

## Schools Forum

**Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday, 18 January 2022 at 4.00 pm**  
**Digital Meeting via Microsoft Teams**

### Schools Forum Members Present:

Mr M. Vlahakis	Primary Head Teacher, Cadmus Family of schools
Mrs C. Draper	Primary Head Teacher, Short Heath Federation
Mrs J. Garratt	Primary Head Teacher, Walsall Wood
Mr S. Davies	Primary Head Teacher, Christ Church CE (C) JMI School
Mr M. Moody	Primary Academy Representative, Goldsmiths and Rivers Academies
Mrs S. Bowen	Secondary Maintained Head Teacher, St. Thomas More Catholic School
Mr A. Seager	Secondary Academy Head Teacher, Bloxwich Academy
Mrs L. Foster	Primary Governor, Short Heath Federation
Mr M. Fox	Primary Governor, Kings Hill Primary
Mr I. Baker	Secondary Academy Governor, Grace Academy
Mrs C. Fraser	Special School Head Teacher, Castle Business and Enterprise College
Mrs E. Phillips	Academy Special School, Phoenix Academy
Mr C. Bury	Principal, The Ladders School, Alternative Provision
Mr T. Hopkins	PVI Representative
Mr S. Pritchard-Jones	Pupil Referral Unit representative

### Officers Present:

Mrs S. Rowe – Executive Director of Children's Services  
Ms J. Nash – Interim Head of SEND  
Mr R. Thomas – Head of Access  
Mr R. Walley – Technical Accounting, Treasury Management & Education Finance Manager  
Mr L. Haynes – Deputy Head of Finance - Corporate  
Mr N. Picken – Principal Democratic Services Officer

### Observer Present:

Councillor C. Towe	Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Education and Skills
Sharon Guy	
Mrs Kate Bargh	North Star Federation

		Action
<b>1.</b> <b>18.01.22</b>	<b>Welcome</b>  The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and explaining and rules of procedure and legal context in which the meeting was being held. He also directed members of the public viewing the meeting to the papers, which could be	

	<p>found on the Council's Committee Management Information System (CMIS) webpage.</p> <p>Members confirmed they could both see and hear the proceedings.</p>	
<p><b>2.</b> <b>18.01.22</b></p>	<p><b>Apologies</b></p> <p>Apologies for absence had been received from Mr A. Orlik, Mrs S. Kelly, Ms M. Turley, Mr W. Downie and Mrs H. Keenan.</p>	
<p><b>3.</b> <b>18.01.22</b></p>	<p><b>Minutes – 7 December, 2021</b></p> <p>The Schools Forum received the Minutes of the meeting held on 7 December, 2021 (see annexed).</p> <p>Councillor Towe requested that his name be included within the list of apologies.</p> <p>The Chair put the recommendation to the vote and it was:</p> <p><b>Resolved:</b></p> <p>That the Minutes of the meeting held on 7 December, 2021, a copy having been previously circulated to each Member of Schools Forum, be approved and signed as a true record subject to the inclusion of Councillor Towe within the list of apologies.</p>	Noted
<p><b>4.</b> <b>18.01.22</b></p>	<p><b>Matters Arising from the Minutes of 7 December, 2021</b></p> <p>Mrs Draper clarified that the work on Autism Outreach Development, mentioned in items 7 &amp; 8 of the Minutes as submitted, was undertaken by the Children and Young Peoples Autism Early Intervention Project Group.</p>	
<p><b>5.</b> <b>18.01.22</b></p>	<p><b>Late Item/s (urgent) to be introduced by the Chair</b></p> <p>Substitutes at Schools Forum – requested by Helen Keenan</p> <p><b>High Needs Funding Working Group</b></p> <p>Cathy Draper reported that the Working Group had been re-established and would continue to meet frequently until the summer term. It was suggested that this item be included on the Forward Plan.</p>	<p>Neil Picken to provide report to March meeting.</p> <p>Neil Picken to include on Forward Plan.</p>

