

Meeting title:	Schools Forum Meeting	
Date/time	07 May 2025, 17.30-19.00	
Members:	<p><u>School Members</u> 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><u>Academy Members</u> Monique Pink (Parent Governor) Vacant Vacant Vacant Vacant Vacant Vacant</p> <p><u>Alternative Provision</u> Jo Byrne (PRU rep, Headteacher)</p> <p><u>Special School Members</u> Jo Clare (Special School rep) Kevin McDonnell (Special School Headteacher rep)</p> <p><u>Non School Members</u> David Davies (Staff rep)</p> <p><u>Early Years Representative</u> Jenna Clark</p>
Additional attendees:	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) Suhail Kadir (Finance Manager - Schools)	
Apologies:	Kathryn Lloyd	
Members Absent:		

	Item
1.	<p>Welcome and introduction</p> <p>New members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monique Pink, Parent Governor at Mossbourne Parkside Academy • Jo Byrne, Pupil Referral Unit Representative

2.	<p>2.1. 2.1. Minutes of the last meeting held 05 February 2025 ☰ Schools Forum Minutes - 05.02.2025</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minutes approved <p>2.2. Action log ☰ SF Action Log 24-25</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actions were reviewed with relevant status updates made
3.	<p>New Regent College (PRU) Budget - Karen Thomson ☰ 0.3 Pupil Referral Unit Schools Forum update</p> <p>The Local Authority (LA) has been commissioning 180 places for primary and secondary students up to age 16 at New Regents College. However, all 180 places have not been used at the same time. To rationalize and streamline provision, the LA proposes to fund 180 places for the next 12 months on a transitional basis but record 140 places (with 40 additional), which is closer to the average number of places required. An additional £400,000 in transitional funding is proposed to extend the offer.</p> <p>Chair comment: What are the long-term strategies to replace transitional funding after the 12 months?</p> <p>Karen explained that the PRU budget consists of three parts: place funding, commissioned services, and top-up funding. Place funding criteria are based on the average number of pupils occupying places over a 12-month period (a Department for Education, DfE, criterion). The LA is looking to increase the commissioned services line to provide more reintegration pathways beyond long-term placements for permanently excluded pupils.</p> <p>The LA has allocated an additional £325,000 from high needs funding for HEALS, which has not been previously funded. This was negotiated as part of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Value for Money (DVB) additional funding.</p> <p>The top-up funding for New Regent College is under review. The proposal is to maintain the previous year's top-up rate.</p> <p>New Regent College is part of the AP Taskforce and is entitled to funding, which the DfE has extended for another 12 months. The DfE has agreed to fund £97,000 if the LA matches this by £49,000.</p> <p>Chair comment: Would the current top-up funding and the match funding be sufficient for meeting the needs of the AP cohort in Hackney?</p> <p>Karen noted that the additional funding is specifically aimed at identifying a particular element of the AP cohort at high risk of violence. The budget for 154 places, which could potentially serve up to 300 children depending on their needs (short or long term education), is reasonable in most cases. Extending the current provision is being explored by New Regent College independently. A comparative national benchmark, though outdated, shows the budget compares well. However, the top-up funding needs review as part of the SEND and AP review. While resources are never enough, Karen is currently satisfied with the budget.</p> <p>Member comment: If under 180 places were funded last year but not used, was there a carry forward for New Regent?</p> <p>The ever on roll number attending new regents in 2023-24 was 203 children. Not all 180 places were taken up at the same time as pupils do not attend at the same time.</p> <p>Chris Scott explained that New Regent College has a carried forward balance, but the council doesn't as they</p>

funded the full number places.

During the review, there was tension regarding expenditure being based on the full budget. While there's an understanding of the need for secure place funding and recognizing that top-up rates in Hackney were below average, discussions are happening to ensure funding matches actual needs rather than exceeding them. The focus is shifting towards more commissioned services, with a transfer of funding that will reduce place funding but not the overall Alternative Education budget.

Additionally, conversations and recommendations arose about business rates for PRUs. While PRUs are not typically covered, and initial guidance from the EFSA suggested no recompense, the LA determined this was unfair. Therefore, the LA proposes to recompense business rates for PRUs annually, similar to other schools.

