

MEETING OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM
Wednesday, 21 June 2023 at 8:30am
At the PDC Main Hall

TYPE	MEMBERSHIP
GOVERNORS	Alan Morton* (AM); Jo Faulkner (JF); Pip Pinhorn (PP); Abdul Chowdhury* (AC). Tracy Edwards (TE)
HEADTEACHERS	Fanoula Smith (FS), Brenda Landers* (Chair), Paul Woods (PW), Maria Lewington* (ML), Astrid Schon (AS), Kevin Jones (KJ), Becky Dolamore* (BD), Veronica Armson (VA), Danny Lye (DL), Graham Clifford* (GC); Jemima Reilly* (JR); Terry Bennet* (TB), Dee Bleach* (DB), Martin Nirsimloo (MN).
Non-School Members	Tracy Smith* -THEP , Alex Kenny* – NEU,
OBSERVERS	
Officers in Attendance	James Thomas (JT)*; Kay Goodacre (KG)*; Farhad Ahmed (FA)*; Nikki Parsons (NP)* Lisa Fraser* (LF),

The meeting started at 08:35

AGENDA ITEM 1: Welcome and apologies

PRESENTING: Chair

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received and accepted from Paul Woods, Fanoula Smith, Danny Lye and Jo Faulkner.

Veronica Armson sent apologies for lateness.

AGENDA ITEM 2: Minutes of the last meeting

PRESENTING: Chair

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as an accurate record.

Action point update:

- A report on the de-delegation will be presented at the Full Consultative meeting in the Autumn term.
- Kay informed everyone that options for governor briefing are being explored for the Autumn term onwards. Kay will liaise with Jo Faulkner.
- Information about the DAF has been included in the Headteacher's Bulletin.
- Amendments have been made to the nursery admissions form to ensure questions related to disability are clear.
- Jess Milne is preparing an update on how Early Years moderation was funded previously.

Matters arising

TB asked what will happen to the growth fund allocated to the new Mulberry Academy London Dock site. KG replied that the opening of the site has been delayed and the growth fund allocated will be returned by the DfE. This will then be allocated to the secondary schools who have agreed to take on additional classes.

AGENDA ITEM 3: Individual Schools Budget Outturn and School Balances

PRESENTING: Kay Goodacre

Kay Goodacre informed Schools Forum that this item is for discussion.

Provisional figures show that school revenue balances at the end of the 2022/23 financial year have provisionally decreased by £1.018m (-3%) to £33.5m. The number of deficit schools has remained at 7 at the end of 2022-23. This overall number contains 2 schools who have moved out of a deficit position since last year and 2 schools that have moved into a deficit. Emerging schools that are a concern will be supported by the Schools Finance Team. Overall, school balances remain healthy.

A HT and a governor commented that the support provided to one of the schools that has come out of the deficit position has been great. The whole school and Governing Board worked together to achieve this outcome.

KG informed Schools Forum that the decision has been made that no clawbacks will be made at present, however this may be revisited in the future, particularly for schools which have a significant surplus balance without any movement. The DfE looks at the overall schools balances and this is one of the factors which contribute to the rhetoric that schools have adequate funding. JT added that LAs know that this is not a fair representation of schools funding and does not represent the funding pressures faced by schools. These figures are used as a defence and rationale for not allocating additional funding to schools.

A HT added that their school has a surplus balance, however they feel nervous about depleting this balance in the face of future uncertainties, particularly for recurring costs such as teacher salaries.

AK added that the unions have been working with headteachers and have seen an increase in redundancies and restructuring. Unions are working with headteachers to raise the profile of school funding.

AM added that it is important to ensure that schools that do not have a surplus balance will be supported in managing their finances.

AGENDA ITEM 4: DSG Outturn

PRESENTING: Kay Goodacre

Kay Goodacre gave an update on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) provisional outturn position which is an underspend of £0.9m, which includes an overspend of £1.9m in the High Needs Block (HNB). Overall, the position is good however a large, historical deficit in the HNB is still being carried.

The SEND team is seeing a high number of EHCPs and an increase in the number of children referred to independent special schools.

The Chair asked if there is a strategy in place for increasing capacity in LA special schools as the funding for independent special schools is very high. JT replied that the LA is refreshing its sufficiency planning and looking at the additional provision needed.

LF added that the LA is exploring alternative models such as the Phoenix Pilot Project. The inclusion in mainstream schools in TH is very good, and the number of children in special provision is one of the lowest. Kay confirmed that places in independent special provisions cost between £60 - £80k.

