

REDCAR & CLEVELAND SCHOOLS' FORUM

MINUTES OF A VIRTUAL MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 4 FEBRUARY 2025 AT 3:00PM THROUGH MICROSOFT TEAMS

MEMBERS PRESENT:

SCHOOL REPRESENTATIVES	
Maintained Primary School Headteachers' Representative	Miss T Cooper
Maintained Special School Representative	Mr P McLean, Kirkleatham Hall School (Chair)
Maintained School Governors' Representative	Mr M Bloomfield, Belmont Primary School (in part)
ACADEMY REPRESENTATIVES	
Ironstone Academy Trust	Mrs A O'Gara
Nicholas Postgate Catholic Academy Trust	Miss S Williams
Skelton Primary School	Ms S Walker (in part)
Special Academies: Mo Mowlam Academy	Miss R Glover (Vice Chair)
Tees Valley Collaborative Trust	Mr C Glover
Tees Valley Education	Ms A Kell
LOCAL AUTHORITY ELECTED MEMBER	
LA Elected Member	Councillor B Suthers
TRADE UNIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS REPRESENTATIVE	
NEU	Mr J Myers
NON-SCHOOL REPRESENTATIVES	
PVI Sector (Early Years)	Dr J Hawthorne
16-19 Representative	Mr J Faulkner, Redcar College
NON-MEMBERS/OFFICERS	
Assistant Director for Education and Skills	Ms C Mahoney
Directorate Accountant	Mrs E Laird
Accountant	Mr A Robson
Lead for Achievement	Mrs J Ratcliffe
ALSO PRESENT:	
Clerk to Schools' Forum	Mrs A Douglas, Governance Support Service
Observers	Mr N Luke (Governance Support Service), Ms L Williams (Spark Education Trust), Mrs R Miller (Ironstone Academy Trust), Mr R Anderson (KTS Academy) (in part) and Mrs S Mckirdy (Families Information Service)

The meeting started at 3:00pm. The required quorum was met at all times.

		ACTION
1.	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE	
1.1	Apologies had been submitted in advance of the meeting from Mr L Beaumont.	Clerk
1.2	<p>RESOLVED to consent to the absence of the above-named member.</p> <p><i>To facilitate the attendance of the maintained primary schools' Headteacher representative, the published agenda was reorganised in the following way.</i></p>	
5.	REPORT RECOMMENDING ALLOCATIONS OF THE DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT FOR 2025-26	
5.1	<p>Purpose</p> <p>To inform Schools' Forum of the proposed use of the dedicated schools grant (DSG) in 2025-26 via an update on the four funding blocks, and to seek approvals, where required, for the use of the funding. A briefing paper had been circulated to members of Schools' Forum in advance of the meeting to inform decision-making.</p>	
5.2	Discussion/Challenge	
5.2.1	<p>The DSG was the main source of government funding for the provision of education services by local authorities (LAs) and other institutions and was divided into four notional blocks: the schools block, the high needs block, the central school services block (CSSB) and the early years block. Each of the four blocks of the DSG was determined by a separate National Funding Formula (NFF).</p> <p><u>Schools Block (for information)</u></p>	
5.2.2	<p>The schools block funding for 2025-26, issued to the LA under the NFF gave a total allocation, based on information in the October 2024 census of £120.190m (compared to the 2023-24 allocation of £112.917m). This allocation was based on pupil numbers, as detailed in the briefing paper, from the October 2023 census.</p>	
5.2.3	<p>Schools' Forum had agreed in 2018-19 to adopt the compulsory factors and values in the NFF including the optional factors for rates and PFI funding. The relevant NFF changes from 2024-25 were outlined:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rolling the 2024 to 2025 teachers' pay additional grant (TPAG), the teachers' pensions employer contribution grant (TPECG) 2024, and the core schools budget grant (CSBG) into the NFF. The methodology for the CSBG was the same, however this grant was annualised as it was from September 2024 only. 	

