

# Schools Forum

## Draft Minutes of Meeting held 18 November 2021 at 10am 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)  
Vines Schools Trust

#### **Name**

Mr T Parfett (Chair)  
Dr S Asong  
Mrs L Coates  
Mr S Munday  
Mr K Sadler  
Mr S Santhaguru

#### **Secondary Voluntary Aided School**

Grays Convent

#### **Name**

Mrs P Johnson

#### **Standalone Academy Trusts**

Woodside Academy  
Giffards Primary

#### **Name**

Mr E Caines  
Mrs N Haslam-Davis

#### **Infrastructure Groups**

TASS  
TPHA

#### **Name**

Mr S Bell  
Mr R Latham

#### **Alternative Provision**

Olive AP

#### **Name**

Mr M Vickers

#### **Special Schools**

Treetops Academy  
Beacon Hill Academy

#### **Name**

Mr J Brewer  
Mrs S Hewitt

#### **Non-school members**

Diocese of Brentwood  
0-11 Representative  
11-19 Representative  
0-5 EYFS Representative

#### **Name**

+Mrs M Shepherd  
Ms Alison Jones  
Dr J Revell  
Mr A Melbourne

#### **Also in Attendance**

Mrs Michelle Lucas  
Mr Malcolm Taylor  
Mr David May  
Miss Sarah Williams  
Ms Andrea Winstone  
  
Miss Teresa Lydon

Assistant Director, Education Skills  
Strategic Lead – Specialist Provision/PEP  
Strategic Lead – DSG and Schools  
Service Manager, Education Support Service  
Strategic Lead for School Effectiveness and  
SEND Children's Services  
Clerk

## **1. Welcome**

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed everyone back.

## **2. Apologies for Absence:**

No apologies were received. Mr M Taylor advised he would need to leave the meeting at 10.45am to attend another meeting.

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

- i) The Forum agreed the agenda and time guide. The Chair advised that Mr D May would share a presentation to present Items 5, 6, and 7.
- ii) Any Other Business – no other items was put forward before the meeting.  
The Chair asked if any nominations had been received for the Vice Chair position. Mrs P Johnson advised that Dr S Asong had been nominated by TASS. This will be discuss further in any other business.

## **4. Dedicated Schools Grant 2021/22 – Report**

Mr D May went through his presentation. He advised that the DSG 2021/22 was currently forecasting a £0.535m overspend. The DSG deficit would therefore increase to £2.148m.

Schools Block (SB) – Based on currently commitments and historic level of spend it is currently forecasted an under spend of £0.594m.

Central Services Block (CSB) – this has a projected under spend of £0.025m due to a combination of salary slippage and savings in venue hire for the School Forum meetings.

High Needs Block (HNB) – This is the significant area of financial risk and can be broken down into four areas:

- The continued increase in the number of EHCP. The budget has been increased / realigned to reflect the expected cost in 2021/22 as quantified within the DSG Management Plan.
- The Post-16 position reflects 32 new places from September, 13 of which are placed in Independent Schools at a cost of £1m.
- Residential and Non-Residential Non-Maintained and Independent placements continuing to increase but can be contained within the funding allocation.
- Increase in supplying tuition packages for pupils not in School, costing £0.450m, a £0.150m overspend.

He advised that a review of the local offer and commissioned places available is Thurrock continues. There is a continued need to challenge schools on the use of the Notional SEN budget and the requirement to progress to an EHCP.

Early Years Block (EYB) – A risk remains in Early Years with funding allocations awaited for the 3 year period 2020/2023. In 2021/22 funding is to be based on a termly census whilst Thurrock local formula was developed using historic, pre Covid, full year data and recognised the change in numbers each term.

There were no questions from members at this stage.

## **AGREED**

- a) 16 Forum members noted contents of the report and offered support and challenge.
- b) 16 Forum members agreed the financial position for 2021/22.
- c) 16 Forum members agree to receive regular updates on the 2021/22 projected outturn position.

### **5. High Needs Block Commissioned Placements – Report**

Mr D May advised that the long term strategy is to:

- Increase the local offer and reduce the number of out of area placements.
- Deliver improved outcomes for young people.
- Deliver improved value for money.

