

Schools Forum

Draft Minutes of Meeting held 17 September 2020 at 10am Virtual Meeting – Microsoft Teams

In Attendance:

Multi Academy Trusts

Catalyst Academies Trust
ORTU Federation
Osborne Co-operative Academy Trust
REAch2 Academy Trust
South West Essex Community Education Trust
The Gateway Learning Community Trust (GLC)
Vine Schools Trust

Name

Mr T Parfett
Dr Sophina Asong
Mr Griffiths
Mr E Samuel
Mrs C Pumfrey
Mr K Sadler
Mrs E Wigmore

Secondary Voluntary Aided School

Grays Convent

Name

Mrs M Miller

Standalone Academy Trusts

Woodside Academy
Giffards Primary

Name

Mr E Caines
Mrs N Haslam

Infrastructure Groups

TASS
TPHA

Name

Mrs P Johnson
Mrs J Sawtell-Haines

Alternative Provision

Olive AP

Name

Mr M Vickers

Special Schools

Treetops Academy
Beacon Hill Academy

Name

Mr J Brewer
Mrs Sue Hewitt

Non-school members

Diocese of Chelmsford
Diocese of Brentwood
0-5 EYFS Representative

Name

Miss S Jones
Mrs M Shepherd
Mr A Melbourne

Also in Attendance

Mr Malcolm Taylor

Ms Michelle Lucas
Mr David May
Ms Sarah Williams

Ms Andrea Winstone

Ms Teresa Lydon

Strategic Lead – Specialist
Provision/PEP
Assistant Director, Education Skills
Strategic Lead – DSG and Schools
Service Manager, Education Support
Service
Strategic Lead – School Effectiveness
and Special Educational Needs /
Disabilities
Clerk

1. Welcome from the Chair

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting. The Chair asked all members to click the mute button until they wanted to speak this was to address the feedback that can take place on Microsoft Teams.

2. Apologies for Absence:

1. Apologies for absence were received from Mrs N Cashell, Ms A Jones and Mr J Revell. There was no representative for Ormiston Park at the meeting. Mrs N Graham did not attend the meeting.

3. Agreement of Agenda, Time-Guide and Notification of Any Other Business

- i) Election of Vice Chair. The Chair asked if any members would like to volunteers to take up the role of Vice-Chair. Mr T Parfett advised he would like to be considered for the role. Mr E Gaines nominated Mr T Parfett. The Chair confirmed that there was one nomination. All forum members agreed to elect Mr T Parfett as the new Vice-Chair.
- ii) The Forum agreed the agenda and time guide.
- iii) No Other Business was added at this time

4. Dedicated School Grant 2019-20 and 2020-21

The Chair asked Mr D May to summarise his reports which were issued before the meeting. Mr D May advised that the DSG reserve outturn position is a deficit of £1.978m. This is an overall improvement of £0.678m achieved through a combination of improved in year position and the transfer to reserves from the Schools Block. There is still a financial risk due to the continued demand for EHCP.

He advised that the Early Years providers during the summer and autumn term had been guaranteed a level of funding based on the known take up and a minimum funding guarantee. Payments have also been advanced to support provider's cash flow.

The DSG 2020/21 projected outturn position is a deficit of £0.638m, as a result of the demand within the High Needs Block (HNB) that exceeds the budget available.

The outturn position reflects the following in year pressures that have been reported throughout the year:

Schools Block – Pupil Growth had an underspend of £0.714m.

Schools Block – Expected Schools Block contribution to DSG deficit of £1.248m. If this had been actioned in year the final outturn position would have been a deficit of £0.570m.

High Needs Block – An overspend of £1.562m. This is less than projected outturn previously reported by £0.500m. Officers will monitor 2020/21 expenditure to identify if

any invoices, relating to 2019/20 have been received late as a result of Covid 19. The overspend reflects increased demand for EHCP and specialist places.