		ACTION
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increasing the NFF factor values, as detailed in Appendix A of the briefing paper. The headline rate of increase was 8% on the age weighted pupil unit (AWPU) and the lump sum, and 29% on 'Ever6' (FSM6). However, once the range of grants had been included, the actual increase in factors would be 0.5%. - LAs had the freedom to set the minimum funding guarantee (MFG) in their local formulae between -0.5% and +0.0% per pupil. 	
5.2.4	<p>Falling rolls funding would compensate schools where school capacity survey (SCAP) 2022 data showed that the school places would be required in the subsequent three to five years. However, this would not impact any school in Redcar and Cleveland, as the projected growth rates indicated that numbers of primary places in the borough would decrease. Growth funding had been provided in the allocation at £186,965 which would be fully utilised in the 2025-26 academic year.</p> <p><i>Ms S Walker joined the meeting.</i></p>	
5.2.5	<p>Applying the national formula factors to the October 2024 census figures would have created a funding deficit of £658,131 before the 0.5% transfer to the high needs block. Four primary schools did not meet the minimum per pupil funding floor and therefore would attract funding to top up to the national funding rate of £4,995. In October 2024, Schools' Forum had approved the transfer of 0.5% of the schools' block. This was calculated as £600,949 from the schools' block to the high needs block in 2024-25, creating an overall gap of £1,259,080.</p>	
5.2.6	<p>To ensure the affordability of the transfer there were very few options whilst remaining within the NFF:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cap schools that made the largest gains, - Reduce the MFG to -0.5%, - Reduce the basic entitlement per pupil (AWPU) to affect variable funding rates, - Reduce the lump sum per school to affect fixed funding rates. 	
5.2.7	<p>The LA had modelled the impact of reducing the AWPU to the lowest allowable level by the Department for Education (DfE) which was 97.5% of the factor. The LA had also modelled the impact of reducing the lump sum to the lowest allowable level per school. Mrs Laird shared the various impacts of the modelling, as detailed in the briefing paper. The LA's recommendation was to remain as close to the NFF as possible. Therefore, the proposal was to cap gains at 0.6% and keep the MFG at the highest level of 0%. All schools would see per pupil gains between 0% and 0.601%.</p>	
5.2.8	<p>Notional special educational needs (SEN) values would continue as per the 2024-25 formula with 8% of AWPU funding, 16% of deprivation funding and 80% of low prior attainment funding contributing to the allowance. This equated to a funding allocation of £14.7m across the borough.</p>	

		ACTION
<p><u>Schools Block – De-Delegation for Maintained Mainstream Schools (for voting)</u></p> <p>5.2.9 The LA proposed a continuation of the current arrangement for the de-delegation of free school meals (FSM) eligibility for maintained schools at the 2025-26 rate of £4.69 per pupil. This would equate to a 2% increase in rate to reflect increased staff costs. The maintained primary schools’ Headteacher representative confirmed she had consulted with maintained primary school Headteachers who had approved the 2% increase.</p> <p><u>High Needs Block – for Information</u></p> <p>5.2.10 The allocation for 2025-26, along with comparative figures for 2024-25, and how it had been derived under the NFF for high needs had been detailed in the briefing paper. Overall, there had been a 6% increase in the high needs block allocation. Additionally for 2025-26, the MFG for special schools had been set to 0% equivalent to mainstream schools. This had been 0.5% in 2024-25.</p> <p>5.2.11 The legacy teachers’ pay awards (from September 2018 and 2019) and employer contributions for teachers’ pensions (from September 2019) were still provided at £660 per place. The additional 3.4% funding received in 2023-24 would continue to be added to special schools and pupil referral unit budgets as per 2024-25 on a per pupil basis. Special schools were also in receipt of a TPAG, TPECG (2024) and CSBG (from September 2024) which, for 2025-26, would be rolled into one grant with a full years allocation for CSBG as per mainstream schools. Also, like mainstream schools, a further grant would be made to cover the planned increases in National Insurance contributions, which would be published in due course.</p> <p>5.2.12 A Schools’ Forum member raised concerns about high needs funding for children in early years. They highlighted that, as a sector, early years provision was already under pressure owing to challenges in staff recruitment and retention. The current 1:1 funding rate of £9.72 did not cover staffing costs and oncosts, making it financially unviable for many settings to offer high needs places. As a result, many providers chose not to offer these places owing to the lack of financial sustainability. It was noted by the LA that, in addition to 1:1 funding, settings received base funding, bringing the total to approximately £14 per hour. However, the LA acknowledged the need to review funding rates.</p> <p>5.2.13 Members of the LA thanked Schools’ Forum for raising this issue and confirmed that a SEN Sufficiency Plan would be developed. This plan would assess current and future demands and outline the steps needed to ensure the availability of quality early years placements for children with high needs. Schools’ Forum welcomed this discussion, emphasising the risk of this becoming a ‘hidden issue’, with families feeling they had no alternative but to make their own arrangements until their children joined Reception, as early years settings did not have sufficient quality provision for children with additional needs. This impacted some parents’ ability to rejoin the workforce. Schools’ Forum</p>		