<p><b>6.</b> <b>18.01.22</b></p>	<p><b>Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)</b></p> <p>The Schools Forum noted that there were no items for consideration in the private session.</p>	
<p><b>7.</b> <b>18.01.22</b></p>	<p><b>Update on the SEND Local Area Improvement Programme and EHCPs – enclosed</b></p> <p>The Forum considered a report on the SEND Local Area Improvement Programme and EHCP's. It was requested that the Stock Take information be circulated as it was corrupt within the papers circulated. It was also asked why the embedded elements had disappeared.</p> <p>In relation to the compliance update, it was asked whether the goal of 60% of EHCP's in January, 2022 being issued within 20 weeks, was achievable. The Interim Head of SEND confirmed that the goal to achieve this was by 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2022. This would be achievable as the team's way of working had been transformed. Casework was 1 child, 1 case officer but work to break down tasks involved in each case and a team based approach adopted. This included focussed tasks, specific roles and timeframes for completion which were monitored on a weekly basis. This had improved performance during January, 2022 and the aim was to clear the backlog by 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2022.</p> <p>This progress was acknowledged but assurance sought that improvements were sustainable in the long term. It was also asked whether the quality of Plans would be captured. The Interim Head of SEND advised that a working group would commence in coming weeks and would review the quality and purposefulness of the Plans. The template would also be reviewed and redesigned with input from schools, parents and other stakeholders. A new Quality Assurance framework had also been established based on EHC journeys which went much deeper than previous frameworks.</p> <p>In terms of specialist provision, SEND sufficiency, it was asked whether there were any timelines for the review to be completed. The Interim Head of SEND advised that she would seek clarity and provide this information to Schools Forum Members. Mrs Draper advised that she and Kate Bargh, Head of North Star Federation were working on a 6 month part time secondment to the local authority to develop this. The Specialist Provision Review Group was due to commence again week commencing 24<sup>th</sup> January, 2022 and timetabled to meet every 3 weeks thereafter. Work commenced prior to Christmas 2021 to revise and update the action plan which was now complete. There were a number of work streams, many of which had commenced. It was clear that there were urgent needs</p>	<p>Judith to seek clarity from Sharon Kelly and re circulate/respond.</p> <p>Judith to circulate information.</p>

