

Schools Forum

Minutes of Meeting held 19 January 2021 at 10am Virtual Meeting – Microsoft Teams

In Attendance:

Multi Academy Trusts

Catalyst Academies Trust
ORTU Federation
Osborne Co-operative Academy Trust
South West Essex Community Education Trust
The Gateway Learning Community Trust (GLC)
Reach2 Academy Trust
South West Essex Community Education Trust
Vine Schools Trust
Christus Catholic Trust

Name

Mr T Parfett (Vice Chair)
Dr Sophina Asong
Mr P Griffiths (The Chair)
Mr S Munday
Mr K Sadler
Mr E Samuel
Mr S Munday
Mrs D McManus
Mrs N Cashall

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

Special Schools

Treetops Academy
Beacon Hill Academy

Name

Mr J Brewer
Mrs Sue Hewitt

Non-school members

Diocese of Brentwood
0-5 EYFS Representative
0-11 Representative

Name

Mrs M Shepherd
Mr A Melbourne
Ms Alison Jones

Also in Attendance

Mr Malcolm Taylor

Ms Michelle Lucas
Mr David May
Ms Sarah Williams

Ms Teresa Lydon

Strategic Lead – Specialist
Provision/PEP
Assistant Director, Education Skills
Strategic Lead – DSG and Schools
Service Manager, Education Support
Service
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. He also advised that this meeting was not being recorded.

2. Apologies for Absence:

Mr M Vickers sent their apologies for the meeting. Mrs M Lucas advised that Councillor A Jefferies had sent his apologies.

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

- i) The Forum agreed the agenda and time guide.
- ii) Any Other Business – no items were put forward before the meeting

4. Dedicated School Grant (DSG) 2020-21

Mr D May summarised the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2020-21 report which was sent out to all forum members prior to the meeting.

Mr D May advised that the DSG 2020/21 projected outturn is a deficit of £1.617m, as a result of continued demand within the High Needs Block that exceeds the budget available. The DSG has a carried forward deficit of £1.978m into 2020/21. The 2020/21 projected in year position will increase the deficit to £3.595m.

The High Needs Block is a significant area of financial risk and is broken down into four areas:

- The continued increase in the number of EHCP. Additional costs of £0.734m are forecasted in maintaining pupils within Thurrock schools or other Local Authority mainstream schools and academies.
- Post 16 – Increased pupil numbers are forecasted with additional cost of £0.400m.
- Residential and Non-Residential Non-Maintained and Independent placements forecast an overspend of £1.128m.
- Increase in supplying tuition packages for pupils not in School, costing additional £0.300m.

Early Years Block has a breakeven forecast based on the following information. Thurrock has agreed the following approach for the spring term:

- Where a child registers to take up a place and does not attend any other setting, payment will be made to the setting holding the place.
- Minimum funding guarantee, for each setting, equal to the value paid in spring 2020.
- If a setting chooses not to open, no payment will be made.
- The Local Authority will continue to fund providers which have been advised to close, or left with no option to close, due to public health reasons.

This remains consistent with what has been guaranteed for each term in 2020/21.

Mr E Caines asked how they would get funding if the settings were not open. Mr D May advised that guidance for the spring census is that all early year's provision should remain open and continue to allow all children to attend full time or their usual timetable hours. The setting can then include all children registered to take a place on census whether in attendance or not. If closed due to COVID then the census is still completed as if open. The Chair also commented that if the schools settings have chosen not to open then they would not get the funding. Mr E Caines commented that that during the original lockdown they were told that the nursery would close if the school was closed except for key workers. The wording of this was then changed. He feels that parents do not want their children in these settings. Mr D May advised that EFSA guidance advises if the nursery setting is not open to all children then they would not get the funding. The Chair advised that all nursery settings should be fully open. Not all schools have done this and may not get the funding. Mr D May commented that as they are using the spring 2021 census this will have a significant impact on budgets.