In 2021/22 the local authority commissioned 623 pupils in special schools or specialist settings. In 2022/23 the local authority is to increase commissioned numbers with the EFSA to 732 places which reflects the opening and planned expansion of Treetops Free School. Mr D May presented the proposed commissioned place for 2022/23 in Thurrock. This also reflected an additional 74 places reflecting the further development of Primary Autism and Secondary SEMH provision which will bring the total to 806.

Mr M Vickers asked why SEMH provision in 2022/23 is zero. Mr D May advised they do not have an establishment to assign it to as yet and don't know the potential start date. This will be included in the EFSA return when this provision is established. Mr M Taylor advised that the SEMH might take a different form and discussions are taking place at the moment.

Mr E Caines commented that he totally agrees we need to increase the number of places locally. He doubts however that this will meet the expanding need. He suggested that they look at children currently in specialist provisions who could be effectively taught in mainstream also making the initial decision more rigorous. He advised that the number of children coming into the borough is increasing. However he also feels that increasing places in the borough will attract more children out of borough. He asked if the places will cater for the current children with severe needs. Mr M Taylor advised that there is a lot of work taking place to share learning resources with mainstream schools to offer a broader range of activities. Mrs A Winstone advised they have successfully got some funding to give more training to the main stream schools. Mr M Taylor advised that some of the children with very complex needs may still need to be placed in residential placements out of borough.

Mrs S Hewitt asked about growth from 657 in 2021/22 to 806 in 2022/23, how many of those spaces are new or were they being used to move children from out of borough to in borough. Mr D May advised they are all new placements to prevent children going out of borough in the future. Data for 2022/23 will be presented under the Management Plan in this meeting. Mrs S Hewitt asked if they had a graph to show what this would look like. Mr D May advised that 100 of the places relate to Treetops Free School. Mr M Taylor advised it is a combination of both. Some children in primary schools with very complex needs will move to Treetops. The long term plan is to prevent having to move children out of borough in the future.

Mrs L Coates commented that the two primary provisions in the Osborne Trust which has 16 commissioned places was not increasing. She advised they have two spaces left for the rest of the academic year. She asked what the LA's position on the growth was. This limited the outreach

capability. Mr M Taylor advised that they have been able to offer more turn around places as exclusions have been low.

Children who have gone through the SEN system and have an EHCP in the longer term would be moved to the Quarry hill or Dilkes Academy provision or may be able to attend another mainstream school if possible.

Mr D May spoke about the Band values. In 2022/23 it is proposed the following changes would be implemented

Resource Bases – Increase to Basic per Pupil Values:

- Primary 2021/22 = £4,180 2022/23 = £4,265
- Secondary 2021/22 = £5,415 2022/23 = £5,525

Top up funding would receive a 4.25% uplift. This is consistent with the 3% inflationary increase applied through the National Funding Formula and includes 1.25% for the National Insurance increase.

Mr M Vickers would like to place on record his thanks to Thurrock for taking this proactive approach in challenging financial times and the ongoing commitment to working to meet local needs of a wide range of vulnerable pupils needs to be acknowledged.

Mr D May advised that they are looking to give a 4.25% uplift to the High Needs Block outreach services in 2022/23.

Mr R Latham asked if they have reviewed the Outreach service to see the impact. Mr M Taylor advised that this has happened at TASS but not THPA as yet.

#### **AGREED:**

- a) All Forum members considered and commented on the information provided in the report.
- b) 17 Forum members support the commissioned numbers for 2022/23 that were required to be submitted to the ESFA on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2021. 1 abstained.
- c) 17 Forum members approved the increase in band values to be applied from September 2022, as shown in Appendix 1. 1 abstained
- d) 13 Forum members approved the increase in the funding to support the Outreach services from September 2022. 5 abstained.

#### **6. DSG Management Plan – Presentation**

Mr D May advised that conditions of grant require that any LA with an overall deficit on its DSG account at the end of the financial year, must be able to present a plan to the Department of Education (DfE) for managing their future DSG spend. His presentation shows the DSG management plan for 2021 to inform the budget settings for 202/23.

