

Meeting title:	Schools Forum Meeting	
Date/time	02 July 2025, 17.30-19.00	
Members:	<p>School Members</p> <p>Kevin Reynolds (Maintained Pri Headteacher rep) Robin Warren (Maintained Pri Headteacher rep) Sian Davies (Maintained Pri Headteacher rep) Lisa Neidich (Maintained Pri Governor rep) Sam Billington (Maintained Pri Governor rep) Chris Howard (Maintained Pri Governor rep; Chair) Andy English (Maintained Sec Headteacher rep) Farzana Chowdhury (Nursery School Headteacher rep)</p>	<p>Academy Members</p> <p>Monique Pink (Parent Governor) Vacant Vacant Vacant Vacant Vacant Vacant</p> <p>Alternative Provision</p> <p>Jo Byrne (PRU rep, Headteacher)</p> <p>Special School Members</p> <p>Jo Clare (Special School rep) Kevin McDonnell (Special School Headteacher rep)</p> <p>Non School Members</p> <p>David Davies (Staff rep)</p> <p>Early Years Representative</p> <p>Jenna Clark</p>
Additional attendees:	<p>Cllr Anntoinette Bramble, Cabinet member for Education, Young People & Children Social Care Cllr Caroline Woodley, Cabinet member for Families, Early Years & Play Cllr Anya Sizer (SEND Champion for Hackney) Jacquie Burke (Group Director, Children & Education) Jason Marantz (DoE & Inclusion, Hackney Education) Kathryn Lloyd (Interim Head of Education Operations, Hackney Education) Joe Wilson (AD Send and Inclusion) Anton Francic (Interim AD School Standards & Improvement) Donna Thomas (AD Early years, Early Help and Well-being) Sajeed Patni (Interim Director of Finance (C&Ed), Hackney Council) Terry Bryan (AD School Estate Strategy) Ann Yiadom (Clerk to the Forum) Chris Scott (Group Accountant) Suhal Kadir (Finance Manager - Schools)</p>	
Apologies:	<p>Chris Howard (Maintained Pri Governor rep; Chair), Kevin McDonnell (Joe Siber attending instead), Kevin Reynolds (Maintained Pri Headteacher rep)</p> <p>Kathryn Lloyd (delayed), Sian Davies (delayed)</p>	
Members Absent:		

	Item
1.	Welcome and introduction

<p>2.</p>	<p>2.1. Minutes of the last meeting held 07 May 2025</p> <p>The minutes of the previous meeting were approved</p> <p>2.2. Action log</p> <p>Refer to item 6</p> <p>2.3 Matters arising</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review of SEND funding model <p>Terry Bryan briefly updated on the review of the SEND funding model for special schools and resource provisions. The review aims to consider whether funding can be increased or redistributed more equitably, as current arrangements are not working for some struggling schools. A proposal will be brought to the forum in the autumn for consultation.</p> <p>Member comment: there are a number of mainstream schools who are accommodating children with significant need who really should have been allocated a place in a specialist setting or a resource-based provision, but because there are no spaces, they are still in mainstream schools. That funding also needs to be looked at.</p> <p>Terry stated he would consult with Yvonne Wade and other colleagues to explore how to approach funding for mainstream schools accommodating children with significant needs. Additionally, advice would need to be taken on whether this could be incorporated into the current funding review.</p> <p>The chair added that in secondary education, there is significant movement of pupils with SEND from one school to another. However, the associated funding doesn't appear to follow these students upon their transfer, which places considerable pressure on the receiving schools, which also needs to be looked at.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Action: Terry Bryan to consult with Yvonne Wade and other colleagues to explore how to approach funding for mainstream schools accommodating children with significant needs, and to address the issue of funding not following students with SEND when they transfer schools. <p>Yvonne noted that mainstream banding levels were in line with other authorities as found during the DBV work previously carried. Nonetheless, Yvonne will ensure to take note of the point and have a separate look.</p> <p>Jason Marantz highlighted the need for more special school places, with projections indicating a requirement for 90 to 120 additional places in the next several years, even after the 300 places currently pledged; addressing the long-term problem of insufficient capacity is being looked at.</p> <p>The Chair asked that the forum is regularly updated over the next year in how the LA is scoping out solutions to meet the needs mentioned.</p> <p>As this isn't solely a funding issue, Jason noted that updates will be shared via other forums as well. In addition, Terry informed forum members that the updated SEND sufficiency plan will be brought to the forum.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Action: Schools Forum representatives to be kept updated over the next year on the scoping of plans to meet the projected need for 90 to 120 additional special school places in the next several years. ● Action: SEND sufficiency plan to be shared with Schools Forum <p>Member comment: The point made regarding pressure in the early years sector is being echoed, particularly regarding the time it takes to process EHCNA applications, which often means children leave before funding can be recouped. Time is the issue. The requirement for three reviewed support plan meetings might be a barrier and could be reduced to two.</p> <p>Yvonne reminded everyone that the high needs block has an approximate £21 million overspend, which has been consistent. While the government has extended the override for two more years, the situation remains difficult.</p>
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The chair queried what this means in terms of the statutory requirements. Given the £21 million over spend, is it being suggested that the LA is not in a position to meet those emerging needs that members have mentioned?

