

Minutes of the Schools Forum – 19th March 2026

Microsoft Teams Meeting.

Status: Draft

Name	Establishment	Representing
Claire Whiting (CW) Chair	Redhill Primary Academy	Academies – North Cluster
Liz Smith-Keitley (LS)	Newport Childrensworld	PVI sector
Joseph Piatczanyn (JP)	Meadows Primary Academy	Academies – North Cluster
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.
- Penny Hustwick – Governors LA Maintained Schools.
- James Youngman – Queensway Special Academy.
- Alison Ashley – Kickstart PRU - Academy PRUs.
- Ben Braim – Madeley Nursery School – Maintained Nursery Schools
- Laura Armato – Academies – Telford Park School.

2. Minutes of the 15th January 2026 meeting and matters arising - CW.

2.1 The minutes of the 15th January 2026 were accepted as a true and accurate record. Copies of the minutes can be found here:

[Minutes of 15th January 2026.](#)

2.2 CW advised that at the last meeting it was discussed that discussions on the services within de-delegation items would be started earlier. CW & TD had a discussion, and it was agreed that it would be too early to start this at this meeting, but it has not been forgotten.

3. DfE White Paper - TD

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

[Schools White Paper & SEND Reform.](#)

3.2 TD advised the Forum that the paper was written in two parts; the first being extracts from the actual paper and the second being analysis and comment on the paper.

3.3 The main points covered are as follows:

- That all schools would need to become academies,
- That local authorities (LAs) could need to set up Academy Trusts but there would be DfE rules preventing 'conflicts of interest' which could limit LAs direct involvement;
- Local area partnerships will become more prominent,
- Local groups of schools will be required to form groups and pool funds for SEND,
- The funding announced within the paper was similar to that which would have been expected as annual increases in the high needs block (there is no like-for-like increase in the high needs block for 2026/27, the cash increase resulting from pay & pension grants being baselined into the high needs block),
- Capital funding is being made available but will only be sufficient to make adaptations to the estate rather than build new schools,
- EHCPs are to be reviewed at the end of phases of education, commencing 2029/30, with them being retained only by children and young people requiring specialist support,
- Inclusive practice is intended to be enforced by OfSTED,
- There is a lack of specific timeframes for some of the proposals, and the important changes with respect to EHCPs are several years away from even starting to be implemented,
- There appears a major increase in bureaucratic oversight of the system with ICBs, Trusts, DfE and Local Authorities and others involved,
- The DfE has committed to write off 90% of the accumulated deficit local authorities have on their balance sheet up to March 2026, subject to submitting a suitable SEND reform plan,
- The government's commitment to financial support for 2026/27 and 2027/28 is not specified in any detail.

3.4 DL stated that the reform plans would need to set the LA back on a sustainable financial track. TD stated that this would be difficult given the current trajectory of spending with without any additional DSG high needs funding.

- 3.5 ND stated that STSA is an existing collective body in T&W that could form the basis for a local SEND partnership.
- 3.6 RCa stated that there will be a local plan group established that will represent all interested parties. The LA will be meeting with the DfE after Easter which will hopefully give clarity on the funding to be received and what is expected of the LA reform plan.
- 3.7 RCo stated that it looks like schools are being given money on one hand then having it taken off them on the other hand; extra costs of support staff, reduced EHCPs. RCa recognised that this would cause pressures on schools' budgets.

4. Local SEND Reform Plans - TD.

- 4.1 The Forum was provided with papers which can be found at the following links:

[Local SEND Reform Plans.](#)

[Commissioning Letter – Local SEND Reform Plan](#)

[The Local SEND Reform Plan](#)

- 4.2 TD advised the Forum that the paper was written in two parts similarly to the previous paper; the first being extracts from the actual paper and the second being analysis and comment on the paper.

- It was noteworthy that the commissioning letter was a joint letter from both the education and health ministerial, even though financially SEND is an education responsibility,
- Plans are to be submitted by June 2026 for government scrutiny and if accepted will trigger payment of 90% of the cumulative deficit to 31 March 2026 in the autumn term. If the plan is not accepted and needs resubmission, payment will not be received until the spring term,
- The prospect of further support for years 2026-27 & 2027-28 is referred to but without any specific detail'
- As most local authority high needs budgets are currently being overspent, turning this around without an increase in high needs funding and before the significant changes to EHCP funding start to be introduced, will be challenging,
- Two income streams will be made available; the first will go directly to schools and the second will be to the LA. There are no local authority level figures available at this time regarding the funding,
- Many of the practices covered in the paper are already being pursued by the LA and schools,
- The paper mentions joint responsibility with the ICB.

- 4.3 ND asked if the DfE would be looking at the amounts that Independent Special Schools (ISS) are charging. TD responded that the government proposes changes to the law, to prevent excessive charges, but it is not clear how this can be achieved in practice.

- 4.4 CW stated that having waited so long for the white paper it was disappointing that so many questions had been left open.

5. AOB - CW.

- 5.1 TD advised the Forum that the local authority would be implementing the real living wage again, with effect from the 1st of April 2026. This will have an impact on local authority-maintained schools, employing staff on spinal points three four and five, but not academies. The local authority has modelled the additional costs arising from this compared to existing budget assumptions and for all schools it totalled £69K with a significant part of this relating to special schools.
- 5.2 CW identified that the next meeting due on the 21st May 2026 clashes with the primary heads' forum. It was suggested that the meeting be moved from 9.30 to 14.00 and this was agreed by the members present.

6. Next Meetings

The dates of the forthcoming meetings for the academic year 2025/26, are as follows:

- Thursday 21st May 2026