Member comment: Does the Boxing Academy pay business rates and will they be recompensed?

Karen shared that the Head of the Boxing Academy has been asked to confirm if their business rates are recompensed.

4. **Growth and Reorganisation Funding - Chris Scott [w](#) 04. Report - Reorganisation Funding.docx**

The report on Growth and Reorganisation Funding was divided into three parts. The first section summarises the funding disbursement related to school closures in Summer 2024.

Chair comment: How will funding distribution avoid repeating the misallocations seen in 2024?

Chris explained that the current financial year's proposal will not rely on estimates. While there is always a risk with estimated payments, clawing back funding was not deemed necessary.

Member comment: Does the funding pertain specifically to the 2023-24 academic year, including pupil movement and school closures within that year? It appears that some children have not been accounted for.

Chris noted that 295 pupils appeared on the school census in October 2023 in one of the four closing schools and were matched to another Hackney primary school in the October census 2024. This was the counting rule. Year 6 pupils had left to secondary schools, and a number of pupils did not appear on the census, indicating they had left Hackney. Some children had already left due to discussions about possible school closures. The funding period was from September 2024 until the end of the financial year, and funding remains with the school until it closes.

Jason added that the first cycle was a protracted process from the year prior and contained within an academic year, leading to pupils leaving earlier.

The second part of the report addresses the decisions to merge two schools and close two schools, with pupils being accommodated at other schools. The report also addresses compliance issues with the regulations during 2024 mergers,

Terry explained the statutory guidance on "prescribed alteration," which refers to a school being required to formally increase its Published Admission Number (PAN), as in the case of Nightingale or open additional classes, as in the case of Princess May. Regardless of whether the pupils ended up at these schools, both schools were entitled to receive a significant share of the budget from the closing schools according to the school funding regulations. The Local Authority's (LA) previous approach when providing additional funding for these schools was not in line with the funding regulations and it was right that this was retrospectively addressed.

Chair comment: Regarding regulations, what happens to funding when students leave the borough prior to the funding being distributed? Is the additional allocation maintained by schools despite not meeting projected student

numbers?

Terry explained that when making a "prescribed alteration," schools must prepare for potential additional classes and incur costs, even before knowing the actual numbers. The fact that students did not arrive as anticipated does not negate the costs incurred by these schools when increasing their PAN or setting up new classes. There is still the potential for these classes to operate if additional pupils move to these schools in future. The regulations therefore make provision for these circumstances as it is recognised that enlarged schools can face financial difficulties if the anticipated number of pupils do not arrive immediately.

Chris noted the second part of the paper outlines that the budget will be passported with the merged schools.

The final section of the report addresses two schools closing without a merger arrangement. It was acknowledged that regulations were not adequately followed previously. Under the proposal for the current year, Nightingale would have inherited £672k from Baden Powell's budget due to attracting more pupils from the closing schools. Princess May would have inherited £519k from Colvestone's budget, but received less due to fewer children transferring, leaving them £244k worse off. It was agreed to correct this retrospectively.

St. Matthias agreed with the LA to open an additional Year 4 class, with an allocation of £221k from the remaining budget, leaving £825k. There are no current plans for other "prescribed alterations," though funding is available if needed. The LA is reviewing how to allocate the remaining money, as School Forum (SF) regulations do not allow funding for casual admissions, which the Education and Skills Funding Agency (EFSA) has reinforced.

Member comment: This needs to be carefully communicated to all Heads, as it was repeatedly mentioned last year that the 'funding follows the children.' Also, schools like Nightingale inherited a number of children from Colvestone and therefore could have claimed additional money as well as receiving the lump sum. It would be useful to know where all the children went to, to work out how many children were lost to another borough. And it would also be useful to have two case studies done at Sebright and Hoxton Gardens to show the impact of why they received the additional funding.

Terry clarified that the school funding regulations had not changed, it was just that last year the forum was asked to agree to an approach that was out of step with its provisions.

