

REDCAR & CLEVELAND SCHOOLS' FORUM

MINUTES OF A VIRTUAL MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 17 JUNE 2025 AT 3:00PM THROUGH MICROSOFT TEAMS

MEMBERS PRESENT:

SCHOOL REPRESENTATIVES	
Maintained Special School Representative	Mr P McLean, Kirkleatham Hall School (Chair)
Pupil Referral Unit	Mr L Beaumont, Archway
ACADEMY REPRESENTATIVES	
Nicholas Postgate Catholic Academy Trust	Miss S Williams
Skelton Primary School	Ms S Walker
Special Academies: Mo Mowlam Academy	Miss R Glover (Vice Chair)
Atomix Educational Trust	Mr C Glover
Galileo Multi Academy Trust	Mrs S Hindmarch
LOCAL AUTHORITY ELECTED MEMBER	
Local Authority 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
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
Virtual School Head	Mrs P Douglas

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 Mrs A O'Gara, Ironstone Academy Trust and Mrs C Chadwick, Saltburn Primary School.	

		ACTION
1.2	The following members were not in attendance: maintained primary school Headteachers' representative, maintained primary school governors' representative, Outwood Academy Trust, Tees Valley Education and Steel River Academy Trust.	
1.3	RESOLVED to consent to the absence of the above-named members.	Clerk
2.	NOTIFICATION OF ANY OTHER BUSINESS	
	A revised update on professional challenge was declared for discussion 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 4 February 2025 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	Outcome The minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2025 were approved as a true record of proceedings.	Clerk
5.	APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR FOR THE 2025-26 ACADEMIC YEAR	
5.1	Members had been invited in advance to express their willingness to serve as Chair of Schools' Forum for the 2025-26 academic year. No names had been submitted in advance of the meeting. Members were also given an opportunity at the meeting to express their willingness to stand. Mr Paul McLean put his name forward for consideration, and no further names were forthcoming.	
5.2	RESOLVED that Mr Paul McLean be appointed Chair of Schools' Forum for the academic year 2025-26.	Clerk
6.	APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR FOR THE 2025-26 ACADEMIC YEAR	
6.1	Members had been invited in advance to express their willingness to serve as Vice-Chair of Schools' Forum for the 2025-26 academic year. No names had been submitted in advance of the meeting. Members were also given an opportunity at the	

		ACTION
6.2	meeting to express their willingness to stand. Miss Rachel Glover put her name forward for consideration, and no further names were forthcoming. RESOLVED that Miss Rachel Glover be appointed Vice-Chair of Schools' Forum for the academic year 2025-26.	Clerk
7.	VIRTUAL SCHOOL: PREVIOUS ACADEMIC YEAR'S SPEND, AND CHANGES TO PUPIL PREMIUM PLUS FOR THE 2025-26 ACADEMIC YEAR	
7.1	Purpose To provide an update on the use and management of Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) funding for Children in Our Care (CioC), including recent changes, current practices, and future proposals.	
7.2	Discussion/Challenge	
7.2.1	The Virtual School was primarily funded through external grants, which covered all staffing costs except for the salary of the Virtual Head. This particular cost was met by the Local Authority (LA). The school supported a cohort of approximately 380 to 400 children and young people, located both within and outside the borough.	
7.2.2	In the previous financial year, the total grant funding allocated to the Virtual School amounted to £1,210,175.00. By the end of March 2025, the total expenditure stood at £1,037,675.64, resulting in a surplus. This surplus had been carried forward into the next financial year to support ongoing and future initiatives.	
7.2.3	A breakdown of the PP+ expenditure for 2024-25 showed that funds had been distributed across several key areas. These included staffing costs, direct PP+ payments to support individual learners, and extended duties undertaken by the team. Additionally, contributions were made to staffing in other teams, and a small portion of the budget was allocated to support post-16 young people. This included the collection and analysis of attendance data to inform statutory Personal Education Plans (PEPs). Other spending included welfare call, staff training and memberships, Designated Teacher training, membership of Adoption Tees Valley, placements, alternative education and tutors, counselling and assessments, and rewards.	
7.2.4	Members of the Schools' Forum enquired whether all LAs produced similar data to enable benchmarking and the sharing of best practices. It was noted that the Virtual School Head was part of the North East network of Virtual School Heads, which met termly to compare practices. While data collection was currently underway, detailed comparisons were not yet possible. However, this was an area that would be explored further, as benchmarking could provide valuable insights.	

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7.2.5 The Forum also asked whether the Virtual School had a governing body. It was confirmed that a governing body had been established last year. Its membership included Headteacher representatives from both primary and secondary schools, a social worker, an Assistant Director, a foster carer, and a representative from a special school. Members agreed that tracking the impact of governance over time would be beneficial. In response to a further query from the Forum, it was agreed that tracking staffing levels over time, particularly in terms of full-time equivalents, and comparing them with other areas would be a useful exercise.	
7.2.6 There was a discussion around the current spending profile, particularly a potential imbalance between administrative costs related to attendance and the lower expenditure on rewards. It was acknowledged that it would be difficult to assess this without comparative data from other areas. However, it was emphasised that collecting attendance data was a statutory duty, and that improving attendance was directly linked to better educational outcomes. The focus was on raising attainment, rather than providing individual allowances. Feedback from stakeholders confirmed that the support provided by the Virtual School team was highly valued.	
7.2.7 Schools currently received £1,400 in PP+ per CioC annually, distributed in three termly instalments (£500/£450/£450), linked to targets set in each child's PEP. Accountability was required for each term's funding; unaccounted funds would result in the next term's payment being withheld. From April 2025, the PP+ allocation had increased from £2,570 to £2,630 per child. The Virtual School proposed increasing the termly allocation to £500 per term.	
7.2.8 A new electronic system (Welfare Call) allowed schools to request additional funding at any time, improving efficiency and responsiveness. Additional centrally held PP+ funds were used for targeted support, such as mentoring through Middlesbrough Football Club, based on school requests. Feedback from Designated Teachers had been positive, and all additional interventions were monitored for impact and value for money, with regular reporting to oversight bodies.	
7.3 Outcomes	
7.3.1 Schools Forum noted the update and proposals.	
7.3.2 The increase in termly PP+ allocation and continued use of the electronic funding request system were welcomed.	
7.3.3 Ongoing monitoring and reporting of impact would continue through established governance channels.	

