

SCHOOLS FORUM

Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 16 January 2024 **at 1.00 pm via MS Teams**

Members Present: Sash Hamidi – Exec Headteacher, The Pegasus Partnership Trust (CHAIR)
Nick Waldron – Headteacher, Pinner Park Primary School (VICE CHAIR)
Patrick O'Dwyer – Director of Education
Steven Deanus – Headteacher, Roxeth Primary School
Chris Briggs – Headteacher, St Joseph's Primary School
Louise Browning – Headteacher, Norbury School
David O'Farrell – Headteacher, St Bernadette's Primary School
PK Maselino – Headteacher, The Helix
Paul Gamble – Headteacher, Harrow High School
Simon Arnell – Headteacher, Avanti House Secondary School
Rashid Benserghin – Headteacher, Roxbourne Primary School
Geraldine Higgins – Headteacher, The Sacred Heart Language College
James Rebbitt – Headteacher, Whitmore High School

Officers in Attendance: Jo Frost – Finance Business Partner

SH opened the meeting.

1 Apologies and Order of the Agenda

Sarah Marriott – Headteacher, Pinner Wood Primary School

The order of the agenda was agreed.

2 The minutes of the meeting held on 7 November were agreed.

3 Matters Arising

Academy Rep Vacancy

LB reported that Fiona Hopkins – Headteacher, Heathland School had expressed an interest in being a Schools Forum member. This was unanimously agreed.

The membership will be reviewed to ensure it reflects the October 2023 pupil number proportions and a full list of remaining vacancies will be provided to the Chair

ACTION JF

4 DSG Budget 2024-25

JF introduced the report which set out the updated DSG position for 2024-25.

Schools Block

Schools Forum noted the DSG allocation at Table 1
Schools Forum noted the overall funding formula and indicative distributed funding at Appendix A.
Schools Forum noted the indicative formula derived 2024-25 budgets at school level at Appendix B
and changes between years at Appendix C

Growth Fund

Proposal: Schools Forum is requested to agree a growth fund of £165,311 for a potential primary bulge class and secondary bulge class from September 2024. Schools Forum noted that any unspent growth funding would be carried forward to future years.

Decision: Schools Forum unanimously agreed

Schools Forum noted the final MFG. NW queried whether the rolling in of the MSAG would disadvantage schools in the MFG calculation as including the MSAG already means all schools would receive more per pupil than the previous year. JF explained that the MSAG was excluded from the MFG calculations.

NW pointed out that the MSAG for some schools makes it look like there is a real cash increase however schools were expecting it to continue and therefore it is not a real increase. JF agreed.

PG queried whether the Teachers Pay Additional Grant will be separate to the NFF. JF confirmed this will be the case for the 2024-25 academic year.

High Needs Block

Schools Forum noted the High Needs Block allocation.

JF explained that there was a real cash increase of 2.88% after rolling in the High Needs Additional Grant from the previous financial year which not only has to cover inflationary increases but also growth in demand and complexity of need. Schools Forum commented how inadequate this in the context of the financial HNB challenges that Harrow and other LAs are facing.

Early Years Block

Schools Forum noted the Early Years Block update

5 SEND Funding Proposals 2024-25 – Response to Consultations

JF introduced the report which set out the outcome of the consultations and the LA's responses to the consultations

Funding for EHCPs in mainstream schools

Q1 - JF set out the LA's response to the consultation which is to proceed with the proposal to provide funding increase of 7% to the hourly/banding rate for 2024-25. SH commented that the response

SH noted that the response seemed to be a forgone conclusion and that there was no opportunity for discussion. POD explained that we consult on the proposals that were considered fair in the context of the independent funding review and benchmarking.

POD explained that the proposal is supported by the independent funding review which identified that funding was below average of the comparator group and the increases over 2 years (23/24 and 24/25) would rectify that. POD also explained that the funding review took a broader view about mainstream funding as this is a decision which has an ongoing funding implication that could limit the

flexibility to do what we need to do in making provision and having a sustainable budget. However, we tried to find a reasonable solution in the context of the funding challenges and needs.

NW queried why funding can't be reviewed annually. POD explained that it takes time to see the impact of any funding decision as well as the impact of embedding the updated SEND strategy.

