be better spent on provision.

5. Scheme for Financing Schools AY2026/2027 - TD.

5.1 TD advised that the Scheme for Financing Schools has been updated for the new academic year. There are no directed revisions from the DfE this year but there is a requirement to let the Forum know of the update, which is essentially removing the schools that have converted to academy status and the updating of various dates within the document.

6. AOB.

6.1 RCo asked about move to academisation and the white paper. What should schools be doing around this? RCa advised that the LA are having discussions with the DfE, and the LA will contact all schools with options and gauge views (e.g. around the idea of local authority Trust(s)) in due course.

7. Next Meetings

The dates of the forthcoming meetings for the academic year 2026/2027, are as follows:

- Thursday 17th September 2026,
- Thursday 12th November 2026,
- Thursday 14th January 2027,
- Thursday 18th March 2027,
- Thursday 13th May 2027.