Yvonne explained that due to the overspend, the local authority is in a very difficult position and needs to balance its books. She emphasized that a national review of funding is needed, as the current situation makes it challenging to meet emerging needs.

Member comment: It is important to look at what is happening at school level; the difficulty is highlighted in the plan-do-review cycles in early years and the self-imposed issue of schools being required to restart the EHCP process when a child transfers is not acknowledged, which isn't an assumption nor a misconception. There are practical things that can be done to make changes with quick wins needing to be looked at.

Yvonne Wade clarified that there had been a misunderstanding that assessments needed to be restarted, and stated that revised guidance on requesting evidence would be published over the summer break for the new academic year.

Jacquie Burke discussed the £19.1 million deficit on the balance sheet, noting that Hackney has managed to control spending in this area, partly due to the DBV initiative. She anticipates a white paper in the autumn that may propose moving away from EHCPs as the default, with a focus on the graduated response and devolving financial responsibility to schools. Jacquie Burke stressed the importance of making the graduated response work to manage current funding, especially given the national £4.8 billion debt across local authorities if the statutory override is not continued.

Jason Marantz reiterated that the extension of the statutory override is intended to allow for reform, and emphasized the need to address local issues while awaiting national changes. He announced that a school leader would be commissioned to work with the SEND team to resolve "misinterpretations" within the system, improve clarity, simplify processes, and work towards meeting needs earlier.

Member comment: There is disproportionality and inequity across provision; while phrases like "better value" are used, schools with 23% of children having an EHCP are struggling compared to schools with less than 2%. Children with needs are present, and systems like the Fair Access Panel should help prevent this disproportionality for inclusive schools. The local authority has a responsibility to challenge admissions of schools that don't have many EHCPs and ask why they are achieving 90% in results.

The chair added that there are some schools that disproportionately take on a higher number of students with EHCPs, querying how those schools are being supported if they want to meet those statutory requirements, and how does the LA prevent those schools from defaulting as it is a huge financial burden on schools because they are not fully funded to deliver what is needed for those young people?

Yvonne clarified that the issue extends beyond SEND services to wider Hackney issues like admissions. She questioned if the member was suggesting moving children around.

Member comment: The comment is about the LA's awareness of schools with a disproportionate number of children with EHCPs. What support mechanisms are in place for those schools, such as the allocation of experts, specialist teachers, RAG funding, additional grants, and services. Contrast this with schools that have fewer challenges and sit under national averages; how is funding apportioned to ensure equity? Gainsborough was assigned a child from the Fair Access Panel when it already has 23% of children with an EHCP, indicating that the mechanisms are not working to ensure equity. Disproportionality is not by chance but by choice; equity of provision is not available for many children.

