

Minutes

Meeting title:	Schools Forum Meeting	
Date/time	01 July 2026, 17.30-19.00	
Members:	<u>School Members</u> Kevin Reynolds (Maintained Pri Headteacher rep) Robin Warren (Maintained Pri Headteacher rep) Sian Davies (Maintained Pri Headteacher rep) Ian Quest (Maintained Pri Governor rep) Sam Billington (Maintained Pri Governor rep) Chris Howard (Maintained Pri Governor rep) Andy English (Maintained Sec Headteacher rep) Farzana Chowdhury (Nursery School Headteacher rep) Attendance record	<u>Academy Members</u> Monique Pink (Mossbourne: Parent Governor) Marya Afreedi (Eko Trust: Primary Headteacher) Vacant Vacant Vacant Vacant Vacant <u>Alternative Provision</u> Jo Byrne (PRU rep, Headteacher) <u>Special School Members</u> Jo Clare (Special School rep) Kevin McDonnell (Special School Headteacher rep) <u>Non School Members</u> David Davies (Staff rep) <u>Early Years Representative</u> Jenna Clark
Additional attendees:	Cllr Laura-Louise Fairley, Deputy Cabinet member for SEND Support Cllr Soraya Adejare, Cabinet member for Children, Young People & Early Intervention Jacquie Burke (Group Director Children & Education, Hackney Council) Jason Marantz (Director of Education & Inclusion, Hackney Council) Shakeel Yasin (Director of Finance (Services), Hackney Council) Terry Bryan (AD School Estate Strategy, Hackney Council) Donna Thomas (AD Early Years, Early Help and Well-being, Hackney Council) Sajeed Patni (AD of Finance Children & Education, Hackney Council) Chris Scott (Group Accountant, Hackney Council) Suhail Kadir (Finance Manager - Schools, Hackney Council) Yvonne Wade (Head of SEND, Hackney Council) Lisa Williams (Head of School Improvement & Education Performance, Hackney Council) Kathryn Lloyd (Head of Strategy, Governance & Performance, Hackney Council) Ann Yiadom (Clerk to Schools Forum, Hackney Council)	
Apologies:	Kevin Reynolds; Jo Byrne; Marya Afreedi; Farzana Chowdhury; Christopher Howard	
Members Absent:	Monique Pink	

Meeting Minutes	
1.	Welcome and introduction
2.	3.1. Minutes of the last meeting held 05 November 2025 - Schools Forum Minutes - 04.02.2025

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	The minutes were confirmed as an accurate record. 3.2. Action log - Schools Forum Action Log An action regarding modelling was discussed. It was confirmed that financial modelling will be conducted as necessary, with an update scheduled for the November meeting. While this was not completed for the 2026/27 budget cycle, further details will be presented alongside the 0.5% proposal.
3.	Schools White Paper, SEND Reform Update and Sufficiency - Hackney Local SEND Reform Plan; Final Draft; HNC&S Sufficiency Jason Marantz shared the Local SEND Reform Plan for Hackney; discussion also covered the final draft and the Strategy for High Needs Capital and Sufficiency 2026-30. Member comment: The governance structure looks complicated; complexity does not help accountability. Thoughts on how to ensure clear accountability? Jason noted that he is accountable to everyone and acknowledges the complexity. It is necessary to have a SEND and AP Board, an Executive Board, a Parent Carer Forum (PCF), a Schools Forum (SF), and a joint board with the ICB. It is intended to test if it can be simplified, but this governance structure is currently required. Member comment: How do we ensure that services supporting schools are quality services and not subject to factors like SALT/CAMHS delays, which impact the ability of schools to be fully inclusive? While the HSGB did not previously meet the need, Jason explained that another accountability board will have oversight and be brought to the primary consultative group. Member comment: Regarding savings, where are they expected to come from? Is it from reducing the number of children with SEND being educated out-of-borough and providing resources in mainstream settings instead? If so, these settings must be attractive to parents, who have the right to decline if they feel a setting is not inclusive or appropriate. How will we ensure that schools with whole-school behaviour management policies adapt to meet the needs of children with SEND? Jason agreed that needs should be met locally as children are not best served out-of-borough. DfE and SEND reforms propose this, but we must consider how schools and parents are brought along, acknowledging current nervousness and lack of trust. This is a challenge for the whole partnership. Cllr Fairley asked if mainstream inclusion might drive changes in behaviour policies by design, as many secondary schools will need to review these to become more inclusive for children with SEND. Jason noted that while schools set their own policies, there is a system-wide expectation for inclusion, which Ofsted also judges. Many schools are already very inclusive; it is hoped that additional funding will ease the burden. Schools that are not inclusive will need to change their practices in line with the reforms. Cllr Fairley noted that Hackney schools are fantastic but emphasised that transparency is needed regarding how schools use mainstream inclusion grants to become more inclusive. As behaviour policies are a part of inclusion, it will be interesting to see how schools adapt. The Chair questioned how the SEND White Paper addresses the need for savings and how will this model reduce costs? Jason explained that there is a specialist tier for children with EHCPs whose needs are best met in special schools. We need to look at the balance of needs met by special versus mainstream schools. Currently, children are often sent to independent special schools of varying quality across the country; the expectation is to work together as a system to meet these needs locally. Cllr Adejare queried: Regarding the LA's power to intervene when problems arise, and the "Expert at Hand" (EaH) / "Right Support, Right Time" initiatives, what will workforce planning look like in the long-term approach?

