

Minutes of the Schools Forum – 15th January 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
Penny Hustwick (PH)	Hollinswood Primary School	Maintained – Governors
Joseph Piatczany (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
Laura Armato (LA)	Amethyst Academies Trust	Academies – Central Cluster
James Youngman (JY)	Learning Community Trust	Academies - Special Schools
Rachel Cook (RC)	Newdale Primary School	Maintained Primaries – Central Cluster
Simon Wellman (SW)	Director of Education & Skills	Director of Education & Skills
Tim Davis (TD)	Finance Manager	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.
- Alison Ashley – Kickstart PRU - Academy PRUs.
- Ben Braim – Madeley Nursery School – Maintained Nursery Schools
- Sarah Staniforth – Academies - SS's Peter & Paul RC Primary School.

2. Minutes of the 10th of December 2025 meeting and matters arising - CW.

2.1 The minutes of the 10th of December 2025 were accepted as a true and accurate record. Copies of the minutes can be found here:

[Minutes of 10th December 2025.](#)

2.2 There were no matters arising that would not be covered at this meeting.

3. December 2025 allocations of Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2026/27 - TD

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

[2026/27 DSG Allocations.](#)

Schools Block.

3.2 The schools block allocations were as expected and match the schools census from October 2025. The allocations methodology on which the Forum was consulted has been agreed by the cabinet member for Children & Young People, Learning, Employment & Skills and subject to items in the agenda below will be submitted to the DfE by the 22nd of January.

Central School Services Block (CSSB)

3.3 The final CSSB allocation was similar to the draft allocation. The deployment of this block was agreed at the December 2025 Forum.

High Needs block.

3.4 The high needs block has increased by £2.5 million but this is a result of previously separate grants being brought into the high needs block. Like-for-like, the allocation has not increased from 2025/26.

3.5 A reasonable speculation is that the DfE will announce additional funding to accompany the changes to SEND policy due to be announced in the forthcoming white paper. However, as things stand, the lack of any increase in high needs funding in 2026/27 will further increase high needs financial pressure both in T&W and nationally.

Early Years.

3.6 We have had confirmation of the local authority's hourly funding rates for 2026/27. Further details are provided in the early years paper covered in section seven below.

4. Proposal to transfer schools block funding to high needs in financial year 2026/2027- TD.

4.1 The Forum were provided with a paper which can be seen at the following link:

[Proposal to transfer Schools Block funding to High Needs in 2026/27.](#)

- 4.2 TD summarised the paper and highlighted the acceleration in high needs expenditure in recent years which has led to the cumulative overspend in the DSG.
- 4.3 CL commented that there has been a dramatic increase in the number of children with EHCPs and that some of the pupils with EHCPs would be better supported in specialist provision. SW responded by saying that the LA provide an alternative route for additional funding through the ISF panel and is also intending to increase specialist provision.
- 4.4 CW stated that she believed that it is more cost effective to have a centralized provision rather than all schools trying to manage SEND themselves.
- 4.5 SW stated that the decision is for 2026/27 only and we hope that changes in the forthcoming white paper will mean that we do not need to ask schools for funds in the future.
- 4.6 LA asked what are the implications of a “No” vote. SW responded that discretionary provision would be at risk, such as the Fairshare fund, Outreach, the Inclusive Schools Fund etc.
- 4.7 LA asked if other local authorities are asking for 0.5% transfer and why 0.5%. SW replied, yes, other local authorities are asking and some of those that are being refused then request the DfE to overturn the decision. In the deteriorating financial context nationally, the DfE are now more sympathetic to such requests. TD advised that 0.5% is the maximum transfer can agree locally – above this requires DfE approval. TD also said that the LA would not seek to overturn a ‘no’ vote from the Forum, given that the LA approach is to work in partnership with schools.
- 4.8 JP shared feedback from his cluster who understand the pressures the SEND system is under. One question was could we go for a lower amount of maybe 0.25%. SW stated that we are overspending on the non-statutory areas that the top slice contributed to so a lower amount would put pressure on those areas and would likely see them having to be reduced.
- 4.9 CC stated that schools need to respect the ISF system and not claim when funding is not needed i.e. when support provided has resulted in the pupil’s additional needs reducing.
- 4.10 RC stated that it was frustrating that we don’t have the White Paper to see what the future will bring. There is a possibility that schools will attempt to ensure that they get their ISF share to at least match the amount that they have paid, in which case this could cause expenditure to increase. Schools within Central cluster had mixed views on whether to support the transfer.
- 4.11 SW stated that he had put forward a business case to increase the SEND team from five FTE to seven given the increasing pressures on the team. This had been agreed, with the LA increasing the (non DSG) funding for the team.

- 4.12 ND stated that the special schools appreciate the work of the mainstream schools and fully acknowledge the rising complexity of pupils within the mainstream system.
- 4.13 JE stated that a pupil formerly at her school was recently the subject of a tribunal which resulted in independent specialist provision (ISP) at a cost of almost £100K per annum. SW stated that ISP charges are far too high and need challenging centrally by the DfE.
- 4.14 RC was worried that some pupils in mainstream schools have higher needs than some of those that are within special schools due to the increase in complexity of the needs and that more specialist provision is needed. SW responded that there is a plan to create more places locally – but this of course will come at both a capital and revenue cost, in a situation when high needs DSG is already considerably overspent.
- 4.15 CW called for a vote, and this transfer of 0.5% of the schools block to high needs was agreed unanimously.