He advised there are 3 Key areas.

- 1. Education Health & Care Plans** – Mr D May commented we need to know the data. He went through the current and projected data. He advised we need to increase the local offer – SEMH and Autism are required. Early Years and Post 16 are areas of significant growth. A

deep dive report 2021 explained Thurrock context and stated that reducing health inequalities would have an impact in the long term on the need for SEND provision.

Schools need to continue to be fully inclusive and to admit children with EHCPs by making reasonable adjustments. They must use their notional SEND budget before making requests for additional funding. They must ensure the graduated Assess-plan-do review processes are undertaken and the Provision guidance is used to inform next steps before requests for EHCPs take place.

He advised that there is continued demand for under 5s and Post 16 and there is a higher proportion of EHCPs than our neighbouring Local Authorities.

2. **Increased demand of specialist places** – Mr D May advised that there is an increased demand in specialist places.
3. **SEND review** – Mr D May advised this is a national problem. There are insufficient funds to meet current demand. The High Needs block National Funding Formula is not responsive to local circumstances and needs to be reviewed and updated. Mr D May advised there is a lot of anticipation on the outcome of the SEND review and the publication of the SEND green paper which is expected in the first three months of 2022.

Mr A Melborne asked why some years are going up and some are coming down. Mr D May advised they are using pupil data linking with EHCP data to do the analysis. Some years may have a smaller group of children in the whole year group. Mr A Melborne asked why it is higher in Thurrock than neighbouring LAs. Mr D May advised it is linked to deprivation as the EFSA do not use the number of EHCPs to release funding. Mrs A Winstone advised that a deep dive into EHCPs shows that the threshold for issuing EHCPs was very rigorous. It is also about a number of families moving into the area for specialist places and also deprivation. Mrs S Hewitt would like to get more background on Post 16. Is the increase because they can now continue with an EHCP until they are 25 or is it families moving to Thurrock. She would like a breakdown. Do we know why it is growing so much? Mr D May advised that children Post 16 with EHCPs are choosing to stay in education. She would like some data on the age groups 19 to 25. Mrs A Winstone advised that post 16 team also work with all young people in the borough to determine whether they need their plans ceased as they are now working or have asked to have their plan ceased. Mrs M Lucas advised they are very clear in what they need to do to close plans for those not in education employment or training but these children are very vulnerable. A small number of plans are left open while they try to get these young people to re-engage. Mrs S Hewitt advised that the offer extended from 19 to 25 with no extra money in the pot is an issue.

Mr E Caines commented that some children are very difficult to teach and sometimes would be quite happy doing appropriate work they had the skills for in a safe environment. He feels that they would benefit more from things that are practical. Do they need to be in school? What can we teach them that is useful? What are they doing that they need the education support for at that age of 19-25. Mrs M Lucas advised they need to bring back a report about the breadth of offer they have for Post 16. Inspire work closely with USP and SEC with a whole range of activities in places. There is also a range of support in turn ship programmes. Mrs M Lucas is happy to bring back to the next meeting.

Mr E Caines thinks a café, farm or bicycle repair shop should be setup as an enterprise to support the children who could be in these settings and would not be exploited and get all the support and monitoring they need.

Mrs S Hewitt advised that a lot of this is already taking place. It is about finding things that match their interests. Mrs S Hewitt would like more information and data and the cost implications. Andrea advised they have 68 children who are post 16 and will bring back breakdown of data.

**Action: A report on Post 16 and 19 to 25 data, the breadth of offer and some success stories would be brought to a future meeting of the schools forum.**

## **AGREED**

a) All Forum members noted contents of the presentation

### **4. Dedicated Schools Grant 2022/23 – Report & Presentation**

Mr D May advised as a result of the current forecast of a deficit of £0.535m the outturn position would therefore increase to a deficit of £2.418m.

The High Needs Block remains the area of significant high risk, especially with the continued increase in EHCP's and the additional cost of out of borough placements

There is also a risk in Early Years with funding allocations awaiting for the 3 year period 2020/2023.

