

# Minutes

<b>Meeting title:</b>	Schools Forum Meeting	
<b>Date/time</b>	04 February 2026, 17.30-19.00	
<b>Members:</b>	<p><b><u>School Members</u></b>  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)</p> <p><a href="#">Attendance record</a></p>	<p><b><u>Academy Members</u></b>  Monique Pink (Mossbourne: Parent Governor)  Marya Afreedi (Eko Trust: Primary Headteacher)  Vacant  Vacant  Vacant  Vacant  Vacant</p> <p><b><u>Alternative Provision</u></b>  Jo Byrne (PRU rep, Headteacher)</p> <p><b><u>Special School Members</u></b>  Jo Clare (Special School rep)  Kevin McDonnell (Special School Headteacher rep)</p> <p><b><u>Non School Members</u></b>  David Davies (Staff rep)</p> <p><b><u>Early Years Representative</u></b>  Jenna Clark</p>
<b>Additional attendees:</b>	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) Lisa Williams (Head of School Improvement & Education Performance) Donna Thomas (AD Early years, Early Help and Well-being) Shakeel Yasin (Director of Finances (Services)) Sajeed Patni (AD of Finance, Children & Education) Terry Bryan (AD School Estate Strategy) Chris Scott (Group Accountant) Suhail Kadir (Finance Manager - Schools) Kathryn Lloyd (Head of Strategy, Governance & Performance) Ann Yiadom (Clerk to the Forum) Anton Francic (Principal Secondary Adviser) Damien Parrott (Senior Leadership & Management Adviser - Primary SIP)	
<b>Apologies:</b>	David Davies (Staff rep); Kevin Reynolds (Maintained Pri Headteacher rep)	
<b>Members Absent:</b>	Marya Afreedi (Eko Trust: Primary Headteacher)	

## Executive Summary

- The Schools Forum endorsed the **Early Years funding proposal for 2026-27**, which expanded the block funding from £54M to £68M to cover eligible children from nine months upwards.

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- **Special Schools Budget:** Forum members raised significant concerns that current top-up rates are inadequate and have contributed to cumulative deficits in special schools, leading to a call for more in-depth analytical work by the local authority.
- The Forum agreed to approve the 529 commissioned places, which are determined by the current physical capacity of the special schools, and noted the 3.5% increase in top-up funding.
- The Schools Forum approved the **CSSB line allocation for 2026/27**, despite an overall reduction of approximately £84,000, driven by a 20% cut to school improvement funding and the need for services to absorb centrally employed teacher costs. Services will require cost reductions, and the Forum requested comparative data on central spend per pupil for future review.
- **New Regents College (NRC) Funding:** A proposal for a new, stable tiered top-up funding model was presented to support the redesign of the Hackney Educational Alternative Learning Services (HEALS).
- Following discussion about NRC's past large surplus and the need for clear Key Performance Indicators, the Forum approved the new funding structure, including a reduction from 180 to 140 commissioned places.
- A draft **SEN Sufficiency Plan** was introduced, highlighting a projected 19% increase in children with Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs) by 2032.
- Members voiced strong concerns that the plan requires a more detailed analysis of student need beyond simple diagnosis and needs further consultation before moving forward. The item will return to the next meeting.
- **Raising Achievement Grant:** An interim report outlined progress on using the grant for budgetary control and developing bespoke programs for underserved student groups.
- **Redundancy Panel Process:** The Forum approved a proposal to align the redundancy panel's criteria with national guidance, which broadens the scope for Local Authority-funded redundancy costs by removing the prior requirement for 'falling rolls'

## Action Summary:

1	<b>Agenda item 4:</b> Approval of Central Schools Services Block 2026/2	<b>Comparative data to be presented to schools forum - Benchmarking Central Spend per Pupil and Central Block Funding Data</b>
2	<b>Agenda item 7:</b> SEND Sufficiency Plan	<b>Plan/discussion to be brought back for a full review once the White Paper has been officially released and more work has been completed.</b>
3	<b>Agenda item 9:</b> Redundancy Panel Process - Review	<b>Review of the Redundancy Panel Process to be discussed annually</b>

## Meeting Minutes

1.	<b>Welcome and introduction</b>
2.	<p><b>3.1. Minutes of the last meeting held 05 November 2025</b> - <a href="#">Schools Forum Minutes - 05.11.2025</a></p> <p>The minutes were confirmed as an accurate record, with one vote in favour and one seconding the motion.</p> <p><b>3.2. Action log</b> - <a href="#">Schools Forum Action Log</a></p> <p>The action log was reviewed and it was noted that relevant items are on the agenda.</p>

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3. **Administration arrangements for allocation of Early Years Funding 2026-27** - [Administration of Early Years Block Budget for 2026/27](#)

Donna Thomas presented the report which is for the forum members to endorse.