	ACTION
<p>5.2.14 stressed the importance of early intervention to ensure support was available at an earlier stage, helping to ‘level up’ opportunities for these children.</p> <p>Additionally, Schools’ Forum highlighted that 1:1 funding for schools had remained unchanged for the past 10 years, whilst costs had increased significantly, making it increasingly difficult for schools to cover staffing costs. The funding challenge was not limited solely to early years settings, but extended throughout all school levels, affecting the ability to recruit and retain staff for children with the most complex needs. In response, the Assistant Director for Education and Skills stipulated that the LA and strategic leaders within the LA had recently commenced a considerable piece of work to try and address the issues around the higher needs funding and the deficit within this area. This was being addressed within the Strategic Education Board meetings.</p> <p><i>Mr R Anderson joined the meeting.</i></p>	
<p><u>Early Years Block – for Discussion</u></p> <p>5.2.15 Following the expansion of entitlements in 2024-25 to include 15 hours per week for eligible working parents of children aged 2 years old from 1 April 2024 and 15 hours per week for eligible working parents of children aged 9 months to 2 years old from 1 September 2024, the entitlement had been increased again to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Early Years entitlement of 30 hours per week from 1 September 2025 for eligible working parents of children aged 2 years old, - Early Years entitlement of 30 hours per week from 1 September 2025 for eligible working parents of children aged 9 months to 2 years old. <p>The remaining entitlements remained unchanged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 15 hours entitlement for families of 2-year-olds receiving additional support (formerly known as the 2-year-old disadvantaged entitlement), - Universal 15 hours entitlement for all 3- and 4-year-olds, - Additional 15 hours entitlement for working parents of 3- and 4-year-olds. 	
<p>5.2.16 The illustrative early years block allocation, along with a prior year’s comparator, had been detailed in the briefing paper. The total early years block stood at £17,487m. The final grant allocation to the LA would be adjusted in Summer 2025 to reflect January 2025 census for 3- and 4-year-old funding, with a further adjustment to reflect January 2026 census information, at the end of the 2025-26 financial year.</p> <p><i>Mr M Bloomfield joined the meeting.</i></p>	