		ACTION
8.	DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT FINAL OUTTURN POSITION 2024-25	
8.1	Purpose To provide Schools' Forum with a summary of actual income and expenditure against the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for the financial year ending 31 March 2025.	
8.2	Discussion/Challenge The report, shared with Schools' Forum in advance of the meeting, outlined the DSG financial position based on actual expenditure and accruals up to 31 March 2025. <u>Outturn 2024-25</u> 8.2.1 The final year-end position reported a cumulative DSG deficit of £12.455m, allocated across four reserves. This made up around 9% of the total northeast deficit. DSG deficits were currently ringfenced as unusable reserves, however that override was due to end in March 2026. The non-traded reserve comprised the four DSG funding blocks, while the traded reserve covered union duties and Inspire 2 Learn, as per recommended accounting practices. The outturn position by block had been included in the report. All figures were presented before recoupment. <u>Block Level Variances</u> 8.2.2 All money in the Individual Schools' Block had been allocated to schools, resulting in no variance. 8.2.3 Central Schools Services Block (CSSB): Overspend of £490k attributed to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Growth funding distribution exceeding in-year funding by £291k.- Strategic management and related services overspending by £212k following revised guidance on allowable DSG charges.- Minor additional variances of £13k. 8.2.4 Early Years Block: Overspend due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Prior year adjustment of £102k.- £33k variance due to difference in hours claimed higher than budgeted.- Minor other expenditure pressures of £21k.	

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8.2.5	<p><u>High Needs Block (HNB) Analysis</u></p> <p>The overspend was predominantly seen in the HNB. The most significant cost pressures were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Independent schools (£2.929m overspend): Reflecting increased reliance due to capacity constraints in local special schools. - Individual pupil support (£0.924m): Reflecting higher-than-anticipated support needs in mainstream settings, reducing capacity for special school placements. - Permanent exclusions (£0.826m): Due to a rise in exclusions, with associated costs of tutoring when no alternative provision was available. - Special school top-ups (£0.733m): Driven by an increase in both pupil numbers and higher funding band requirements. 	
8.2.6	<p><u>Maintained School Balances</u></p> <p>As of 31 March 2025, total maintained school balances stood at a £1.468m surplus, representing a £0.413m reduction from the previous year. One maintained school was currently in a deficit position and had provided a three-year forecast to return to surplus.</p>	
8.2.7	<p><u>2025-26 Budget Allocation</u></p> <p>The provisional DSG allocation for 2025-26 totalled £168.223m, and was broken down as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Schools Block: £119.589m. - CSSB: £0.865m. - HNB: £30.272m. - Early Years Block: £17.497m. <p>A block transfer of £0.601m from the Schools Block to the HNB had been agreed and was included in the above figures.</p>	
8.2.8	<p>The 2025-26 budget included provisions for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A minimum funding guarantee ensuring no decrease in per-pupil funding for special schools compared to 2024-25. - An additional £660 per place for historic teachers' pension grant for special schools. - A 3.4% uplift based on 2024-25 funded special school places. 	
8.2.9	<p>Schools' Forum asked whether there had been a historic increase in the cost of placements in independent schools.</p> <p>It was confirmed that costs had risen, partly due to increased reliance on independent provision. Once children had been placed in independent settings, it could be challenging to transition them back into mainstream or local provision. However, efforts were being made to identify and utilise key transition points, and some successful moves had been achieved. To</p>	

		ACTION
8.2.10	<p>reduce reliance on independent placements, there was ongoing work to establish more specialist bases within secondary schools. It was noted that parental preference and limited capacity within local special schools could be among the key factors driving the use of independent provision.</p> <p>The Forum discussed whether expanding the number of special schools would be a more cost-effective long-term solution. It was agreed that this would likely reduce dependency on independent placements. Members noted delays in the Department for Education's (DfE) school building programme, and it was noted that a new special school was planned within the borough, with a later than anticipated opening date of 2027. Ms Mahoney extended thanks to local special schools that had taken on additional pupils to help alleviate pressure on placements.</p>	
8.3	Outcomes	
8.3.1	Schools' Forum noted the DSG overspend in 2024-25.	
8.3.2	Schools' Forum acknowledged the carry forward of the cumulative deficit into 2025-26.	
8.3.3	Schools' Forum noted the updated DSG budget allocations outlined in section 5.1 of the report.	
9.	ANY OTHER BUSINESS	
9.1	Ms Mahoney informed the Forum that she had been contacted by the Joint Safeguarding Board, who offered to provide an update on the revised professional challenge procedure. However, there was no current demand from the Schools' Forum to receive this update.	
9.2	Mr Myers advised that he would retire in the summer, and would be replaced on the group by Mrs Lorraine Nash.	
10.	ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS	
	No matters had been identified for future meetings.	
11.	DATE OF THE FUTURE MEETING	
11.1	The next meeting of the Schools' Forum was scheduled to take place virtually on Monday 29 September 2025 at 3:00pm.	
11.2	A request was made by Mrs Laird to bring the November and February meetings forward by one week to align with reporting timescales. Ms Mahoney would consult with the Education Improvement Partnership (EIP) and confirm whether the proposed changes could be accommodated.	