Early Year Block – The amount of funding distributed to providers is calculated to exceed the original funding allocation from the ESFA. This reflects an increase in take up off the early years offer. An adjustment to the DSG income to be received has been projected of £0.095m that is reflected in the figures shown. As discussed previously this funding is to be used to support increases in funding rates to Early Years providers from April 2020.

The DSG has a carried forward deficit of £1.978m into 2020/21. As a result of this a return is required to be submitted to the EFSA that outlines the reason the deficit has occurred and the actions to be taken to contain expenditure. The ESFA supported Thurrock in seeking to balance the in-year position before tackling the historic deficit. A follow up meeting with the ESFA is planned to be arranged during the autumn term.

The current projected outturn for 2020/21 is an overspend of £0.638m. The key areas are:

Schools Block – Pupil Growth, reflecting known commitments, has an underspend of £0.964m.

Central Services Block – Delay in the recruitment has resulted in an underspend of £0.034m.

High Needs Block – An overspend of £1.636m with the following main areas:

- Increased demand for EHCP's and specialist placements within Thurrock, has an overspend of £0.375m.
- Increased demand for Post 16 placements has an overspend of £0.388m
- Increase demand for non-maintained and independent specialist placements has an overspend of £0.873m.

Early Years Block – A breakeven position is currently forecasted. Additional expenditure of £0.054m has been incurred during the summer in response to Covid 19. This can be accommodated from the increased DSG allocation for 2019/20.

The Chair thanked Mr D May for his report. The Forum did not have any questions on this report. The Chair commented that it was a complex picture and asked if there were any additional measures put in place to reduce the deficit further. Mr D May commented that nothing was in place at the moment as they needed to look at the High Needs Block further. He advised that the EFSA were happy with the authority's plans to reduce the deficit. He advised that the local authority requires additional financial support from the EFSA to support the High Needs Block.

Mrs J Sawtell-Haines asked if they were reducing the deficit by transferring from the Schools block into the High Needs Block. Mr D May advised that they would not be able to transfer as much from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block in 2020-21.

AGREED

- a) All Forum members noted the contents of the report and offer comments on action taken or that could be considered.

- b) All Forum members agreed the financial position for 2019/20 and projection for 2020/21 that will be included in returns to be made to the ESFA.
- c) All Forum members agree to receive regular updates on the 2020/21 projected outturn position.

5. Dedicated School Grant 2021-22

Mr D May commented that the report distributed looked at what the provisional funding allocations for 2021-22 were from the EFSA.

Mr D May was hoping for more of a transfer to the High Needs Block but this may be a phased approach in the future.

The EFSA has updated the National Funding Formula in 2021/22 with new factor values with some key changes:

The Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) postcodes have been updated and this could impact some areas because of this.

Funding previously received through the Teachers' Pay Grant (TPG) and Teachers' Pension Employer Contribution Grants (TPECG), including the supplementary fund, to mainstream schools for pupils from reception to year 11 will be allocated through the schools NFF; by increasing the basic per pupil funding; and by increasing the minimum per pupil funding.

School funding is increasing by 4% overall. The Minimum per Pupil Funding Levels are £4,180 per primary pupil, £5,215 per KS3 pupil and £5,715 per KS4 pupil, all including the pay and pensions grant amounts

The Chair asked if there were any questions.

Mrs S Hewitt asked about how the teachers grant would be distributed to the Special Schools. Mr D May advised it would come through as their funding. He also advised he would explain this more at the next meeting.

Mr M Vickers asked for some more information prior to the next meeting regarding the teachers grant. Mr D May advised he will get the information to the setting as soon as it is available.

AGREED

- a) All Forum members noted the contents of the report.
- b) All Forum members agreed to receive detailed information on the formula to be applied and impact at school level in 2021/22.

6. High Needs Block 2020-21

Mr D May advised that the key components relevant to this report are:

- The High Needs Block had an overspend of £1.562m. The overspend reflects increased demand for EHCP and specialist places.
- The DSG has a carried forward deficit of £1.978m into 2020/21.

