



## **SCHOOLS FORUM**

### **Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 4 June 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  
Michael Baumring - Headteacher-Kenmore Park Junior School  
Louise Browning – Headteacher, Norbury School  
David O'Farrell – Headteacher, St Bernadette's Primary School  
PK Maselino – Headteacher, The Helix  
Geraldine Higgins – Headteacher, The Sacred Heart Language College

**Officers in Attendance:** Jo Frost – Finance Business Partner  
Pat Harvey – Interim Finance Business Partner and Clerk  
Catherine Milmine – SEN Assessment and Review Service Manager

SH opened the meeting after confirming the meeting was quorate 40% of membership i.e., 7 members.

#### **1 Apologies and Order of the Agenda**

Chris Briggs – Headteacher, St Joseph's Primary School  
Sarah Marriott – Headteacher, Pinner Wood Primary School  
Steven Deanus – Headteacher, Roxeth Primary School  
Cllr Hitesh Karia (Portfolio Holder)

1.1 The order of the agenda was agreed, and SH confirmed there was an AOB.

#### **2 Minutes of the Last Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 January 2024 were agreed.

#### **3 Matters Arising**

##### **3.1 Membership**

JF confirmed the membership reflected the October 2023 pupil census and vacancies were:

- Academy Headteacher
- PVI representative
- 2 Governor vacancies

**ACTION PH**

### 3.2 Capital program and asbestos

POD provided update for members on LB disappointment at last meeting that a Cabinet report dealing with school capital program did not raise or cover the borough wide approach to asbestos and acknowledgement that schools managing this. POD updated and included via Microsoft chat:

*“Asbestos is reported by exceptions to senior managers but not to Members. It is safe practice not to remove asbestos and to maintain as would be laid out in the asbestos risk assessment.”*

Schools Forum noted, and LB requested for asbestos to kept via discussions at appropriate meetings.

### 3.3 Introduction of new Finance Business Partner

JF updated Schools Forum members that she was leaving London Borough of Harrow 7 June and PH would be replacing her. SH thanked JF for her legacy and wished to note a thank you from Schools Forum and heads. POD also sent thanks and noted that she would be missed.

## 4 Update on SEND Strategy

CM presented an update on the SEND Strategy with a presentation to Schools Forum members.

The engagement and feedback timescale period were September 2023 to May 2024 and included Primary and secondary SENCO forum, face to face meetings with parent carer forum, heads and directors. Engagement with Health and Wellbeing Board, Children and Young People's Integration Partnership Board and online survey.

SH enquired who are the respondents. CM updated partners are professionals, health, community voluntary groups, LA officers, parent carers and children and young people.

The 2019-2024 Strategy was reviewed and five priority areas, including working groups and feedback used to develop the strategy with action plans, including timescales.

SH enquired if costing will be included and year(s) and timescales. CM replied no costings due to timespan (i.e., 5 years) and capacity issues, for example land for new Free school had already been purchased.

The draft Strategy will be signed off at Partnership Board 6<sup>th</sup> June, and reports and papers for July Cabinet.

### SENARS update 2024-25

CM presented update on SENARS team.

Recruitment and restructure of team now complete with Jan Bailey, team manager appointed overseeing operational work.

Four additional caseworkers will see caseload reduced and additional Senior professional to create four distinct teams based on age.

New tribunals officer has been appointed and transport officer now in post.

SD enquired if SENARS update had been shared. CM will share details.

**ACTION CM**

SH enquired how this is being funded, i.e., DSG. POD updated from General Fund.

CM updated Schools Forum that works on structure chart, names, and pictures, Jan Bailey will oversee.

## **Band F Funding**

CM presented update on Band F funding.

SH enquired if a referral takes 3-6 months and parent is happy, what happens?

CM commented that this would have to be thought through and each case looked at as a 'child-by-child case'.

DOF commented that funding for Occupational Therapists, and SALT doesn't impact on some children with EHCPs, and schools support several children by buying additional support themselves. Schools Forum noted.

NW enquired if there is a list of children due for an Annual Review (AR) April/May. CM replied that SENCO's have asked the same question, and currently looking if there is a workable way to enable this, but the AR decision comes to panel for the collective decision.

NW commented that the list of AR's and names before April would be useful.

CM updated Schools Forum that EHCP's are updated after Annual Reviews and amendment process is sensible.

SH enquired if any Band F funding will be backdated to April 2024. CM commented that any children prior to April 2024 Annual Review or emergency Annual Review will be part of the process. Estimated 50-60 children known.

SH commented if children waiting for a special place should be automatic. CM replied the Annual Review is the process.

SH enquired on the new Free School September 2025 and set up process. CM updated Schools Forum 25<sup>th</sup> June for prospective Trusts. ESFA appoint the Trust in autumn term and 5-year plan on places. Sufficiency meetings will be held 2 weekly.

Schools Forum thanked CM for her hard work.

## **5 DSG Outturn 2023-24**

JF introduced the report which set out the DSG outturn for 2023-24.