Action: M Lucas to contact all schools to re-iterate to them that their nurseries need to be fully open and advise all parents

Mrs J Sawtell-Haines asked if she could furlough her staff in the nursery if all of their children choose not to attend the setting.

Mr E Caines asked about furlough of nursery staff to cover the money which will be lost in the future. Mr D May advised that if the school has chosen not to open he was unsure if furlough would apply. Mr E Caines commented that they were originally told that it was up to the nurseries to decide whether they join the school or close. All decided to close. The guidance was then changed but there was no alert to this change. Also told that this would not be based on census. He feels that this is an appalling situation. The Chair advised they faced significant challenge at one of their schools which they closed due to a high number of staff being extremely ill. He also commented that the DFE have advised that they must open.

The government has updated the rules on how providers who receive early entitlement income can access the Job Retention Scheme.

When working out how much wage support can be claimed via the furlough scheme, providers should now:

- establish how much early entitlement funding you are currently receiving
- calculate what this equates to as a percentage of your usual income

This is the proportion of your wage bill which cannot receive any furlough support, meaning that the rest of your wage bill is eligible for furlough support.

The DfE has also confirmed that providers can now take the decision as to what would reasonably represent a usual monthly income, rather than using February 2020.

AGREED

- a) All Forum members agreed the financial position for 2020-21 and offered comments on action taken or that could be considered.
- b) All Forum members agreed to receive regular updates on 202-21 projected outturn position.

5. Dedicated School Grant 2021-22

Mr D May went through a presentation and summarised the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2021-22 report which was sent out to all forum members prior to the meeting.

The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocations for 2021/22, was updated to reflect the October 2020 census data received has increased from £11.371m to £16.430m. The primary reason for the change, is the increase in pupil numbers of 469 from October 2019 to October 2020.

Thurrock Cabinet approved that the National Funding Formula would be implemented in full in 2021/22. The report provides an update to the formula to be submitted to the ESFA by 21 January. The final formula 2021/22 is also included in the attached report.

The High Needs Block continues to experience significant increase in demand and costs. It is proposed to transfer funding from the Schools Block £0.673m and the Central Services School Block £0.200m, subject to Schools Forum approval, to support the HNB budget.

The report informs of the challenges faced in Early Years as a result of the impact of Covid and the return to the use of the January 2021 census data. Officers are awaiting updated guidance and further information will be presented at the next meeting.

Mr D May advised that at the Headteachers meeting on the 3 February an update would be provided to all Headteachers to inform them of their provisional funding allocation.

Schools Block

Mr D May advised of the increase in funding of £13.462m is as a result of grants transferring into the Dedicated Schools Grant of £6.269m; increase to funding rates of £4.192m; increase of 468 pupils, realising additional funding of £2.629m and an increase in the growth fund by £0.372m.

In 2021/22 the funding will continue to be distributed using the Schools National Funding Formula (NFF). Key aspects of the formula are:

- The incorporation of the 2019 update to the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), ensuring that the deprivation funding through the NFF continues to target schools most likely to need additional funding;
- Funding previously received through the Teachers' Pay Grant (TPG) and Teachers' Pension Employer Contribution Grants (TPECG), has been added to schools' baselines; by increasing the basic per pupil funding;
- The minimum per pupil funding levels will be set at £4,180 for primary schools and £5,415 for secondary schools.

Mr D May advised that it still remains the government's intention to move to a 'hard' NFF, where budgets will be set on the basis of a single, national formula.

Mr D May discussed the Formula Factors Values.

Mr D May advised that Cabinet agreed that the Thurrock's funding formula in 2021/22 would implement the following principles:

- National Funding Formula values to be applied
- Unallocated funding has allowed an inflationary increase of 1.03257 to be applied to Basic Entitlement values
- Confirmed growth included in formula
- Retained growth £1.213m
- High Needs Block contribution of £0.673m (0.5%)
- Notional SEN %ages consistent with 2020/21

Mr D May circulated the Provisional 2021-22 funding allocations. He advised that Pupil Premium values have not changed. Eligible pupils are now to be determined by October 20 Census.