Chris further added that last year, the Forum agreed to transfer the outstanding budget into the growth fund and allocate it based on where the children went, but this approach was subsequently questioned. There is a possible option to apply for a disapplication to the EFSA to distribute the surplus. Alternatively, it could be dealt with as part of the overall management of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). For example, in the year just closed, there is a High Needs overspend, but the LA is expecting to have a balanced DSG due to underspend in other areas. Therefore, the LA could manage the DSG as a whole to accommodate the surplus.

Chair comment: There are schools that are absorbing pupils without formal mergers, how does the LA plan to support those schools?

Chris explained that there is no budgetary support or process for financial assistance to schools absorbing pupils. All funding remains with closing schools until the end of August. Whilst Jason added that the contingency fund could be a helpful mechanism for unique situations although this could be depleted quickly.

Member comment: Absorbing pupils, even with a teacher present, can have a significant knock-on effect, especially when absorbing six pupils with limited or no teaching assistant support. Negating the fact that a class has not been opened and therefore no funding allocated needs to be thought through carefully as children are coming and extra resources are being put in place with no additional funding.

Terry acknowledged the validity of the point, noting that the LA would redirect funds if a compliant method exists.

	<p>Some LAs utilise a growth fund which provides the necessary mechanism for supplementing school budgets, but HE lacks a similar mechanism for these situations. Currently, funds are available and will be allocated as equitably as possible.</p> <p>The chair echoed that marginal changes can still have an impact.</p> <p>Councillor Bramble informed the forum of her endeavour to collaborate with Jason, Terry, and education colleagues with a view to explore funding and support solutions of the schools where children are exiting. Whilst it is acknowledged that the LA lacks the same mechanisms as others, alternative approaches will be investigated nonetheless.</p> <p>Jason reiterated that if a school was significantly impacted, the only mechanism would be the contingency fund.</p> <p>Action: Explore funding and support solutions for schools where children are exiting - Cllr Bramble, Jason Marantz, Terry Bryan and co.</p>
5.	<p>Update on High Needs Funding Arrangements 2025/26  High Needs Update.pptx</p> <p>Chris provided an update on high needs block funding, anticipating a balanced budget in 2025-2026 despite an expected High Needs overspend in 2024-2025; the DSG as a whole has a modest surplus in 24/25. There is the possibility of a future request for a block transfer depending on the financial situation. If required modelling will be brought to the forum with a few different scenarios. but at present it is not expected to request a block transfer as an overspend is not anticipated in 2025/26. The creation of a high-needs subgroup was deemed no longer required, with high-needs matters to continue being addressed in full forum discussions.</p> <p>Member comment: there seems to be a contradiction with having a balanced budget.</p> <p>Chris acknowledged budget pressures in some special schools due to variations. Currently, the LA is cautiously optimistic, due to an increase in the schools block and the actual grant, which allows the LA to manage some pressure in 2025/26. However, the forum will receive further updates as the year progresses.</p> <p>Member comment: It is a struggle to reconcile this based on the stated figures with those in other documents, which indicate a £2.7 million deficit in the special schools sector for 2025/26, increasing to £6.8 million by 2027/28.</p> <p>Chris explained that efforts are underway to manage this issue, but the degree of success will influence its future trajectory. There is a possibility of unforeseen pressures arising later in the year that the Local Authority is not currently anticipating. The forum will be kept informed of any developments.</p> <p>Member comment: There are conflicting reports: a Hackney paper indicates a crashing sector, while another item suggests a balanced budget. These discrepancies do not add up.</p> <p>Chris notes that outcomes will depend on agreements made with special schools while Sajeed added that projections are based on current trends. Factors influencing this year's trajectory may change. Mitigation strategies can be implemented in future years. The Local Authority's forecast will be periodically refreshed, and the forum will be updated. Trends will be revised to reflect any mitigating actions, likely resulting in a reduction.</p> <p>Action: modeling to be brought to the forum with a few different scenarios regarding High Needs Funding Arrangements, as and when required</p>
6.	<p>Draft End-of-Year Position on School Estates Balances and Next Steps - Terry Bryan</p> <p> School Budgets, Current Position, LA Support and Challenge - Schools Forum .pdf</p>

Terry shared a presented slides on School Budget, Current position, LA support and Challenges with the Forum.