Jason acknowledged that some of these issues are wider than the Schools Forum can address and are being looked at in other forums, such as the education strategy. He confirmed that the Fair Access Panel needs to be reviewed and that financial related elements would be brought back as they work through the process. He also mentioned that the local authority is commissioning one or two school leaders to work with the SEND team to resolve issues related to misinterpretations and improve clarity and simplicity in meeting needs earlier.

- **Clarification: DSG and High Needs Budget**

Chris Scott clarified a point from the previous meeting regarding the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and high needs budget. He explained that at the last meeting, they presented an item stating that the 2025-2026 DSG

budget was expected to be balanced, and there was also an item about the deterioration of school balances. He noted that there was some discussion about whether these two points were contradictory.

Chris clarified that in terms of the council's DSG expenditure in the current financial year, they believe it will be matched by the grant. Therefore, it is not expected to add to the existing £19.1 million accumulated deficit. However, in the current year and likely over the next few years, the LA realistically expect to see a further deterioration in the school balances held at year-end. He emphasized that these are two separate things, and while one presents a more positive picture than the other, it is not a contradiction but two distinct, albeit related, items.

- **Clarification: NRC (PRU) Budget**

Jason Marantz presented a document prepared by Karen Thompson to clarify the NRC budget, which had been a point of contention after the last minutes. He explained that the ongoing discussion with New Region's College centered on different methods of counting student places, emphasizing the distinction between the "number ever on roll" and the number of places being utilized. Jason confirmed that the current budget is an interim one, agreed at 140 places with a half-term interim top-up, while a long-term budget is being determined in collaboration with the new headteacher.

- **Action: Present the finalised NRC (PRU) budget report to members for review and assessment of the new budget's effectiveness.**

3. Schools' Budget Balances: Update

Chris Scott discussed the school budget balances update. Despite previous concerns, the overall school balance remained in credit at the year-end, with approximately £4 million in revenue reserves. The deficits of four schools that closed last year were written off by the council, and a similar process will occur for schools closing or merging this summer. It is anticipated that the overall deficit might appear better once these closing school deficits are removed from the starting position. However there is a concern that the overall school balances might go into deficit in the next year or two, which would have wider implications for the council's un-ringfenced reserves.

Member comment: Are there any lessons learned from LA from the previous round of closures in terms of managing the deficits that are being built up? What monitoring is taking place? Have there been any kind of parameters put around expenditure for the closing schools?

Chris explained that monitoring of school balances has significantly improved to prevent further deterioration. The goal is to stop balances from worsening, as improvement is not expected for these schools before they close.

Member comment: looking at the current deficit positions at the end of this previous financial year is already higher than the deficits of the closing schools last year. That doesn't look like a prospect that schools are going to manage in any more effective way than before.

Jason highlighted that some schools began the year with larger deficits. This underscores the ongoing work monitoring school deficits, the communications regarding deficit management responsibilities, and the support and challenge provided for deficits not managed within the three-year recovery period.

Terry confirmed details are in item four of the agenda. He noted that while last year saw a significant increase in school budget deficits by year-end, this year, despite starting with higher deficits, balances have been much better controlled. This improvement is attributed to the work detailed in the agenda documents.

Chris further added that while balances started worse this year, the LA has learned the lesson and implemented a robust process to prevent deterioration, which appears successful.

Member comment: Colvestone's budget for last year increased hugely; there were lots of things that hadn't been accounted for in previous financial years that then went into that new budget. It started off at 500, and it quickly spiraled. Is that an issue for some of the closing schools this year with accounting that hasn't been as robust?