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	Jason noted that many inclusive schools support each other and the local system. This must be done collaboratively, including with Academy Trusts. There are escalation routes with the DfE, but the goal is to work together. The EaH initiative is funded by the DfE, with the expectation to determine how it is delivered within certain confines. Once the guidance was released, there was massive competitive recruitment, and the DfE was pushed back on that. We must honestly acknowledge the challenges, remain flexible, and incorporate feedback regularly and systematically. Member comment: How do we monitor what is working and the impact? Are there KPIs? Yes there are many KPIs monitored through the SEND AP and Executive Board, which will also be made available to the Schools Forum. Jason confirmed that HE is working on a data dashboard to ensure clear accountability. Jacquie Burke further highlighted that this is a huge piece of work. DfE finances cannot resolve everything; the LA must think about how to best spend the money. This is an opportunity to work collaboratively, and she welcomed Schools Forum's role in monitoring the budget and KPIs. Member comment: We must manage expectations. Schools are being asked to publish plans, but the £11k per year provided is a limited amount to address these issues and does not fully address equity in the system. Meghan Rutterford-Nice, School Estate Strategy Manager shared the Send Sufficiency projections noting that the new "inclusion bases" umbrella term covers both specialist bases and support bases, with plans to consult with headteachers and governors in September and October. Cllr Fairley queried when the plans will be final enough to communicate to communities and families so they understand what this means for them (e.g., regarding seeking an EHCP)? Jason noted that EHCP numbers have already increased and that the LA is awaiting feedback from the DfE and the associated funding award. Engagement with the PCF and others will also need to be completed. The DfE has indicated this is the first iteration, with further communications expected in the autumn term. Member comment: Research published shows that the most falling roll is impacting the most disadvantaged communities and the most disadvantaged children across the country. This is known in Hackney but is also a national picture. The DfE mentioned a falling roll fund, will the LA have items to be brought back in the autumn term? Jason stated that they are awaiting further guidance and will share that once it is made available whilst also clarifying that the £14k mentioned is for the inclusion mainstream fund for schools. The inclusion based funding will be separate.
4.	Final End Of Year Position for Schools - School Balances 2025-26 Suhail Kadir presented a summary of the report on 2025/26 school balances for school forum members to note. Cllr Adejare queried the process by which LDAs are enacted considering that children's centres are seeing deficits; why are 3-year resolution plans not being implemented? Suhail explained that LDAs are explicit to schools and funded from overall school reserves. Children's centres are managed by Early Years functionalities which are slightly different to that of schools. A similar process would potentially apply if children centres are in deficits, but there is a question around viability which would need to be addressed. Members requested that future reports include more detail on the trajectory of ongoing deficits, such as whether they are shrinking or growing, to which the LA agreed Action: Provide additional details regarding the status of ongoing deficits to clarify if they are increasing or decreasing.