The early years block funding has expanded to cover all children in homes with working families eligible for the entitlement, including children from nine months and upwards.

The block funding has increased to £68M, which is £13M more than the previous year's £54M. A key risk is the Department for Education's new practice of making adjustments to funding based on termly censuses, creating financial volatility

Donna explained that the local authority's allowed retention rate for the Early Years block has decreased from 5% (and 4% in recent years) to 3% this year, which is used to cover the early years service, advice, quality assurance, and safeguarding. Due to the full implementation of funding changes and the potential for clawback based on termly adjustments, the authority is trading cautiously and cannot significantly increase spend on the service.

The Disability Access Fund and the rates for children under two have also seen a slightly increase.

**Members endorsed the proposal for the Early Years funding.**

4. **Approval of Central Schools Services Block 2026/27** - [Central School Services Block](#)

Chris Scott presented the report for School Forum Members to agree, noting that the key points include a headline increase in the block compared to last year. However, when combining the current year across all year groups, an overall reduction of approximately £84,000 can be seen.

The paper identifies two main points, including a 20% reduction in the historic element of the CSSB, which is the funding for school improvement. The overall grant has a small reduction across identified budget lines.

Chris noted that the council has further expenditure chargeable to the grant, which the paper details each of these expenditure lines. The only interchangeable element is the combined services, historic funding element.

**Member comment:** what is the direct impact of that decrease and what are the things that will need to be done differently because of that?

Chris explained that in the current year, the two additional grant items are in respect to the cost of centrally employed teachers. Those grants will mitigate some overspend within the services. Next year, when they are rolled into the grant, the underlying budget for the grant won't decrease, but additional pressures will remain, including costs for centrally employed teachers relating to the pay settlement last year and the increase in the contribution costs. This will have to be absorbed by the relevant services.

Chris further explained that improvements or cost reductions in those areas will need to be made to accommodate this. Although noting that those services also have other funding sources, particularly from the council's general fund, the reduction is very modest in the context of the budget. Nonetheless, these small reductions keep coming through year after year, which is how the slightly larger problem gradually builds up.

**Chair** queried the other central services that could be compromised and asked whether there is any risk of admission services being impacted by this?

Chris explained that an impact on admissions or budget issues is not expected, as the Admissions team has not taken a reduction this year and overspending is not anticipated.

**The Chair** further queried how Hackney's central spend per pupil compares to the national average and to that of our statistical neighbours, to ensure operating within the expected parameters?

The information isn't readily available but would be straightforward to obtain and as such Chris suggested bringing this back to a subsequent meeting alongside benchmarking data for the central block.

- **Action: Comparative data to be presented to schools forum - Benchmarking Central Spend per Pupil and Central Block Funding Data**

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**Member comment:** It is relevant to look at benchmarking against other local authorities but also benchmarking against the reduction in the number of pupils being served. Are these figures reflecting the dramatic reduction in pupils currently in primary and heading towards secondary?

Chris explained that most of the central block is for ongoing responsibilities and is a simple multiple of the number of pupils by a rate. The reduction in pupils over the last few years has had a direct and proportional impact on the size of the grant.

**Member comment:** Is that being reflected in the proportion of funding allocated to the different areas?

Chris explained that the 20% reduction arrangement makes this slightly different. Savings are expected on the copyright license, commensurate with the reduction in pupil numbers and the grant. Without the decrease in pupil numbers, balancing the budget at the current level would be difficult. Overall, expected savings from fewer children should offset some of the grant reduction impact.

In light of the budgeting process **the Chair** queried whether specific areas will be reviewed to cover the £84,000 shortfall, or the portion of that amount not already addressed by the reduced student numbers?