The Chair thanked Mr D May for the information received.

Mr C Caines commented that normally they would have other meetings to make decisions. Mrs J Sawtell-Haines commented that they did not have the schools forum paperwork before for the Thurrock Primary Heads Association (TPHA) meeting therefore it could not be discussed with the wider primary Headteachers.

Central School Services Block

Historical commitment funding in 2021/22 has been reduced by 20%. Mr D May advised that in Thurrock this is a £0.256m reduction and will be incurred over the next 5 years. The Chair asked how the Locality Authority (LA) were expected to function given this 20% reduction. Mr D May commented that this has been discussed for a number of years by the ESFA and this has been incorporated within the LA medium term financial plan.

Mrs J Sawtell-Haines asked about the savings in venue costs for the School forum. How much has been saved by switching to Virtual Meetings. Mr D May advised at least half around £5,000 and this is ringfenced to the DSG and used to support the HNB. He also advised that virtual meetings will continue for now but DfE permission is needed to continue from April 2021.

High Needs Block

Mr D May advised that the High Needs NFF for 2021/22 remains unchanged. However, with over £730 million of additional funding, the formula will ensure that every local authority will receive an increase of at least 8%. Thurrock has received an increase of £2.856m or 11%.

Key areas:

- Projected Outturn 2019/20 is a deficit of £2.562m.
- Continued Year on Year Increase in EHCP's +12% against a population growth of +2%
- Commissioned Numbers 2021/22 + 63 places with Treetops Free School Opens Sept-21
- New Secondary SEMH Provision Sept-21

Mr D May advised we need to set a balanced budget.

High Needs Block 2021-22 Key risks £1.9m are outlined as follows:

- Top Up Funding -Thurrock Schools -Budget less than the 2020/21 forecasted outturn. Potential financial Risk £0.650m;
- Top Up Funding -Other Local Authorities (4-16) -Budget less than the 2020/21 forecasted outturn. Potential financial Risk £0.150m;
- Top Up Funding -Post 16 -Budget to equal the 2020/21 forecasted outturn. Potential financial Risk £0.125m;
- Pupils not in School -Budget less than the 2020/21 forecasted outturn. Potential financial Risk £0.150m;
- Residential -Non Maintained and Independent –Budget to equal 2020/21 forecasted outturn. Potential financial Risk £0.500m;
- Non Residential -Non Maintained and Independent –Budget to equal 2020/21 forecasted outturn. Potential financial Risk £0.200m;
- Additional High Needs Targeted –Budget less than the 2020/21 forecasted outturn. Potential financial Risk £0.125m;

Mr D May advised these will be discussed in more detail at the March forum Meeting. He also commented that The High Needs Block funding issues are a national problem that require a long term solution.

Band Values

New Band values and rates were introduced in September 2020 following a full review of the costs of running resource bases, special and AP academies, within Thurrock.

The key principle is that all providers will be fully funded based on agreed staffing ratios and support. It is not expected that within the resource provisions that the mainstream School would subsidise the cost of the base.

A review meeting is held annually with each provision to discuss both finance, performance and outcomes. The financial aspect involves:

- reviewing the staffing structure in place, in line with national guidelines as appropriate
- discussion on all other expenditure items for appropriateness; changes from the previous year's expenditure
- transparency on all income and expenditure is made available by all settings.

In 2021/22 it is proposed the following changes will be implemented to maintain parity with the increase to school funding and maintaining the principle of full cost recovery:

- the minimum per pupil funding levels will increase to £4,180 for primary schools and to £5,415 for secondary schools. This increase reflects the transfer of grant into the DSG and increase to funding rates;
- Special and AP academies - A new payment will be included to replace the specific grants for Teachers Pay and Teacher Pension Employee Contribution. The ESFA have calculated this at £660pp.
- A 3% inflationary uplift has been applied to the Top up Value

Mrs Jo Sawtell commented that it was pleasing to see that the transport costs have come down. Mr D May advised the cost of transport had not come down but the charge to the DSG of transport costs has reduced.