PG commented that schools are facing pressures because of big pay increases for TAs who largely deliver SEN provision in mainstream schools and the 7% increase does not cover that. JF explained that it is not the DfE's expectation that the LA provide inflationary uplifts to match non-teaching staff inflation and as noted in the previous paper the HNB growth is well below inflation.

SH queried whether members were aware of schools' views in respect of the consultation. JF explained that that funding proposals would form part of a larger Cabinet report in respect of council funding for 2024-25. POD also noted that the Portfolio Holder has been directly briefed in respect of the consultation outcome and a summary of the views expressed in responses.

Q2 – JF set out the LA's response to the consultation which is to proceed with the proposal to increase the threshold of the SEND Support Fund to 3%.

SH queried whether the DfE guidance had a notional threshold. JF explained that there was not a fixed % the guidance states 'a minority of schools which have particular challenges because of their disproportionate number of pupils with SEND or high needs'.

NW expressed concern that even schools that will still receive funding from this fund will lose out as they will receive less than they would have received under the previous methodology.

POD noted that there is still expected to be around £570k going into schools through this fund and also noted that the independent funding review made a comment that the allocation of this fund under the current methodology could create a perverse incentive.

Q3 – JF set out the LA's response to the consultation which is to proceed with the proposal to introduce a Band F on the mainstream EHCP matrix. JF reminded Schools Forum that a small working group is required to work with the LA to develop the criteria/descriptor of need for a Band F pupil so that there is clarity about level of provision, funding, timescales etc. JF explained that these pupils are already in mainstream schools and the LA is trying to support schools financially whilst specialist provision is being identified.

NW thanked the LA for recognizing this emerging need but also wanted to gently challenge the language about schools making good quality provision as this will be difficult as mainstream schools do not have the resources and facilities to offer this level of provision to pupils with significant needs.

Funding for ARMS provision in mainstream schools

JF set out the LA's response to the consultation which is to proceed with the proposal to increase banding/top ups by 3.4%.

6 Early Years Funding Proposals 2024-25

JF introduced the report which set out the changes to Early Years funding for 2024-25 which includes changes to funding rates, methodologies, and the expansion of Early Years entitlements.

Schools Forum noted the changes to Early Years Funding
Schools Forum note the expansion of Early Years Entitlements

LB queried whether the new entitlements were funded from the existing programmes. JF confirmed that there was additional funding in the Early Years Block for 2024-25.

There was a discussion about the need to increase participation in EYFSS. POD explained that the picture is the same across London. The LA has done work with providers and families but it has had little impact in increasing 2 Yo participation.

NW queried whether there was capacity in the nursery sector to accommodate a growth in participation. POD explained that the childcare sufficiency assessment indicates that there is enough capacity at this point but we will be mapping demand for the new requirements and Wraparound.

JF confirmed that the consultation will take place for 2 weeks commencing Monday 22 January and encouraged schools with nurseries to respond to the consultation

7 School Roll Projections

JF introduced the report which included the latest Cabinet Report in respect of school roll projections

POD explained that the largest growth area in EHCPs is in early years although the figures in the table don't look to grow year on year just because children are only in this category for 1-2 years so the throughput is high.

LB expressed disappointment that a Cabinet report that deals with school capital programme does not raise or cover the borough wide approach to asbestos and acknowledgement that schools dealing with this are worse off. POD will look into this.

ACTION POD

Any Other Business

Boys of Black Caribbean Heritage Project

LB updated on the BBCH project which Schools Forum had provided funding to support. LB explained that after some time a keyworker had been appointed in May that had worked across some schools but as there was only one worker the scope of the work was very limited and impossible to deliver anything meaningful. The worker has subsequently left and it is an opportunity to review the project and how it might be delivered in an alternative way.

LB asked Schools Forum to consider whether the project is delivered via a charity or whether there is an opportunity to give the funding to Children's Services to increase the Keeping Families Together service or another multiagency approach?

SH and PG agreed to raise at Primary and Secondary Heads respectively. SH thanked LB for the work so far and the clear and honest feedback. POD offered to meet a group of head teachers to discuss support services going forward.

ACTION SH/PG

The meeting closed at 15:00