The two central grants weren't budgeted in the current year. In the current year, they have been used to offset overspends, however the LA won't have that ability to isolate those overspends next year. The items budgeted from the central school services block will still be budgeted because of those two items being rolled in. The block is approximately £100k more next year. Although it hasn't directly impacted the budget setting, the LA won't have the pressure of being able to offset overspend from those centrally employed teacher grants next year.

**Members agreed to the line allocation of the CSSB as outlined in the report**

## 5. **Special Schools Budget** - [Special Schools Budget](#)

Chris presented the special school budget, proposing to fund the same number of places as currently exist, which is 529 places, and to initially increase the top-up funding by 3.5% for 26/27. The uplift will be calculated on the sum of all three elements of funding (elements one, two, and three) but will nominally sit on element three, as elements one and two have not changed since 2013.

The number of commissioned places is primarily limited by the physical capacity of the schools, and the authority reasonably expects unmet demand.

Legacy funding from several grants, including those for pay and pensions, will be rolled up into a single budget line next year, which is a nationally mandated change

There was a question about why the 3.5% uplift doesn't apply to the plan pension element. The reason is that this element dealt with a nominal increase in cost at the time. However, that nominal increase is still the same, as subsequent nominal increases from subsequent pay settlements were covered by ever more pay grants. There have been many pay grants over the last few years. As such, the £785 isn't part of the 3.5%, but the LA did clarify the 3.5% would be calculated on the other three elements added together, and it would all be put onto element three. A further question raised was regarding elements one and two; these were introduced in 2013.

**The Chair** queried what the real-terms gap between the current cost and the cost at that time is?

The uplift is calculated based on the sum of all three elements of high needs funding, so there is no 'real terms' cost pressure overall. While the total sum of the three elements has grown appropriately over the years, Elements 1 and 2 have remained constant. The entire increase has been applied to Element 3. This approach does not directly impact special schools because the shortfall is compensated through Element 3.

The impact is felt more by mainstream schools. Because Element 2 has not increased in over a decade, the financial threshold for high needs funding has significantly diminished. Relatively speaking, meeting the first £6,000 of cost is less of a financial burden now than it was in 2013.

Overall, this change has been beneficial across the school estate, but the direct effect has not been on special schools.

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**Member question:** Given the number of years in which top up rates saw no increases in the Special Schools Budget (despite clear and obvious annual increases in costs) what is the actual or estimated financial value of that funding gap as a proportion of the current Special Schools cumulative deficit as previously reported?

**Member question:** Could it be indicated where and to what value in the Special Schools Budget additional payments for secondary, sixth form and dual site costs have been accounted for? This is important information for schools engaging in expansion on to second sites, as well as schools already spread over two sites.

Chris explained that the current element 3 top-up rate dates back to 2023, when an external consultant produced a report on all three schools. The consultant assessed the level of spend in each school and benchmarked it against national data for validation. The top-up rate was calculated to cover the entire cost base at that time, including the existing school sites, which have not changed since the report. The rates set in April 2023 fully covered the cost base.

Since then, further pay and pension grants, and the National Insurance Grant, have been introduced. Not all of this funding is yet included in the DSG, with some remaining as separate grants, though all separate grants will be incorporated into the DSG by April 2026.

Additionally, a number of discussions have taken place between the council and the three schools, resulting in some further agreed increases. There has also been additional engagement from consultants. This work addressed the underlying issue of age groups and different sites, which remain unchanged since the initial work.

Regarding the estimated financial value of a funding gap, this is a point open to contest, which Chris explained he cannot comment on a perceived underfunding gap, but attempts can be made to address any questions around it.

**Member comment:** Current top-up rates for special schools are inadequate and benchmarking shows Hackney is underperforming. The upcoming special needs funding review must include a more analytical look at funding and the pattern of deficits in the three special schools over the last five to six years. While a real-term funding reduction is acknowledged, a sustainable solution requires properly accounting for the link between funding and deficits, as the premise that funding is not part of the problem is unacceptable, even with other actions required by special schools.

Jasons recognises the problem noting that it is evident in deficits. The previous review commissioned by the former Director, undertaken by the external consultant, did not yield a solution, which is why a new review has been commissioned. Jason assured that comments are noted adding that the terms of reference for the review have been shared with the heads and will be shared with the chairs. This is for their information, not consultation, so they can see the proposed scope. It will be ensured that funding levels, the primary driver for this review, are central to its focus.