	<p>for September and the short, medium and long term but assurance was given that improvements should be seen quickly over the current term, into the summer term and beyond.</p> <p>Clarity was sought on how the process had changed to that of a previous review. Mrs Draper confirmed that this review follows on from that review as it was undertaken some time ago. It was important to establish what the needs were in Walsall, places available in special schools and specialist provisions and then looking at the gap. The review was now at the planning stage as to how to address this. She clarified that it was moving on at pace and suggested that Schools Forum should be updated at every meeting, as part of the SEN update.</p> <p>Discussion moved onto the Local Offer (which was no longer) during which it was asked whether there had been any feedback on this from schools or parents. The Interim Head of SEND explained that the Local Offer would come as part of Milestone 5 which was part of the transformation stage. Once the recovery had been tackled and overcome the backlog there would be more time and scope to be more transformational. Other authorities which had won awards for their local offer would also be reviewed in order to learn from best practice. It was asked why many elements were green and purple if there was still a lot of work to complete. The Interim Head of SEND stated that a number of improvements had been made and the authority were at the good stage of 'good to great to aspirational' whilst noting that there was always room for improvement. It was confirmed that a part of the project was to taking the project to transformation. Part 1 is about achieving pathways and part 2 is transforming EHCP pathways.</p> <p>Mr Seager referred to special school places and demand and asked whether information was available in relation to spaces available. Cathy Draper confirmed that this formed part of the work of the Special Provision Review Group. The number of EHCP's were known and modelling was being used to predict future demand. Mr Seager requested sight of the data as it was useful for Heads to be informed. Mrs Draper agreed that it was important and highlighted that the Specialist Provision Review Group Membership included all special school heads, other settings such as Pupil Referral Units and short stay schools plus primary and secondary representation and so this was the vehicle for feedback. Simon Rogers, as the secondary representative would have access to the information and feedback. Mrs Draper explained that the current level of provision was known but acknowledged that there were insufficient places available. Mrs Draper agreed to provide an update on the progress of the SPRG at next meeting.</p>	<p>Clerk to include as standing item.</p> <p>To be included within future SEN update reports.</p>
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	<p>Mr Seager referred to the shortage of Educational Psychologists and queried whether the team were now fully staffed. The Interim Head of SEND explained that locums were being used to ensure that the team was at full capacity. To support the recovery project 4 additional Educational Psychologist would be appointed to complete this project by 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2022.</p> <p>The Chair referred to 2 federations which offer an advisory role that could help with reducing the EHCP backlog and offered to arrange a meeting to discuss this. The Interim Head of SEND welcomed the invitation.</p> <p>The number of F4 forms being sent into schools was discussed. Mr Seager stated that these often related to the same children that Senco are working hours on and asked how the number of forms could be reduced. He explained that 5 schools had received forms for the same child which generated a lot of work. The Interim Head of SEND explained that she intended to discuss this with the Head Teacher Working Group as she understood it was a time consuming exercise for all. Any review would need to have regard to the legalities and code of practice which sets out the authorities statutory duties in terms of notifications. It was accepted that this could be undertaken in a more efficient way at an earlier stage. Mr Seager asked whether anything could be implemented in the interim whilst the review was undertaken suggesting a communication to all schools. The Interim Head of SEND agreed to speak with the team and advise Schools Forum.</p> <p>Mrs Draper acknowledged progress made on the stock take but noted that there was no information in relation to the quality on any of the areas. Referring to the Local offer, feedback had been received from FACE that there was some concern. There remained some issues with co-production and EHCP timeliness. These needed to be addressed as it was likely that SEND would have an inspection within the next month. Referring to the dashboard for timeliness and annual reviews Mrs Draper asked whether more recent data was available. The Interim Head of SEND confirmed that figures from December were available.</p> <p>Mrs Draper referred back to the earlier discussion on Educational Psychologists noting that the provision intended for the Spring Term now had to stretch to the Summer term meaning less sessions in school this academic year. This was due to Educational Psychologists focus being moved to EHCP timeliness. The impact included difficulty in predicting high needs funding and reports not being provided to schools in a timely manner.</p>	<p>Judith to speak to team</p>
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	<p>A discussion followed on recruitment and retention of Educational Psychologists. It was explained that appointing Educational Psychologists Assistants was being considered. The Interim Head of SEND explained that whilst use of Locums was required as the Authority was in middle of a recovery process, a recruitment drive for permanent staff would be carried out once the backlog had been cleared.</p> <p>The Chair commented that some years ago Academies had offered the concept of having their own Educational Psychologists as a larger group of schools, which would offer a different working environment and help retention. He asked whether this may be something the LA would consider. The Interim Head of SEND agreed to discuss this with the Director for Access and Inclusion.</p> <p>Mr Bury sought clarity that the target to complete EHCP's was 60% - 80%. The Interim Head of SEND clarified that the timeliness target was 60% and that the national average is 56%. Mr Bury stated that last year this target was only achieved this for 3 months of a year. Whilst he understood that the national average was 56%, this still wasn't good and he questioned whether the bar of 60% was too low. The Interim Head of SEND explained that ECHP plans spanned a number of teams and professionals, which could explain the national target of 56%. All processes have been reviewed internally to improve performance and work would be carried out with other contributors/agencies to continue to improve. Mr Bury accepted the complications but expressed concern that targets were not being met, despite it being 2 years since the Inspection.</p> <p>The Chair stated that there were some advisory reports that had been accepted as part of EHCP's and suggested a meeting with Kate Bargh and the Interim Head of SEND to speed up processes.</p> <p>Mrs Draper referred to pathways - milestone 1 and stated that it would be useful to have this circulated to school along with a family tree of staff, as there was confusion amongst schools with regard to who to contact. The Interim Head of SEND explained that she intended to provide briefings to schools in February, 2022.</p> <p>In closing, the Chair referred to milestone 3 which noted that 750 missing annual review papers and asked why this was the case. The Interim Head of SEND stated that this related to schools and other agencies. There was a backlog of circa 1000 and a part of that are children that haven't had review papers sent from school. Without this paperwork, a review</p>	<p>Judith to speak to Director (A &amp; I)</p> <p>Chair to arrange mtg.</p> <p>Judith to arrange briefings with schools in February, 2022.</p>
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	<p>cannot start. This process needed to be reviewed as some Local Authorities don't have review papers.</p> <p><b>Resolved</b></p> <p>That the update be noted.</p>	
<p><b>8. 18.01.22</b></p>	<p><b>Final Mainstream School Funding Formula for 2022/23 – enclosed</b></p> <p>At the request of the Chair, Mr Walley Technical Accounting, Treasury Management &amp; Education Finance Manager provided an overview of changes to funding factor values.</p> <p>Mrs Draper reminded colleagues that it had previously been agreed that when the budget share was known for the coming year, the funding formula working group would be re-established. This would assist when setting 3 year budgets. The Chair sought clarity as to when the outcome of the government consultation was due. Mr Haynes, Deputy Head of Finance (Corporate) confirmed that the working group should be re-established once the allocations were understood and also the outcome of the governments consultation on finalising the implementation of the national funding formula. This had not yet been received but was expected imminently. It would be prudent to await the outcome before convening a meeting of the working group, which would be reconstituted with the same membership as previously agreed.</p> <p><b>Resolved</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To note the overall level of DSG funding.</li> <li>2. To note the funding factor values for 2022/23 to ensure that allocations to mainstream schools via the local funding formula are affordable within the funding that is available (updated values are set out at Appendix A).</li> <li>3. To endorse and recommend the formula (as set out at Appendix A), including the changes to funding factor values set out within the report, to the Director of Children's Services, the portfolio holder for Education and Skills, and the ESFA.</li> </ol>	<p>Lloyd to convene working group when the outcome of government consultation received.</p>
<p><b>9. 18.01.22</b></p>	<p><b>Approval of Central Expenditure Budgets for 2022/23</b></p> <p>At the request of the Chair, Mr Walley Technical Accounting, Treasury Management &amp; Education Finance Manager provided an overview of the report.</p>	

