

Minutes of the Schools Forum – 21st May 2026

Microsoft Teams Meeting.

Status: Approved.

Name	Establishment	Representing
Claire Whiting (CW) Chair	Redhill Primary Academy	Academies – North Cluster
Penny Hustwick (PH)	Hollinswood Primary School	Maintained Schools Governors
Liz Smith-Keitley (LS)	Children’s World Newport	PVI & Childminders
Sarah Staniforth (SS)	St’s Peter & Paul’s Primary	Academies – Newport Cluster
James Youngman (JY)	Learning Community Trust	Academies – Special Schools
Christobel Cousins (CC)	Lilleshall Primary School	Maintained Primaries – Newport Cluster
Joseph Piatczany (JP)	Meadows Primary School and Nursery	Academies – North Cluster
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
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:

- Alison Ashley – Academy PRUs
- Rebecca Carey – Director for Education & Skills.
- Darren Lennon – Linden Centre PRU.

2. Minutes of the 21st May 2026 meeting and matters arising - CW.

2.1 The minutes of the 21st May 2026 were accepted as a true and accurate record. Copies of the minutes can be found here:

[Minutes of 21st May 2026.](#)

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

3. DfE Consultation: Early years funding: proposed changes to the entitlements funding system - TD

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

[DfE consultation: Early Years funding.](#)

3.2 TD advised that the timing of this (and the high needs consultation covered in the next item) was not ideal as it was published shortly before schools summer holidays and ended shortly after schools returned, which would have limited the engagement from the education sector.

3.3 The consultation has proposals that will be implemented over the next three financial years. In the FY2027 to 2028 the data used to distribute funding to local authorities will be updated and IDACI will be used as part of the measure of deprivation. The possible impact of this on each local authority was included within the consultation document. T&W may see an increase in funding of between 0% and 2.5%.

3.4 The consultation also proposes the option of distributing any prospective early years block in-year surplus to settings. Currently any surplus/deficit is absorbed into the overall DSG position at year end. This may have been significant when the block was calculated based on the two January censuses but now that it mirrors the way settings are funded (i.e. termly censuses) it is less likely that there would be a significant in-year surplus.

3.5 In FY2027/28 the consultation proposes preventing any central top slice of two-year-old funding for central services and a minimum top slice of 0.75% for SENIF.

3.6 Changes for the FY2028/29 are the rolling in of the Early Years Inclusion Fund (EYIF) into the EYNFF with a mandatory inclusion supplement. A deprivation supplement will also be mandated and a withdrawal of the flexibility supplement.

3.7 In the FY2029/30 there will be an EY central block introduced which will replace the top slice. Historically the DfE tend to take the lower end of top-slices as the benchmark, but as T&W would be within that category, the central block may not result in a significant loss of central resources for us.

3.8 PH commented that we will have to wait and see how the changes will work. Until we receive the operational guidance, we will not know exactly what the formula will look like. EY has an early years working group meeting in a couple of weeks.

- 4. DfE Consultation: Upfront funding for mainstream schools: creating a 'local SEND inclusion formula' - TD.**
- 4.1 The Forum was provided with a paper which can found at the following link:
[DfE consultation on Upfront funding for mainstream schools](#).
- 4.2 TD noted that the consultation seeks to prepare the path for the DfE's long term plan to remove additional funding from many/most EHCPs. The overarching principle of the consultation is less funding for EHCPs due to a higher threshold before additional funding is allocated, with funding 'freed up' being distribute to schools through the schools funding formula.
- 4.3 In recent years, many local authorities, including T&W, have agreed with their schools forum to support the overspent high needs budget with funding from the schools' block. The DfE proposal is effectively to move funds in the opposite direction, albeit with an increase in the threshold below which no additional DSG funding is allocated to mainstream schools for EHCPs.
- 4.4 Any redistribution creates winners and losers. With the DfE's proposal, those schools with more EHCPs than their demographics would suggest would lose out and vice versa. It would exacerbate the issue that T&W have aimed to mitigate through Fairshare funding allocations.
- 4.5 If the planned system of enhanced support around schools was already in place (e.g. through the Experts at Hand (EAH) funding), then this would mitigate the risk of some schools having more high needs in the school in proportion to their budget allocations. However, as this support is still being developed, T&W are not going to volunteer to be an early implementor.
- 4.6 The response to the consultation from the Association of Directors of Childrens Services (ADCS) expressed similar concerns to those described above and in the paper.
- 4.7 ND agreed that the experts at hand offer is not yet in place.
- 4.8 RC asked if this was a case of 'robbing Peter to pay Paul'. TD agreed.
- 4.9 CW stated that this will only work if the support around schools is in place and asked if the local authority had enough funds to put the support in place and enough staff to make it work.
- 4.10 ND stated that the Local Authority was getting more EAH funding than originally thought and was advertising for more staff. ND also asked what schools were expected to spend their inclusion funding on? TD stated that there was no additional funding in high needs DSG this year, just legacy grants being brought into the block. Instead, there was funding for experts at hand and inclusion funding for schools. CW agreed that schools had lost grants and were therefore no better off.
- 4.11 RC stated that the Inclusive Grant received at her school was only around £16K which was enough to employ a part-time teaching assistant; therefore, a drop in the ocean. RC stated that she and CC attended a meeting with Abi Martin, to look at HN proposals, and it looked good but there are concerns around where the staff are going to come from. If the staff come from schools, then it creates a problem for schools.

- 4.12 CC stated that her school received around £5K which is only a small contribution to the costs of high needs support. CC asked if there is funding coming to support the hubs? ND agreed that there needs to be funding attached to the hubs for it to work.
- 4.13 TD commented that the DfE is preparing to pay off 90% of local authorities DSG deficits and that the cost of funding this suggests that the DfE's budget must be getting squeezed elsewhere. There was a general consensus that at school level it does not feel like there is sufficient additional funding in the system.
- 4.14 CC commented that the hubs need to be staffed in addition to the help/advice from experts on hand.
- 4.15 TD stated whilst additional funding has been allocated to high needs in recent year, the impact of inflationary pressures on costs and ever increasing demand is out-pacing it.
- 4.16 CW asked if there was any update of the DfE funding the DSG deficit. TD replied that we should know in the next couple of weeks. TD also advised that the in-year FY2026/27 deficit was currently projected at around £10m deficit.
- 4.17 RC asked if this should be discussed with clusters? CW thought that it should be and hoped that PHF would also be briefed.

5. AOB - CW.

- 5.1 CW advised that the May 2027 meeting would clash with SAT so would need to be moved. AW stated he would look for an alternative date.

6. Next Meetings

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

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