**Member comment:** Given the number of children in mainstream settings who should be in special settings, will the funding also be looked at for those pupils? Specifically, pupils who remain in mainstream schools after special schools cannot meet their needs or lack space, despite being put out to consultation..

Jason explained the plan includes review ARP funding attached to mainstream schools, which includes looking at SEND funding levels. The LA acknowledges that some children's needs would be better met in ARPs or special schools, but insufficient places currently exist.

**The Chair** echoed the point raised, noting that in the secondary sector, there is a significant challenge where students are displaced due to insufficient specialist places. This creates a considerable burden on secondary schools, especially when staffing requirements become expensive without the necessary support. Thus, it would be helpful to understand how the local authority plans to address this.

**The chair** further raised a question regarding the evidence base for the 529 commissioned places mentioned in the report, specifically whether this number is linked to EHC trends or placement flow. Furthermore, clarification was sought on the plan if demand were to exceed these 529 places.

Chris explained that the current numbers are agreed upon with the schools and are primarily constrained by the physical capacity of the school buildings. Given the recent trajectory, it is reasonably expected that there will be unmet demand for additional places within the year. The limit on the number of places a school can physically accommodate is the key constraint, meaning that pressure on places is highly likely to continue. Chris also clarified that these are actual commissioned places, not a historical count of locations.

**The Schools Forum approved the number of places and the 3.5% increase in top-up funding**

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## 6. New Regents College funding - [PRU Funding Arrangement](#)

Donna introduced a proposal for New Regents College to move to a more stable tiered top-up model, with £12,000 for standard needs and £18,000 for high needs. This change is intended to develop a more stable budget and allow for a ten-year approach to supporting children with barriers to education. The proposal is predicated on principles of stability, transparent top-up, and upfront funding, with an understanding that the arrangements will be reviewed.

Benchmarking against other local authorities indicated that NRC has been funded quite low. The proposal is to fund NRC with base funding for 140 places at £10,000 (standard), 120 top-up places at £12,000 (standard top-up), and 20 places at £18,000 (higher rate for high needs), also factoring in legacy funding. The intention is to give NRC a more stable budget, enabling them to work more flexibly in partnership with schools.

The College previously built up a significant surplus, which Jo Byrne confirmed was used to meet expenditures in recent years, as they had operated at an in-year deficit for at least the last three years.

Members raised concerns about the past large surplus of over £2 million, its allocation, and the need for reassurance that the new funding will be well spent.

Donna and Jason stressed that the establishment of HEALS provides a new vision, new leadership, and new memorandum of understanding as well as SLA which are in place to improve transparency, data submission, and monitoring

Jo further explained that internal work is being done to determine the actual cost of places across different key stages, noting that primary age students cost more due to complexity. Jo also stated that the school provides a pressure release for young people waiting for specialist settings, which increases costs.

Donna emphasised that the new model, though potentially increasing the budget, is about funding fewer places than historically and enabling the PRU and the LA to work differently to meet needs and reduce exclusions.

**The Chair** advocated for a more forensic approach to understanding the causes of school deficits, particularly in special schools, arguing that sustainability requires understanding the history of the lack of sustainability and sought clarification on the fate of a £2 million balance for transparency.

Jason confirmed that internal systems and structures are now in place to forensically review finances, intervening earlier than in the past. Furthermore, an internal monthly school finances board has been established to review positions and ask necessary questions, leading directly to the review of the ARP and special school funding.

Terry Bryan confirmed that they are looking into the trend that emerged over recent years regarding special schools' funding to understand how they arrived at their current position. The review aims to allow the group to comment on initial findings as the process goes, not just presenting the final result.

**Members voted in agreement to the proposed changes.**

## 7. SEND Sufficiency Plan & Next Steps - [SEND Sufficiency Plan 2025 - Executive summary](#)

- [SEND Sufficiency Plan 2025-2032](#)
- [New SEND Provision Highlight Report](#)

Terry Bryan introduced the SEND Sufficiency Plan, noting it is an iterative document intended to be flexible and revisited regularly. Jason clarified it is a sufficiency plan, not a commissioning plan, and must align with the forthcoming SEND white paper, which is expected to focus on inclusion and increased responsibility for schools. The plan addresses a projected 19% increase in children and young people with EHCPs by 2032 and aims to increase capacity.