	<p>Mr Hopkins commented that it was helpful that in terms of central early years expenditure it was welcomed that the Authority had not chosen to retain the full 5%, which is the maximum allowed to be kept. This will ensure that more money goes into the direct hourly rate for those children in receipt of 2, 3 and 4 year old funding. Mr Haynes confirmed that this had been the consistent approach since the National Early Years Funding Formula came into play. This was to ensure that maximum funding to frontline providers.</p> <p><b>Resolved</b></p> <p>That tables 1 and 2, as set out in the report as submitted, to form the basis for central expenditure for the 2022/23 financial year.</p>	
10. 18.01.22	<p><b>Correspondence</b></p> <p>None</p>	
11. 18.01.22	<p><b>Forward Plan</b></p> <p><b>Resolved:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. That the following items be included within the Forward Plan:- <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. High Needs Funding Updates;</li> <li>b. Feedback from the Funding Formula Working Group; and</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. That the Forward Plan be noted.</li> </ol>	Neil Picken
12. 18.01.22	<p><b>Late Items</b></p> <p>There were no late items for consideration.</p>	
13. 18.01.22	<p><b>Date and Time of future meetings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9 March 2022 at 4.00 pm (It was agreed that the date of this meeting be changed from 8 March due to another meeting being scheduled for that date/time and it only being possible to live stream one meeting.)</li> <li>• 21 June 2022 at 4.00 pm</li> </ul>	

The meeting terminated at 5.23 pm.



Signed .....

Date: .....