

Minutes of Cheshire West and Chester Schools' Forum, virtual meeting, on 12 February 2024 - approved at the 16 July Forum

Members	Representing	Attendance
Schools and Academies		
Jan Diamond	Primary headteachers	Apologies
Kerry Forrester	Primary headteachers	Substitute
Nicky Dowling	Primary headteachers	Attended
Kate Docherty	Primary headteachers	Attended
Beth Hacking	Primary headteachers	Absent
Vacancy	Primary headteachers	Vacancy
Sharon Broughton	Primary governors	Absent
Lisa Rigby	Primary governors	Absent
Nick Lacey	Primary governors	Attended
Vacancy	Primary governors	Vacancy
David Curry	Secondary headteachers	Attended
David Rowlands (Vice Chair)	Secondary governors	Attended
Vacancy	Secondary governors	Absent
Neil Oxley	Special headteachers	Apologies
Judith McGuinness	Special headteachers	Substitute
Philip Hopwood	Special governors	Attended
Andy Stewart	PRU	Attended
Deborah Beaumont	Academies - mainstream	Apologies
Simon Faircloth	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Darran Jones	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Duncan Haworth (Chair)	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Cathryn McKeagney	Academies - mainstream	Apologies
Karen Vitalis	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Vacancy	Academies - mainstream	Vacancy
Vacancy	Academies - mainstream	Vacancy
Michelle Duval	Academies - special	Apologies
Emma Leach	Academies - special	Substitute
Non Schools		
Natasha Kirkwood	PVI early years providers	Apologies
Vacancy	PVI early years providers	Vacancy
Kathryn Magiera	Diocese	Absent
Caroline Vile	Diocese	Absent
Greg Foster	Unions	Absent
Geoff Wright	Unions	Absent
Ian Devereux Roberts	CWAPH	Apologies
Vacancy	16-19 providers	Vacancy
Official Observers		
Councillor Adam Langan	Cabinet Member Children & Families	Attended
	Education Skills & Funding Agency	Absent
Invited Observer		
Councillor Lynn Stocks	Shadow Cabinet Member for Children and Families	Apologies
Officers in attendance		
Andrew Brindley	Senior Finance Manager	
Debbie Edwards	Head of Education and Inclusion	

Charlotte Fenn
Sarah Lister
Lynsey Taylor

Clerk
Early Years Foundation Stage Manager
Finance Manager

1. Introductions and apologies

Duncan Haworth informed Forum that the meeting was being recorded.

Apologies were noted.

Duncan reported the following update to Forum membership: -

Natasha Kirkwood - new PVI representative.

2. Minutes and matters arising of last meeting

2.1 To agree the minutes from the meeting held 16 January 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 January 2024 were agreed as a correct record.

2.2 Matters arising

None to report.

3. Early Years Funding for 2024-2025

Andrew Brindley introduced the report which provided Schools' Forum with a summary of the changes to the local early years' funding formulae for 2024-2025.

Andrew drew Forums attention to the early years entitlements for 2024-2025 outlined in paragraph 7 and the main changes outlined in paragraph 9. It was noted that the new early years' supplementary grant had been rolled into the formula along with the Early Years Teachers Pay Additional Grant.

Andrew drew Forums attention to the increase in the Early Years hourly rate for CW&C and the new funding for 9 months to 2-year-olds. Andrew reminded Forum that the early years funding block of £37.76m was an indicative allocation based on the 2023 census and would be updated in July 2024.

Forum members' attention was drawn to appendix A which detailed the proposed changes to the local early years' funding formulae for 2024-2025.

Andrew explained that although the 2-year-olds rate looked like it had gone down, for 2024-2025 funding had been allocated across the different supplements as well. It was also noted that the SEN inclusion fund had been reduced; in 2023-2024 £200k funding had been allocated from the High Needs block to Early Years, for 2024-2025 it had been decided to fund children with EHCPs direct from the High Needs block. A contingency fund of £115k had been set aside as the figures for 2-year-old and under 2s were an estimate

from the DfE and subject to change. It was also noted that the rates quoted for 9 months to 2-year-olds were similar and competitive of other authorities.

Andrew drew Forum's attention to appendix B which provided the local authority's compliance with the 95% pass-through requirements calculation for 2024-2025. More funding had been put through the 3- and 4-year-olds formula to meet needs. Andrew highlighted the increase in central services funding of £87k to fund local authority staffing requirements and additional costs associated with the implementation and extension of the new early years' provisions from April 2024.

Andrew also informed Forum that it was officer's intention to notify providers of the funding rates for 2024-2025 after the Forum meeting this week.

David Rowlands asked how many extra staff the £87k would fund. In response Andrew confirmed it would fund two staff at different levels including oncosts.