In Thurrock (Autumn 2019), out of a school population of 29,680; 4,333 (14.6%) children and young people were identified as having special educational needs, 3,134(10.6%) were SEN Support and 1,199 (4%) had an Education Health and Care Plan.

In 2019/20 193 new plans were completed, 148 were completed (77%) within the 20 weeks statutory timescale.

The annual increase, over the last financial year for the school population was 2%. However, the annual increase in the number of EHCP's maintained by Thurrock increased by 9%, with 1,677 EHCP's. The placement types were outlined in the report.

Thurrock continues to experience significant demand for EHCP's that in comparison with all benchmarking data is higher.

Mr D May commented that Thurrock needs to understand why demand is greater than statistical neighbours. In addition schools will need to be able to demonstrate how the notional SEN budget is being utilised to support pupils.

The agreed 2020/21 commissioned numbers were submitted to the ESFA in November 2019. The increase in specialist provisions have been broken down into 5 key areas in the report.

Mr D May outlined the next steps as follows:

- Officers to consider the data to understand the reasons why Thurrock EHCP's are greater than statistical neighbours.
- The SEN team to challenge School's on the use of Notional SEN funding.
- Officers to consider options to increase the local offer based on future projected levels of demand. This will be with a view to meeting new demand and seeking where possible to reduce the number of out of borough placements.
- In October meetings will be arranged with all Thurrock specialist settings to discuss commissioned numbers for 2021/22 to enable a return to be submitted to the ESFA in November.
- Officers will continue to scrutinise costs and budgets and reports will be made to each future meeting of the Schools Forum and Headteacher briefings.

Mr E Caines commented that we now have two special schools in the borough and also have many children who present with special needs for many reasons. Does the numbers in the report include all these children? Mr D May advised that the figures include all children. Mr E Caines asks how it works for children who do not live in Thurrock but attend our special schools. Mr May advised special school places are funded via Commissioned places paid for by the host LA and top up funding paid by the LA where the child is resident.

Mr J Brewer asked if there is an increase in EHCPs of children who were living in Thurrock or is it an increase of children with EHCPs who have moved to Thurrock. Mr M Taylor commented that there are a number of children that are moving into Thurrock with

EHCPs but there has also been a significant increase from plans that are issued for children already living in Thurrock.

Mr E Caines commented that their school is getting more children with EHCPs but feels that all schools are experiencing the same.

Action: A Winstone will send around the figures for the number of EHCPs at each schools.

The Chair asked if Thurrock was unique because they are good at EHCPs or are too many children getting EHCPs. Mr M Taylor commented that they are looking at this at the moment but do have a clear and robust process. It is a low threshold to get an EHCP started and parents can challenge the outcomes. They have a programme in place at the moment to help schools with autism which will in the future reduce plans. Ms A Winstone commented that the majority of their tribunals are about refusals to assess for plans.

Mrs J Sawtell-Haines asked who was the gatekeeper? Mrs M Lucas advised that this was Sheila Murphy. Mrs M Lucas is going to speak with Public Health and try and understand why we have such a high amount of EHCPs.

Mrs S Hewitt commented that for autism Treetops offer some very specialised provision and therefore this would attract parents to move to Thurrock. Was there any way of tracking this? Mr M Taylor commented that there are a significant number of families that do move into the area and that a small number of families moving in have a big impact on the spend.

Mrs S Hewitt commented that she feels that ore families moving out from London because of house prices which does affect the number of EHCPs in this borough. SEMH has also impacted on the budget as they come through the EHCP process.

Mr D May advised that as a local area, at the 31st March 2020, we have 74 pupils in independent specialist schools and non-maintained specialist setting. Mr M Taylor advised that the overall placements in residential are very complex social care places.

Mr D May commented that they need a clear outcome to present to the EFSA to show that the funding formula is not working. They also need to get better with intelligence about the amount of EHCPs to present to the EFSA.

Mr D May commented that if we can demonstrate our long term strategy and balance the books in year we can then have a conversation with the EFSA concerning the historic deficit.