**The Chair** raised the need to support mainstream schools to remain inclusive outside of the ARP model to manage the growing demand for specialist places. Jason agreed that a multi-layered solution, including training, is needed. A review was commissioned due to current ARP funding issues, and Jason welcomed the likely white

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	<p>paper suggestion of giving money earlier to schools to address need. Financial constraints, including a £1 million shortfall for schools, were noted as a significant factor.</p> <p>Members welcomed the plan but raised significant concerns about the scope and data. They stressed that the report had huge gaps and lacked crucial data, such as the full extent of students' learning needs, arguing that data should be interrogated by the level of need, not just by diagnosis. Members further emphasised the need for better local intelligence and broader consultation, especially regarding children moving to EHE and the needs of those struggling in secondary school.</p> <p><b>Member comment:</b> the Irish traveler community is missing from the report; over 60% of their 500 children are currently not in a setting. Their needs to be highlighted in the SEND sufficiency strategy</p> <p>Terry acknowledged the gaps and the need for a different type of analysis, reiterating the plan is a work in progress. Terry confirmed that while no one is ruling out the expansion of existing special schools, there are statutory and practical difficulties for example demonstrating sustainable leadership across dual sites. Other options being considered include developing SEN hubs, free schools, or new schools within existing federations. Further analysis is required, particularly on the primary focus of speech, language communication needs, and autism.</p> <p>The discussion also included concerns about funding transparency and the need to learn from schools successfully managing a high number of EHC Plans.</p> <p>Chair requested that any further questions be sent to the Clerk</p> <p><b>Action: plan/discussion to be brought back for a full review once the White Paper has been officially released and more work has been completed.</b></p>
8.	<p><b>Raising Achievement in Primary Schools: interventions for under-achieving groups 2025-26 - <a href="#">Raising Achievement Grant Report</a></b></p> <p>Damian Parrott provided an update noting it is an interim report focused on tightening budgetary control and accuracy.</p> <p>Key aims include maintaining effective programs and developing bespoke programs for underserved groups, specifically Black Caribbean and Turkish/Kurdish pupils, and beginning work to support the Gypsy, Roma, and Irish traveler community.</p> <p>Evaluative data on the impact of programs will be provided in detail at the end of the academic year in the July report.</p> <p>A question was raised about a historical £17k invoice from the library service, which was two years old and unexpected. Damian explained that the new budget tool is predictive and forward-moving, which should prevent similar unexpected, historical expenses by enabling the chasing of invoices and predicting upcoming costs</p> <p>The efforts made on focusing on the impact and evaluation were commended, noting that it will be very beneficial for making informed decisions.</p>
9.	<p><b>Redundancy Panel Process - Review - <a href="#">Redundancy Panel Process Review Report</a></b></p> <p>The redundancy panel agreed to review the current criteria and terms of reference. The criteria have evolved from focusing on "falling roles" to supporting schools with financial challenges regardless of falling roles. The panel proposed two key changes: removing the requirement for falling roles to align with national guidance (Scheme for Financing Schools) and clarifying that redundancy costs should be met by the council, while strain costs need to be met by schools</p> <p>Reassurance was sought that the proposed changes would not exclude any school previously included in the criteria, to which Jason confirmed it is a widening, not a narrowing of scope. Sajeed further confirmed the clarity that pension strain costs would be met by the school, aligning with national guidance.</p>

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It is estimated that the LA has spent circa £2.8 million over the last three years on agreed business cases, acknowledging it is difficult to predict future cost increases due to the widening of the criteria. Jason confirmed that the redundancy panel review happened because they were already considering national guidance beyond just "falling roles," and committed to keeping the criteria under constant review, bringing it back to the group at a reasonable frequency.

Members proposed and agreed that the review should be brought back at least annually due to the current climate of pressures schools are facing.

**Action: Review of the Redundancy Panel Process to be discussed annually**

**Members of maintained schools agreed with the recommendations of the review.**

10. AOB

**1. Training for Schools Forum Members**

None raised

**Next meeting date:** Wednesday 06 May 2026