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	A member commented on the commendable efforts made by schools to balance their budget as was made required last year and, based on the totals, shows that they have done. Children's centre budgets have not changed however, meaning they are doing more with less which might explain some of the deficits. Member comment: Are there controls or limitations on schools' reserves when these reserves build significantly? Suhail clarified the current reserve limits 5% for secondary schools (applicable to both reserves and statutory funding) and 8% for primary schools. Additionally, schools with surplus balances exceeding approximately 12% are required to submit expenditure plans detailing how the excess funds will be utilised. Cllr Fairley praised the efforts of schools doing a great job at managing the balance. She requested a breakdown of the £6m deficit of closed schools to differentiate between existing deficits and closure costs, and also inquired about the ongoing costs of keeping vacant buildings secured Sajeed Patni highlighted that the financial costs of school closures involve one-off expenses as well as ongoing, separate costs related to maintaining and securing empty buildings; further information on the breakdown can be provided. Concern was expressed that these costs contribute to large deficits that are not always captured in standard budget monitoring, and that it is crucial to understand these financial impacts alongside the social impact on communities, teachers, and students Cllr Adejare further expressed concerns regarding the partial funding of teacher pay awards and its potential impact on schools already operating under license deficit agreements, querying what contingency is in place to support schools, and whether there is scope to extend this? Suhail noted that the DfE typically provides grants when pay awards exceed expectations; however, official announcements regarding support for the recently confirmed percentage uplift are still pending Jackie suggested that relevant staff spend time with councillors outside the meeting to explain the rationale behind the school estate strategy, noting that further school closures may be necessary in the future due to declining student enrollment numbers. Action: Relevant HE colleagues to meet with Cllr Fairley and Cllr Adejare to discuss rational of the school estate strategy (SK, MRN, TB) Jason commended the schools for their hard work in managing their budgets despite these difficult circumstances noting that there are outliers. He further reiterated that the LA remains committed to working with and supporting schools through these challenges. Jason also addressed the issue of vacant school buildings, noting that the LA is working with schools to explore solutions emphasising that for closed schools the goal is to avoid empty buildings. Finding the best options for these spaces and how they can be utilised across the borough, including by the independent sector, to better meet various community needs, will be explored.
5.	Schools De-delegated Funding - De-delegated Budgets Review Sajeed Patni presented a paper on delegated budgets to provide members with the detailed sight of budget lines as requested during the November 2025 meeting. Jason acknowledged that the previous model for the supported schools budget is no longer aligned with the current challenges facing schools, as many now offer stronger curriculum options and require different support. The intention is to collaborate with consultative groups to co-produce an evolving model for decision-making David Davies noted that the financial support for the trade union facility fund has grown, with roughly £50k successfully obtained from several academy trusts. While this collection represents a historic milestone, for which Jason and Lolita were commended, it only accounts for half of the required total. Efforts are ongoing to encourage the remaining academies to contribute to the fund, which could potentially cover the funding gap and reduce the need for further budget increases Members expressed concern that the shift of school improvement partners toward the SEND reforms might negatively impact the broader, traditional school improvement function that schools rely on. They questioned whether funding from the EaH money could be used to support a universal teaching and learning offer in mainstream classrooms.

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	Jason clarified that the school improvement team is maintaining its function while gaining an inclusion focus, and noted that the SEND reform funding has specific requirements that restrict its usage Member comment: In the current plan, there is a lot about how School Improvement Partners (SIPs) will be involved in strategic mapping. We must either increase the amount of SIP time or risk detriment to existing SIP functions which schools rely on and which have supported schools in maintaining excellence and improvement. Member comment: A deeper understanding is needed as to why the budget was not used. Regarding the trade union, is there a shift in how the budget is set, and is there an underlying driver for this? Jason explained that the school improvement budget underspend was due to the criteria for that funding not being met which he acknowledges required a review of the model. Regarding the trade union supply cover overspend, this was attributed to higher-than-expected service demand; the LA intends to maintain the current budget level while focusing efforts on securing more contributions from academies
6.	Contingency Funding 25/26 Jason discussed the contingency funding process, emphasising the need for transparency in how funds are allocated for genuine emergencies. The full amount has not been spent and may require better publicising. Jason agreed that the application criteria should be circulated regularly in the weekly bulletin to ensure all schools are aware of the process and can access the support easily Action: Members requested for the criteria for contingency be recirculated to schools
7.	Raising Achievement Grant Update Report 2025-26 - Raising Achievement Grant Report Jason provided brief update on the Raising Achievement Grant report, noting that a more comprehensive evaluation will be presented in the autumn term once current projects are completed Action: Full report to be brought back
8.	AOB - Recruitment - Vice-Chair - The forum discussed the necessity of appointing a Vice Chair to help prevent meeting cancellations and ensure leadership continuity. Nominations are encouraged, with the aim of finalising the appointment in the autumn term - The Chair and members extended their warmest best wishes to Anton Francic upon his retirement at the conclusion of this academic year, expressing gratitude for his support throughout his 45-year career in Hackney.
Dates for 2026/27 Wed 11 Nov 2026 <i>Wed 2 Dec 2026 (held as an additional date should there be NFF delays)</i> Wed 3 Feb 2027 Wed 5 May 2027 Wed 30 Jun 2027	