The chair thanked Mr D May for his presentation and asked the forum if they had any questions or comments.

Mrs J Sawtell-Haines commented on children coming into their reception who need significant support and feel this has not been looked at in their early provision. She feels that if they had been given the support in nursery this would ease the pressure. She commented that the issues of pre-schools and nurseries is not going away. Ms A Winstone stated that the data shows that there is an increase in plans going through

during early years provision. They also have an area co-ordinator in place to help with the children with additional needs in pre-schools and nurseries.

Mr A Melborne commented that early years are increasingly better in identifying children with additional needs and feel that parents will engage.

Mrs N Haslam commented that as parents are moving into the area they don't always get their housing option and they find they are moving schools and therefore plans are not completed. She feels that housing contributes to the high EHCPs at a later date and the issues start at secondary. The Chair agreed that this did have an impact.

The Chair thanked all members for the input.

AGREED

a) All forum members noted the contents of the report.

7. Academies & Free Schools Update

Miss S Williams advised the forum that Warren Primary was on track to convert to Academy on the 1st October 2020 and Bonnygate Primary would convert on the 1st November. Both schools would be part of the Osborne Co-operative Academy Trust.

She advised that Thames Park free school had opened up in its temporary accommodation and the pre-application had been submitted for their permanent site.

Orsett Heath free school had also opened and the planning application was not due until the end of the year.

She commented that Treetops Special school had been through planning and scheduled to open 2020/21. An additional application is going to planning committee in October to approve a sports hall. This will also provide additional classrooms as the temporary classrooms will need to be removed in a year.

AGREED

All forum members noted the report.

8. Schools Forum Membership Structure

Miss S Williams discussed the new forum structure. She advised that the Christus Catholic Trust and the Vines School Trust were now represented in this forum. All meeting dates for the academic year have been set.

She advised that as part of this report she had included some guidance for members and had also set up a training session on the 15th October 9.30-10.30am held through Microsoft teams.

The Chair commented that the guidance was very useful and thanked Miss S Williams for her report.

AGREED

All forum members noted this report.

9. Schools Forum Membership Structure – forward plan

Miss S Williams itemised the agenda for the next year. The Chair advised that on the agenda for the November 2020 the item regarding funding options should read 2021-22.

Action: Miss S Williams to update this.

Mr D May commented that the High Needs Block (HNB) needs to be included in the agenda for this meeting.

Action: Miss S Williams to add to the agenda.

Miss S Williams would like members to email her with any changes to the forward plan.

Mrs J Sawtell-Haines asked about transport and felt it should be included at one of their meetings. Mrs M Lucas agreed to put it on a forward plan. Transport is still a big risk and there has been detailed work. She would like it put on the January agenda meeting.

Action: Miss S Williams to add Transport to the January agenda

Mr D May commented that the home school transport that there is no risk to the DSG the risk is with the local authority.

AGREED

All forum members noted this report.

10. Minutes of Previous Meeting hold on 25th June 2020

All governors were happy with the content.

11. Matters Arising

The Chair asked if there were any changes. He asked the clerk to add page numbers. He also asked for the spelling of Osborne to be corrected on the list of attendees.

Action: Clerk to update minutes of previous meeting

The Chair commented would like the Local Authority to look at their charging for the Union Facility Time. Miss S Williams advised she will add this to the forward plan.

Action: Mrs S Williams to add to forward plan LA to look at their charges for Union Facility Time.

12. Any Other Business

Mrs M Lucas commented she would like to recognise all the hard work that Mr E Caines has done as Vice Chair. She also commented that the Local Authority in the next financial year will be facing unprecedented challenges with their budget. As a result they will be looking at education and the whole education offer within the council. Mrs M Lucas would then like to suggest that they have some volunteers from the forum to work on what the new education offer may look like. She advised that this would only be a small group and as it was very confidential it would not be shared with the school forum during the process.

13. Date of next meeting

Date of next meeting is 19 November 2020.