Terry explained that extensive work was conducted before recommending school closures, including a thorough forensic assessment, to understand the current and projected budget position if no action was taken. The

anticipated budget post-closures was also provided, and the current tracking aligns with predictions in that report. The predicted outcome for the end of the financial year is being observed. Item four details measures for addressing licensed deficit agreements and supporting financially struggling schools

Member comment: Can schools forum have an evaluation of the impact of the schools facing financial difficulties grants that were allocated and the impact on the deficits

The chair queried the key drivers behind the £8.2 million deficit identified, particularly how they compare to previous years. While a slowdown in the rate of deficits was mentioned, further insight would be valuable. Specifically:

- Key Drivers are: What are the main factors contributing to the £8.2 million deficit?
- Comparison to Previous Years: How do these drivers differ from those observed in earlier years?
- Shared Characteristics: Are there any common traits among the schools in deficit, such as size, demographics, leadership stability, or other factors?
- Federations: Federations appear to be performing better as a group. Is there evidence of cross-subsidization within these federations, and are any individual schools within them still struggling despite the overall group performance?

Terry explained that federations present a complex issue due to their diverse governance and budget structures. Some allow surplus funds from one area to support others, depending on their specific setup.

The budget deficit stems from a faster-than-anticipated decline in student enrollment, a trend expected to continue. This, coupled with the challenges faced by smaller, unfederated schools (many of which arose from previous organizational planning), contributes significantly to the problem.

In addition, Chris commented that federated schools should achieve financial efficiencies through scale. While a more scientific approach to specific federations is needed, generally, finance expects greater efficiency.

Jason added that, regarding the previous government's financial difficulty grant for schools, a lessons-learned review was conducted and areas for improvement were identified. There's little value in revisiting it. If a new grant arises, a clear plan will be presented to the Schools Forum. Transparency in contingency allocation and reporting is prioritised, and clear criteria for any future grant funding will be defined in collaboration with schools.

Terry highlighted, as previously explained by Jason, that additional resources have been invested beyond the initial allocation to support schools. This includes bringing in an advisory headteacher to work directly with schools in this area, with details outlined in this document. We've spent significantly more than £45,000 on improving support for headteachers, governance, training, and guidance. It's important to recognise not just the expenditure, but also the extensive work done, which far exceeds the initial £45,000 allocation.

4.

Licensed Deficit Agreement

Chris Scott presented on licensed deficit agreements and cash flow loans, explaining that a more robust process is being implemented for schools in deficit, as they require cash flow loans to avoid being overdrawn. He stated that while some schools cannot set a balanced budget in the short term, the expectation is for them to work towards a sustainable budget in the medium term, with the deficit being licensed in the interim. Terry Bryan encouraged forum members to review the detailed document on supporting schools in financial difficulty, which outlines processes for identifying at-risk schools, providing support, and continuous monitoring.

The chair raised questions regarding the number of schools operating with a licensed deficit, the management strategies in place for these deficits, and the assurance of achieving the three-year recovery plans. The chair noted that this information is vital for early intervention and to improve school survival rates, thereby preventing rapid amalgamations and closures.

Terry explained that the LA is working with schools facing financial difficulty. Schools forum will be provided with a list of schools with licensed deficits, as these arrangements are still being finalised and can occur throughout the financial year. While a rough estimate can be offered now, Terry prefers to present a detailed report and analysis