Member comment: Special schools are committed to improving sustainability, value, and efficiency, though it may vary across schools how this might look like. However, two schools cannot recover from debt largely due to historical underfunding, which gives a false impression of mismanagement. This poses a significant challenge for governors because, unlike other school types, special schools anticipate growth, not falling rolls. Consequently, governors must be mindful that agreeing to increase spaces could increase existing debt while they are trying to recover substantial deficits.

Joe Wilson assured the forum that the LA is currently reviewing top-up funding for all special schools, with an increasing need across these schools being acknowledged. While funding levels were raised two years ago and another increase is being considered, a review is necessary to determine if funding can adequately address deficits experienced by some schools even with previous increases.

Jason added that the LA is committed to annual reviews though does not necessarily equate to annual increases.

Member comment: This is a risk to the system and should be on a risk register. Additionally, given how the information is presented, if all schools' deficits and surpluses are put together the question this raises is 'so what?' Once it is the school's money it is the school's money and not shared around.

Terry pointed out that while the LA currently lacks the authority and desire to clawback, the government might. This could potentially force the LA to do so.

Jason clarified that this issue is already on the risk register and is regularly reviewed. Further adding that the impact of not having an accumulated surplus to offset school deficits could strain LA finances, creating its own difficulties. However, forum members are assured that this matter is being closely and regularly monitored.

Chair comment: Finding strategies to mitigate some of the issues as well as different school models were mentioned. How will collaborative initiatives be found to incentivise schools to participate in the suggested new operating models?

Terry explained the development of a framework for this, emphasizing the collective responsibility of all schools when considering the implications of school closures. The approach will be area-based, encouraging schools to address SEND and EY provision as well rather than focusing solely on falling rolls. This is an opportunity for school leaders and stakeholders to collaboratively determine the best management approach, with school closures considered a last resort. Previous PAN reductions have not always been effective, leaving smaller schools particularly vulnerable. Potential partnerships, such as all-through provisions or mergers, will be explored, as will local federations with single governance and budgets for better economies of scale. Property and asset management, including site maintenance costs, will be reviewed, potentially leading to a reduction in sites for LA savings. School leaders and LA officers must collaborate to explore all potential models and engage with communities. The focus extends beyond financial sustainability to include workforce protection and development, as well as meaningful community engagement, addressing past feedback indicating a lack of true involvement.

Chair comment: Regarding the exploration of federation and merger options, how will small 1FE schools be supported in this process? Additionally, what monitoring procedures are in place for schools receiving deficit support?

Terry explained that HE is proactively supporting schools, not just those at risk or in deficit, by analyzing their spending trajectories and intervening where potential deficits are identified. This involves significant resources across HE and numerous schools. To address the challenge of schools exploring 1FE, a framework is being

	<p>developed. School leaders and LA officers will collaborate within this framework to find local solutions, and community engagement will occur earlier in the process. A letter outlining the details and timeline will be sent out soon, indicating when the LA anticipates implementing changes resulting from this work. The planning phase will be inclusive, involving all school leaders and governing bodies to collectively determine the best way forward, ensuring schools are not left to manage these issues alone.</p> <p>Jason echoed the need to reach a collective borough-wide approach and continue conversation when appropriate.</p>
7.	<p>Schools Forum Contingency Fund - Chris Scott W 0.7. Report - Contingency Funding.docx</p> <p>Chris provided a brief overview of the contingency fund.</p> <p>In 2024/25, three applications totaling £155,000 were approved. The underspent amount will be carried forward within the de-delegated contingency, in accordance with the forum's autumn term agreement.</p>
8.	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>Redundancy Panel Schools Forum Representative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Kevin Reynolds to be the Schools Forum representative on the Redundancy Panel for the remaining panels in the academic year ● A suggestion was made for headteachers to take up this role on a rota basis. <p>Raising Achievement Paper to be presented at the next Schools Forum meeting.</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 4: Explore funding and support solutions for schools where children are exiting - Cllr Bramble, Jason Marantz, Terry Bryan and co. ● Agenda item 5: Modeling to be brought to the forum with a few different scenarios regarding High Needs Funding Arrangements, as and when required 	