	ACTION
<p>5.2.17 Following the consultation in the previous year on early years, it had been agreed that the LA formula for 3- and 4-year-old funding would distribute the additional grant provided for the teachers' pay award to all providers recognising pay inflation for all. It had also been agreed following consultation in 2024-25 that the formula for 2-year-olds receiving additional support, 2-year-olds and under 2-year-olds of eligible working parents would receive the deprivation supplement in the same way as 3- and 4-year-olds. Therefore, the current formula for all age groups comprised of the same base rate for all providers, plus a deprivation supplement (based on residential postcodes as per schools funding and eligibility to early years pupil premium). The base rates were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3- and 4-year-old universal and additional entitlements at £5.44 per hour (£5.35 in 2024-25), - 2-year-old receiving additional support and eligible working parents' entitlements at £7.64 per hour (£7.50 in 2024-25), - Under 2s of eligible working parents' entitlements at £10.51 per hour (£10.33 in 2024-25.) 	
<p>5.2.18 Deprivation funding would be set using the schools NFF income deprivation affecting children index (IDACI) unit values, pro-rated to achieve an hourly rate. The range and hourly rates had been detailed in the briefing paper.</p>	
<p>5.2.19 The council would fund providers with early years' pupil premium at a national rate of £1.00 per hour per eligible pupil (£0.68 per hour 2024-25) up to a maximum of 570 hours. Eligibility was checked by the LA and was based on the parents' benefits claims and/or whether the child was looked after by a LA. Providers would be required to signpost parents in a similar way to FSM checking. This would apply to all early years' entitlements.</p>	
<p>5.2.20 The Disability Access Fund (DAF) would be paid to providers at the national rate of £938 per child (£910 per child 2024-25). Eligibility was checked by the early years' providers and was based on whether a child was in receipt of Disability Living Allowance and in receipt of the universal 15 hours entitlement. This would apply to all early years entitlements.</p> <p><u>Central School Services Block (CSSB) (for information and voting)</u></p>	
<p>5.2.21 The CSSB provided funding for LAs to carry out central functions on behalf of state funded maintained schools and academies in England. The block was split into 'on-going responsibilities' and 'historic commitments' which were expected to decrease over time. Funding for on-going responsibilities was being allocated according to a formula at a per pupil rate. In 2025-26, the final allocation in Redcar and Cleveland was £0.823m. Mrs Laird guided Schools' Forum through the proposed estimated spend for the on-going responsibilities element of the CSSB, which had been detailed in the briefing paper. The estimated spend had been split as required for Schools' Forum approval in line with DfE regulations.</p>	

		ACTION
5.3	Outcomes	
5.3.1	<p>Forum noted the proposals for the schools' block:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - that gains to schools were capped at 0.6%, - that the minimum funding guarantee was set to 0%, - that the growth fund was held for full distribution through the NFF, - the continuation with the agreed notional SEN allocations in the schools' block. 	LA
5.3.2	Mainstream maintained primary schools voted to continue with the de-delegation of funding for the free school meals eligibility service.	LA
5.3.3	Schools' Forum approved the proposed spend for the on-going responsibilities element of the 2025-26 CSSB.	LA
5.3.4	Schools' Forum noted the rate changes to the early years block.	LA
2.	NOTIFICATION OF ANY OTHER BUSINESS	
	A membership update would be shared for information under Any Other Business.	
3.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST	
3.1	Schools' Forum members were given the opportunity to declare any pecuniary interests or other conflicts of interest relating to items on the agenda for the current meeting.	
3.2	No such declarations were made on this occasion.	
4.	MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING	
4.1	Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 25 November 2024 had been circulated prior to the meeting. Having given members an opportunity to highlight any inaccuracies, the minutes were accepted as a true record of proceedings. All action points were confirmed as having been completed.	
4.2	<p>Outcome</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting held on Monday 25 November 2024 were approved as a true record of proceedings.</p>	Clerk

		ACTION
6.	ANY OTHER BUSINESS	
	<u>Membership Update</u> Members noted that Mrs S Marsden had replaced Mrs S Hill as the representative for Steel River Academy Trust. The clerk had been informed that Mrs G Trattles no longer worked for Outwood Academies Trust. The clerk had inquired whether another member of the Trust had been nominated to replace Mrs Trattles and awaited a response.	Clerk
7.	ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS	
	No matters had been identified for future meetings.	
8.	DATE OF THE FUTURE MEETING	
	The next meeting would be held on Tuesday 17 June 2025 at 3:00pm. The meeting would be held virtually.	

Meeting closed at 3:35pm.