5. Arrangements for funding statutory services provided by the Local Authority –De-delegation - TD.

- 5.1 There were papers provided for this agenda item which can be found at the following links:

[Funding Statutory Services for Schools - 2026/27 Central Schools Services Block and De-delegation.](#)

[Annex showing expenditure and descriptions of spend.](#)

[Briefing Note for Schools Forum representatives of maintained schools](#)

- 5.2 TD briefed the group on the papers provided. The papers provided are in part those provided at the last meeting with clarification added where appropriate. The item at this meeting is for the de-delegation element as the CSSB request for funding was approved at the last meeting. This item requires a vote but only for those members that represent LA maintained mainstream schools, as this is requesting funding to be de-delegated back to the LA from funding within the schools' block of the DSG.
- 5.3 The funding being requested is for those services that provide statutory services. Those services often include both a statutory element and a traded element. TD pointed out that the traded element is usually the more visible part of the service.
- 5.4 Schools had raised concerns about the viability of these services due to the decreasing number of LA maintained schools and therefore pupils. TD said that one of the council's ongoing principles was to protect front-line services, such as schools, as far as possible from funding pressures and this was demonstrated in the frozen amount per pupil for de-delegation prior to 2025/26 and the small reduction in the amount per pupil proposed for 2026/27. TD also pointed out that Academy Trusts have to charge their member schools for the costs of central services.

- 5.5 CC/CW both confirmed that they have looked to compare the costs of academies and schools, but this is very difficult to do, given available information.
- 5.6 JP gave feedback from cluster meetings that schools need greater understanding of the impact of funds used and clarity of where spent. CW responded that the Forum now has more clarity than ever before due to the challenging of agenda items over recent years.
- 5.7 CC stated her opinion that we now have a request for the basic, minimum amount due to years of scrutiny. CW stated that as the Schools Forum was a body focussed on finances, discussion around the quality of services might be more appropriate in other meetings, such as Primary Heads Forum.
- 5.8 RC said that after challenge the request has reduced which is good and shows the effectiveness and worth of this Forum.
- 5.9 CC stated that the Forum process is painful but a necessity one.
- 5.10 CW called for a vote, and de-delegation of £30.67 per pupil for LA statutory services was unanimously agreed.

6. De-delegation for Statutory Schools Quality Assurance Services - TD.

- 6.1 The Forum were provided with a paper, previously circulated at the December 2025 Forum, which can be found at the following link:
[De-delegation for Statutory School Quality Assurance Services](#)
- 6.2 As with the previous paper, the request for de-delegation requires a vote from the LA maintained mainstream schools only.
- 6.3 Similar concerns were raised around the reducing numbers of schools and pupils that drives the de-delegation and the resulting financial sustainability of the service.
- 6.4 RC raised concerns about the value for money around staff time. SW stated that the management charge was maybe a misnomer as it also covers direct involvement in the delivery of the service by the individual concerned. SW agreed the area does need more work to look at how the service operates and suggested re-establishing a working group with maintained schools to look at this, similarly to when de-delegation for this service was first introduced.
- 6.5 SW stated that the LA is picking up more costs of the service as schools convert to academy status to ensure that the charge to schools remain the same, per pupil, in real terms (i.e. a proposed 2% increase per pupil for 2026/27).
- 6.6 CW called for a vote and the proposal to de-delegate £11.46 for statutory school quality assurance for maintained schools in 2026/27 was unanimously agreed.

7. Early Years Budget for FY2026/2027 - TD.

7.1 The Forum were presented with a paper which can be found at the following link:

[Early Years Budget for FY2026/2027](#)

7.2 TD summarised the paper which had been presented to the early years finance group the previous Friday for their consultation. The EY finance group supported the proposals in the paper.

7.3 PH stated that the early years settings were under the same pressures as schools especially in the SEND area. The early years team was actively seeking to promote early years as a career path, given the recruitment challenges facing the sector. Following the expansion of funded provision, it now represents a large majority of the PVI sector's business and thus the level of funding is even more important. Historically, surpluses were made in three and four-year-old provision and losses made in the provision for younger children, but for many settings this position has now reversed.

7.4 RC stated that the central retention needed some scrutiny as it was a significant sum. SW responded that team are now doing more work due to the expansion of the provision and costs have increased less than the increase in the workload and the size of the early years block.

7.5 AW pointed out that a large number of local authorities ensured that they took the maximum of 3% from EY as a retention, whereas T&W were only asking for 1.2%, continuing a track record of passing on a very high proportion of early years funding to settings.

7.6 RC stated that in her cluster there are varying views, some schools supportive of the value for money provided by the early years team and others more critical, feeling that it provides little to their schools. PH stated that the team are under pressure due to the increased number of children now within the funding system. They also administer the funding allocations to settings which have of course increased.

7.7 CW called for a vote and the proposed sum of £405,199 for central retention was passed unanimously.

8. AOB - CW.

8.1 There was no further business.

8.2 SW thanked the Forum for their support during his tenure as Director of Education, this being his last meeting.

9. Next Meetings

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

Planned Forum Meetings

- Thursday 19th March 2026
- Thursday 14th May 2026