	<p>after consulting with finance colleagues. There are a few schools with deficits, some exceeding a million pounds and others under £100,000.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action: Terry Bryan to present a detailed report and analysis of schools with licensed deficits to the Schools Forum after consulting with finance colleagues <p>The chair queried how to manage the situation and avoid creating anxiety for schools, noting that the original document listed schools with deficits and a precursor section detailing schools closed last year due to a £4 million accumulated deficit. This could lead schools to wonder if they were next, given the closures for a million-pound deficit.</p> <p>Terry responded that when considering a school for a licensed deficit recovery plan, the LA assesses the financial outlook over the next three years. If a school with a large deficit has a full enrollment and potential for recovery through various activities, closure would not be considered. The LA engages in detailed, proactive work with schools to determine long-term sustainability. It is acknowledged that recovery might extend beyond three years, especially if the outlook shows significant improvement, but this depends on available resources</p> <p>Sajeed clarified that the £4.3 million deficit figure for the schools that closed includes redundancy, severance, and strain costs. This figure does not disaggregate the deficit balance from redundancy costs. The council covers these costs from the general fund. The final deficit figure for schools closing at the end of this financial year will likely be significantly higher. This is due to them carrying forward higher deficits and potentially having a different staffing complement (more FTEs, staff with more years of service, and potentially more early retirement costs). These factors should be considered when reviewing the figures</p>
5.	<p>Raising Achievement Grant (RAG)</p> <p>Damien Parrott provided an update regarding the Raising Achievement Grant detailing activities carried out.</p> <p>Member commend: the plan's suggestions for addressing inequalities is praiseworthy but it is disappointing that Irish Travellers, identified as the most underachieving group in the borough, were not mentioned. Their inclusion in future documents is important; in the past efforts were made to ensure their data was published.</p> <p>Damien acknowledged his need to know more about the Irish Traveller community, committing to review how to integrate effective engagement strategies into future plans.</p> <p>Jason reinforced Damian's response, acknowledging the importance of broadening the focus of the grant to other underperforming groups beyond the original Black Caribbean and Turkish/Kurdish heritage pupils. He reminded the forum that permission had been granted about a year prior to include other underperforming groups, regardless of size, and that this would be data-driven.</p> <p>Lisa Williams will be leading on this piece (sustainable school improvement) in September as the new Head of School Improvement and Education Performance.</p>
6.	<p>LA to report back on academy contributions to union facility time (previous action)</p> <p>Jason explained that letters would be sent out this week to all academy leaders requesting contributions for local union facility time, which is considered good practice. He noted that some academy leaders have already started contributing although emphasising that while the LA cannot insist on contributions, they will continue to push for them and monitor the situation regularly.</p>
7.	<p>DBV Update</p> <p>Yvonne Wade provided an update regarding the Delivering Better Value program Hackney was chosen for, due to its high needs block overspend, which, while substantial (£21 million), was not as high as authorities in the "safety valve" program. She detailed the initial Newton modeling, which predicted a much higher overspend, and Hackney's own more conservative forecast.</p>

	<p>Workstream 1 (Early Years and Primary-Secondary Transition): This involved reviewing the graduated response and developing "right support, right time" for early years. A small team was developed to work with early years settings, providing training, modeling, and coaching. They also focused on the primary-to-secondary transition, piloting year 5/6 self-advocacy support. Early gains included 28 early years settings adopting the approach, a 15% decrease in assessment requests (September 2023-2024), and only one EHCP request from pupils in the year 5/6 pilot.</p> <p>The Chair questioned the existence of an independent evaluation mechanism to monitor whether early intervention genuinely reduces long-term EHCP demand, rather than merely delaying the application process.</p> <p>Yvonne responded that, while modeling began in 2022, the project only started in autumn 2024. Therefore, it is still in its early stages, and long-term evaluation data is not yet available.</p>
8.	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>None raised</p>
	<p>Proposed dates for 2025/26</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wed 5 Nov 2025 ● Wed 4 Feb 2026 ● Wed 6 May 2026 ● Wed 1 Jul 2026 <p>Summary of actions agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Agenda item 2: Terry Bryan to consult with Yvonne Wade and other colleagues to explore how to approach funding for mainstream schools accommodating children with significant needs, and to address the issue of funding not following students with SEND when they transfer schools. ● Agenda item 2: Schools Forum representatives to be kept updated over the next year on the scoping of plans to meet the projected need for 90 to 120 additional special school places in the next several years. ● Agenda item 2: SEND sufficiency plan to be shared with Schools Forum ● Agenda item 2: Present the finalised NRC (PRU) budget report to members for review and assessment of the new budget's effectiveness ● Agenda item 4: Terry Bryan to present a detailed report and analysis of schools with licensed deficits to the Schools Forum after consulting with finance colleagues