Dr Asong asked what were the latest census figures for travellers and if that amount shown was being spent on staff. Mr D May advised that this is mainly spend on staff. Dr Asong would like a breakdown on how many young people they are supporting. This could also be included as part of the over-arching work being done by the sub-committee for Outcomes for disadvantaged and unrepresented student and young people in Thurrock.

Action: ML to get a breakdown on figures within the traveller community and discuss this further as part of the sub-committee for Outcomes for disadvantaged and unrepresented student and young people in Thurrock.

Early Years

Mr D May advised that the ESFA have confirmed the use of the Spring Census on funding in both 2020/21 and 2021/22.

He also advised that Thurrock had agreed the following approach for the spring term:

- Provisional lists, census information and payment profile to follow the guidelines issued
- Where a child registers to take up a place and does not attend any other setting, payment will be made to the setting holding the place.
- If a setting chooses not to open, no payment will be made.
- The Local Authority will continue to fund providers which have been advised to close, or left with no option to close, due to public health reasons.
- Minimum funding guarantee, for each setting, equal to the value paid in spring 2020.

This is consistent with arrangements implemented for Summer and Autumn Terms.

Mr D May outlined the Early Years Funding Formula (EYFF) for 2021/22 as follows:

- The funding announcement included investment of £44m in early years. This will be realised through an increase in the hourly rate to be paid of 8p for 2YO and 6p for 3&4YO.
- EYFF for 2021/22 is based on Jan21 census for 5/12 of the funding and the Jan22 census for 7/12 of the funding.
- Current funding allocation, reflects updated hourly rates and is based on the Jan20 census only.
- In Jul21, the ESFA will confirm the final 2020/21 funding allocation.
- In Jul22, the ESFA will confirm the final 2021/22 funding allocation.

Covid support

The LA has approved the following request to support settings:

A one-off payment as a contribution for COVID related costs to be paid in the spring term. This will be based on the autumn numbers with each provider to receive a fixed amount of £500, with a variable rate of £50 per child. This has a cost implication of £235,250.

AGREED

- a) All Forum members noted the contents of the report.
- b) Forum members agreed to the transfer of 0.5% £0.673m from the Schools Block to High Need Block to support increase demand for Specialist placements and EHCP's in 2021/22. Two abstained from voting.
- c) Forum members agreed to the retention of £1.213m to fund in year growth in 2021/22. One abstained from voting
- d) All Forum members agreed the use of the Central School Services Block budget of £1.783m in 2021/22.
- e) All Forum members agreed the High Needs Block Budget of £29.139m in 2021/22 with the associated risks identified.
- f) All Forum members agreed the Early Years Budget for 2021/22

6. Growth Fund 2021/22

Miss S Williams commented that this report seeks for the Schools Forum to agree to the process for the allocation of growth funding for schools who take bulge classes or expanding schools whereby schools increase their published admission number at the request of the Council.

She advised that following the publication of the Pupil Place Plan last July Miss S Williams and Mr D May have worked together to present the forecasted growth budget for 2021/22.

She commented that the local authority continues to work with schools to ensure that there is a sufficiency of school places to meet local demand across the borough. This may involve increasing the published admission number (PANS) in those schools where existing places are deemed insufficient to meet projected local demand. Currently the local authority, through basic need funding, supports the capital cost of any required expansion and bulge classes, if that expansion or bulge class has been agreed as part of the pupil place planning process.

The growth fund cannot be used to support schools in financial difficulty. Growth funding in Thurrock will be applied in the following circumstances:

- where a school or academy has agreed with the authority to provide additional places (30 places) to meet basic need in the area (either as a bulge class or on-going commitment).
- To support where a school has increased its PAN in agreement with the local authority to meet basic need in the area.