Schools Forum noted total DSG received by the local authority after recoupment is £152.275m and outturn was deficit £1.159m for 2023-24.

## **Central School Services Block (CSSB)**

Schools Forum noted CSSB outturn was an underspend £0.277m due to underspend on Teachers Pay and Pension Grant (TPPG) allocations £0.032m, School Effectiveness and Early Years Service savings £0.191m due to vacancies and earmarked provision for ESOL not required £0.054m.

## **Early Years Block**

Schools Forum noted an underspend of £0.722m, however noted a 'claw back' is expected in July due to estimated early years original funding allocation being based upon estimated spring census and adjusted for final actual spring census.

Schools Forum asked, is there less children in borough? POD updated that there is a decline in children, but businesses are currently managing this.

### **High Needs Block (HNB)**

Schools Forum noted an overspend of £2.315m.

Schools Forum noted HNB overall spend has increased by nearly 20% (nearly £8m) compared to previous year.

Schools Forum noted EHCPs growth of over 300 plans between January 2023 and January 2024. Schools Forum noted in borough capacity is limited and reliance is on Out of Borough (OOB) or Independent and Non-Maintained Special Schools (INMSS) that is more expensive, example cost Kingsley place £35k to £60k, whereas INMSS c£80k place.

Schools Forum noted HN deficit is growing with only 3% increase in funding each year with significant area of spend, 40 INMSS included and only 7/12ths of expenditure in 2023-24. Estimate deficit is c£10m.

SH asked about Sensory team budget and POD confirmed this budget supports children and young people who have a hearing impairment (HI), physical disability, multi-sensory impairment or visual impairment (VI). SH enquired what the DSG contribution is, and POD confirmed General Fund supports the Children Sensory team who provide support and access to services including Education Psychology.

### **Growth Fund**

Schools Forum noted underspend of £0.141m and £0.300m included in growth budget due to trigger in EHCP census growth from October to May census.

### **Final Contingency 2022-23**

Schools Forum noted revised balance 2023-24 is £2.193m less earmarked commitments for 2024-25 £0.851m, providing a transfer to DSG deficit reserve £1.342m.

### **DSG Deficits**

Schools Forum noted an additional £2.482m added to cumulative HNB deficit 2023-24 and final cumulative deficit closing at 31 March 2024 £2.580m.

SD asked what does that mean to Harrow? JF updated with approximately 33-35 local authorities currently on a DfE Safety Valve Program with growing pressures and high deficits. County Councils are facing a growing scale of imaginary expenditure.

POD updated Schools Forum of a Financial Challenge meeting with DfE officers who asked what steps Harrow could take to mitigate pressures because apart from SEND Strategy, opening a new Free school, growing ARMS/units in schools, and what other mitigation could be addressed. SD enquired if Harrow are missing out on something due to local authorities' overspending on HNB and no doubt will eventually be assisted by DfE, yet Harrow are attempting to manage the pressures.

POD encouraged Schools Forum members - to consider if other additional activities could help mitigate these pressures.

## 6 Reducing Exclusions Project

LB provided a verbal update on the Reducing Exclusions Project.

Exclusions project is a tutoring project with emphasis on tutoring including therapists, Educational Psychologists.

Success story is currently 8 pupils ready to sit GCSE's.

How – 1-1 tutoring, with buy in from the family, children and therapeutic aspect to the program.

Family therapy is easier to involve and manage.

Program is 6-8 weeks that includes tutoring, CAMHS, mentoring and buy in from schools.

Mary-Ann (previously worked in Brent) has timetabled:

- 4 year 7 pupils
- 4 year 8 pupils and
- 4 year 10 pupils with a cost of £9,600 per term (same cost as providers)

Program is also to train staff and continue as a rolling program.

Challenge – school led with some pupils previously excluded and a new face on the program, managed moves applicable to some pupils.

Evidence is frustration due to not enough provision and low take up year 10/11

Primary Pilot of 2 schools, with early years involvement, family therapist (Life chances)

MB commented that £18k for 9 children in term, £2k per child is expensive. LB commented that exclusion costs is similar, if not more expensive. The program is an intense program of therapy mentoring, martial arts, responsibility hands and feet, tell the story and baseline.

GH enquired who the company was – LB replied LT99.

SH commented on a possibility of part time AP project, but this would involve specialist AP professionals covering a wider spectrum in AP.

GH commented on White Friars team providing a similar program with same amount of funding about £0.250m.

Schools Forum thanked LB and noted that invitation should be sent to Primary heads.

### **ACTION POD**

### **AOB**

DOF updated members on communication around Inner London Funding and teachers pay costs with pressures on schools with recruitment and retention of staff. Gareth Thomas and Paul Cosworth (leader) are interested and David Hammons (MP) on this issue. Heads are keen for communication to be shared.

Schools Forum noted.

**Meeting ended 14.26pm**

**Date of next meeting: 10 September 2024**