ML stated that it is reassuring to know that the mainstream provision is expanding and asked if special school provision will still be available where needed. JT replied that special schools are an important part of an inclusive local offer.

A member commented that SEMH is one of the biggest emerging needs and is not as well funded as ASD.

A HT asked if all special schools are oversubscribed. Kay replied that Phoenix School is oversubscribed but not Stephen Hawking School and Beatrice Tate School.

Referring to the provisional outturn position, AM asked how the outturn position compared to the initial forecast. KG replied that the forecast was an underspend. All underspends currently contribute to reducing the HNB overspend. JT added that despite the HNB overspend, the needs of schools have to come first.

LF added that the LA is meeting with the DfE about expanding school provision and the possibility of an Alternative Provision Free School. There is no guarantee that this will be granted.

A member asked if this would impact plans for the expansion of LEAP. LF replied that the provision at South Quay will be closing and the plans for the LEAP expansion will continue.

AGENDA ITEM 5: Biannual Review of the De-delegation Budget

This item has been moved to October.

AGENDA ITEM 6: School Forum Membership

PRESENTING: Salma Siddiqua

Salma Siddiqua gave an update on Schools Forum membership.

The term of office for the following members is coming to an end:

- Becky Dolamore (nursery HT),
- Maria Lewington (maintained primary HT),
- Kevin Jones (primary academy HT),

The following members are retiring:

- Alex Kenny (Trade Union rep)
- Terry Bennet (maintained primary HT)

The following positions are vacant

- Secondary academy HT Rep
- Primary academy governor rep
- Primary maintained governor rep

The academy positions have been difficult to recruit, and it was agreed previously that the offer will be expanded to include academy SLT. Academies have been approached, however there have been no responses.

Members discussed recruitment strategies and the following actions were agreed:

- Send an email to academies to fill academy SLT and governor positions,
- Send an email to all primary governors,
- Make an announcement at the relevant consultative meetings,
- Invite HTs to nominate governors,
- Make an announcement at the Director's Meeting with Governors.

It was noted that Becky Dolamore is called on to represent nursery provisions in many groups, and it was suggested that allowing SLT staff to represent nurseries would ease that pressure.

AGENDA ITEM 7: Workplan 2023-24

PRESENTING: Salma Siddiqua

The Chair suggested that it may be helpful to review the meeting schedule as the meeting in March was cancelled and there was a significant gap between January and June. KG added that all the items scheduled for the March meeting were covered in January and there were no items carried forward to this (June) meeting.

Schools Forum resolved to keep the March meeting and mark it as a provisional meeting.

The schools Forum discussed the possibility of having a mixture of online and in person meetings and the advantages and disadvantages. After discussion, it was agreed that hybrid meeting options at the Town Hall will be explored.

AGENDA ITEM 9: Planned Future Working Groups

PRESENTING: Chair

Alex Kenny informed Schools Forum that the budget for facilities time had been set in January. From September schools will be reimbursed a fixed daily rate for staff members out of school. Some feedback has been received to say that this doesn't cover the cost of cover for staff who are out frequently. This will be explored further to see how this can be managed.

Kay informed Schools Forum that it may be necessary to reconstitute the High Needs Working Group. The group was established in September as there was a lot happening within SEND. A message will be sent to all members asking for expressions of interest.

Action.

The Year-end Working Group has come to an end. The work carried out has been very helpful but the Finance Team feel that there is still some work to be done. The group was set up to explore the issues around year-end and what could be done to better support schools. Some changes were made to improve the quality of the year-end return, such as putting an additional cash advance in February. The actual year-end process has not been as successful as hoped and it will be helpful to explore the reasons for this. The number of accruals and late returns have increased, and it will be helpful to analyse what contributed to this. This will be taken to the Consultative meetings for expressions of interest.

Action.

Alex Kenny informed Forum that free school meals in secondary schools had been raised as an issue at a meeting of school TU representatives. Secondary schools are facing challenges with capacity and infrastructure in accommodating a large number of pupils at lunchtimes. JR replied that there is a working group that is looking at these issues. This will be communicated to headteachers. A webinar with the Director of Education has been organised in July too address these concerns.

The Chair noted that this was the last meeting for Alex Kenny and Terry Bennet who are both retiring. Members thanked Alex and Terry for their contribution to the Schools Forum and to Tower Hamlets schools.

AGENDA ITEM 9: Next Meeting Date

Wednesday 11th October 2023

The meeting ended at 9:29.

Summary of action points

1. Request expressions of interest from headteachers for the High Needs Working Group and the Year-end Working group. Kay and Nikki