Funding will be for a full class of 30 children, funded for one year only. For example from September to the following August. There will then be an annual review of the numbers in the bulge class using the summer census. Funding in the second year will be based on the difference in actual numbers of children on roll between the summer and October census.

Growth funding will not apply in the following circumstances:

- For any PAN increases which are not agreed with the local authority as part of the place planning process to meet basic need in the area.
- Where pupils are admitted above a schools PAN as a consequence of appeal, infant class size regulation exceptions or error in the school admissions process.
- The fund will not be applied retrospectively and will only apply to increases in class size agreed with the council.
- Funding will not be provided following the October census whereby the class is not full to capacity.

She advised that the LA is required to publish the methodology used to provide additional growth fund to schools and academies and it must be applied in the same ways regardless of the type of school.

Mr D May advised that the minimum per pupil value which are applied in 2021-22 will be applied to this growth fund.

Falling Rolls Fund

Miss S Williams advised that the guidance issued allows local authorities to top-slice from the schools block to create a small fund to support good or outstanding schools with falling rolls where growth in pupil numbers is expected within three years. The only mandatory requirement is that financial support provided via the falling rolls fund is available only to schools and academies judged good or outstanding at their last Ofsted inspection. The key principles that drive the need to maintain a falling rolls fund are to ensure that places are secured that will be required in the following two to three years (based on the latest demographic information available) and that neither the local authority, or schools/academies incur unnecessary costs in relation to short-term temporary losses in pupil numbers.

She commented that in consideration of the data available it is not considered that this would be appropriate as the conditions outlined above would not be met within Thurrock in 2021/22. Officers will annually consider if circumstances require the development of a policy.

The Chair would like the LA to discuss with their DFE/ESFA link officer, whether the good and outstanding criteria can be dis-applied in certain circumstances. Can a strong case be provided where the school has an Ofsted rating that requires improvement but clear improvements in school performance can be proved.

Action: The LA to discuss with DFE/EFSA Link officer dis-application for the falling rolls fund in certain circumstances for good and outstanding schools and if a strong case can be provided where the school has an Ofsted rating that requires improvement but clear improvements in school performance can be proved.

AGREED

- a) All forum members agreed the proposed criteria for schools and academies accessing funding allocated for growth for the academic year 2021/22
- b) All forum members agreed a Growth Fund budget for 2021/22 of £1,2132,337
- c) The majority of Forum members agreed the need to keep under review the possible need to establish a Falling Rolls Policy. Three members abstained from voting.

7. **Thurrock School Forum Forward Plan for 2020-2021**

The forward plan was agreed for 2020-21.

Dr Asong commented on the sub group that was setup to examine outcomes for disadvantages and unrepresented students and young people in Thurrock. She would like this to be part of the agenda going forward.

Action: SW to add outcomes for disadvantages and unrepresented students and young people in Thurrock to the forward Plan

AGREED

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

8. **Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 19th November 2020**

All governors were happy with the content.

9. **Matters Arising**

Previous actions

Mr D May to include numbers at each resource base to the January meeting. This has been included in the attached reports.

Ms S Williams to update date of next meeting. This action is complete.

MT to discuss with resources regarding sharing the framework that was used to choose the bandings for each resource base and the costs. MT commented that within Table 8 of the DSG 2021/22 report, information on the funding to be paid to providers is equal to the costs incurred at each base.

MT to put together costs for out of borough placements for next meeting. MT agreed that this form part of the detail discussion around the DSG Management Plan at the March meeting.

September meeting actions outstanding

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

10. **Any Other Business**

Miss S Williams has asked if all forum members could upload a picture to their Microsoft Teams profile.

She also advised that as result of these meetings an action log with be produced which will be sent to all members before the minutes are issued.

Mr E Caines asked if any item for decision were included in the next agenda as opposed to information and sent out on time for them to consult with their schools.

11. Date of next meeting

Date of next meeting is 18 March 2021