Resolved that Schools' Forum

- i. endorsed the base rate funding for 2024-25; and
- ii. approved the central services spend of £930,000 (vote: unanimous)

4. Arrangements for funding from the High Needs Block 2024-2025

Andrew introduced the report which updated Schools Forum on proposed arrangements for allocations from the High Needs Block for 2024-2025.

Andrew took Forum through the report and added that the intention was for High Needs budget allocation notifications to schools to be done by the end of February in advance of the statutory date, end of March, quoted in the paper.

Judith McGuinness brought to Forum's attention that the place numbers (paragraph 6) were incorrect for the academic year 2024-2025 and were higher in special schools than the stated commissioned places and agreed to pass on what data she had to Andrew.

Judith explained that pupil numbers were over the PAN and by not increasing the PAN they were not getting the place value (£10k) for the extra pupils. Judith also stated, on behalf of Special Heads, that although Heads had said they could not meet need they had been instructed, on several occasions, to take the pupils adding additional pressure on the school. Judith also stated that place value funding had not increased for a long time and there were various other factors that had impacted on special school's finances including increase in pay. Judith cited her school with 70 teaching assistants and the resulting massive pay increase. Judith added that a number of special schools were going into deficit this year, the number of referrals and requests for placements this year had been phenomenal, needs were much more complex and took a lot of support and funding, and it was getting increasingly difficult to manage needs and budget.

Judith acknowledged the difficulties mainstream schools were having with SEN pupils but wanted to share the position from the perspective of special schools.

Judith stated that her school had 10 extra pupils and was aware of another school that had 17 over and one school had been instructed to take 23 year 7 SEMH pupils which was also unsafe.

Andrew acknowledged that special schools were taking pupils above their commissioned places but would receive additional top-up funding depending on the number over PAN and relevant top-up banding rate.

Judith explained that only receiving the top-up does not assist when trying to budget for additional pupils and cited an example of the £11k top-up funding for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties not covering the additional support and equipment required to meet their level of need.

Judith added that they used to get a little bit of funding from Health towards their medical needs, but Health budgets were stretched as well and their criteria was now so high they didn't meet it.

Philip Hopwood supported Judith's comments and added that from a Governor's perspective his school had been operating at up to 10 over PAN for a number of years and don't get the additional place funding which put a strain on the pupil to staff ratio and generated lower learning outcomes and worse behaviours. This was a systemic problem with how special schools were funded.

Philip also commented on the wider aspects and on special schools being consulted on other provision such as residential that supported the school and were 'cutting our cloth far too close to the bone' to be able to support the needs of pupils and should expect significantly lower outcomes in the future. This was one element of a warning Philip wanted to support as a governing body faced with decisions brought to them by the headteacher and having to make choices around supporting the headteacher against the local authority or supporting changes in school that were putting at risk some of the pupils' outcomes.

Emma Leach supported the comments made by Philip and Judith and added that historically special schools had been able to help out and go the extra mile but now all special schools were massively over PAN and were putting at risk pupils and their education. Emma raised her concerns over health and safety, which was not being taken into consideration when going over PAN, and getting children out in the event of a fire due to their complex needs and felt it was getting very dangerous.

Andy Stewart supported the comments and added that the situation was the same in PRU, his was currently 19 over PAN, essential 50 percent over.

David Rowlands commented that Forum should endorse the comments for better funding of special schools, Philip Hopwood felt they should take it further and recommend where there was consistent over demand for pupils going into specific schools, they should receive the funding for that demand rather than a place and top-up system.

Duncan sought clarification from Andrew Brindley as to where stood in terms of the ability to change the funding formula.

Andrew agreed to take away the responses and asked colleagues to email him so he could review each case.

Judith added that it was only fair that they got the place value for all the pupils, they were going above and beyond but were not in a safe position.

In response to the comments, Debbie Edwards stated that they had recently started working with a consultant who had written papers for the DfE on how best to spend the High Needs budget and had been looking at best practice across the country. Officers recognised there were challenges around budgets and were engaging with her expertise on how best to amend systems and redress the issues.

Philip Hopwood challenged Debbie's comments as there was already a mechanism to deal with it in place funding under the existing formula, just needed to recognise that they were placing pupils in schools above the number they were set at and moving that number would alleviate the problem. Philip also commented that the lead time on the consultant's report and implementation could be up to 18 months before resolution, but the pain was now and there was already a mechanism to address it.

David Rowlands commented that it was not acceptable that youngsters were potentially unsafe and when dealing with disadvantaged children it couldn't be right that we were hampering them from reaching a limited potential.

Resolved that Schools Forum ask Officers to note the comments and views on special school funding noted in the minutes.

5. Schools Financial Value Standard 2023-2024

Lynsey Taylor introduced the report which was for information only and to remind schools that the SFVS was to be submitted by 31 March 2024. It was noted that the report included key findings from last year's SFVS audit.

Resolved that Schools Forum note the report and the submission date.

6. Any Other Business

None to report.

7. Next meeting

Next Schools Forum meeting Tuesday 2 July 2024.