The key changes made by the ESFA to the National Funding Formula (NFF) in 2022/23 are:

- The core factors in the NFF will increase by 3%.
- The funding floor will ensure that every school is allocated at least 2% more pupil-led funding per pupil compared to 2021-22 allocation.
- The minimum per pupil funding levels will increase by 2%. This will mean that, next year, every primary school will receive at least £4,265 per pupil and every secondary school at least £5,525.

He advised that the High Needs Block increase in 2022/23 of £3.116m is welcome and reflects the change in methodology consulted on earlier in the year that was favourable to Thurrock. However, the number and complexity of EHCP's continue to increase and future budgets will need to reflect the associated increase in costs.

Mr A Melborne asked if we will definitely get an update on Early Years in December. Mr D May is confident this will happen as part of the funding announcement. He advised we need clarity on what the financial position is for all 3 years 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2021/22. Mr A Melborne commented other pressures include rises in national minimum wage, national insurance and staff shortages. He asked what happens if the Early Years funding does not break even. The Early Years block will need to breakeven in 2021/22, if not this would impact on funding available in 2022/23. Mr D May advised that as part of the January meeting we will consider all options and seek to maximise funding to providers.

Mr A Melborne advised that when staff payroll costs go up by 8% the settings would not be able to drive their fees up to match this rate increase. How can we protect this area? Mr D May advised we need more details and will passport as much funds as they can but will need to wait for facts and figures. Mr A Melborne asked if there was an under spend. Mr D May advised there was an over spend in 2020/21. If there was a surplus in 2021/22 this would be ring fenced to early years.

Mr D May spoke about Home to School Transport & Children Social Care placements. He advised that the home to school transport projected cost 2021/22 is £5.1m. This is an over spend of £0.8m against a budget of £4.3m. He advised that DSG makes a fixed contribution of £1.6m.

He advised that provisional allocation shows investment in Schools Block and High Needs Block. The High Needs Block shows projected pressure of £1.474m. He advised that the School Forum must decide whether to transfer 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block to support increase demand for Specialist placements and EHCPs. He also advised there is an in year movement from Schools Block to High Needs Block during the 2020/21 academic year of £0.317m as pupils have moved to the High Needs Block.

Mrs S Hewitt asked if all LA's contribute to the DSG for transport. Mr D May advised this is dependent on decisions which were made in 2005/06. Up and down the country is different. The value transferred is a fixed amount.

Mr D May went through a number of scenarios to show the impact of a 0.5% transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block. Mr D May gave all members a breakdown by school for each option. He then focused on one school from this report to clarify why each school would be different.

Mr D May summarised that there was significant pressures in the whole system with no current long term solution to pressures in High Needs Block. They are awaiting the outcome of the SEND Review.

Mr D May advised that the maximum transfer is 0.5% which equals £0.706m.

Mr D May asked if there were any questions.

Mrs S Hewitt asked at what point they would not be able to move funds between blocks. Mr D May advised that this is likely to be when the Hard National Funding Formula is implemented. No date is fixed at this stage and further information should be received as part of the outcome of the consultation that ended September 2021.

Mr A Melborne asked if there is a parallel growth fund for early years. Mr D May advised not as early years funding is paid based on the termly census whereas schools are funded on the previous October count.

## **AGREED**

- a) All Forum members notes the content of the report and offered support and challenge.
- b) All Forum members considered the 2022/23 information provided on both the Schools and High Needs Block financial position.
- c) 17 Forum members considered and approved the transfer of 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block 2022/23.
- d) All Forum members agreed to receive finalised information based on decisions made today at the January School Forum meeting
- e) All Forum members agreed the principles to be applied to updated 2022/23 data and finance to be received in December.

## **5. Childcare Sufficiency**

Mrs A Winstone advised that the report outlined Thurrock's Annual Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2021. This report is part of a statutory duty as set out in the Childcare Act 2006. It recognises the regeneration opportunities locally and will look to support some of the national drivers around early year's education.

Thurrock Council will continue to support further early years & childcare development across the borough where re-generation and new housing is taking place.

Mrs A Winstone asked if there were any questions.

Mrs S Hewitt asked about provision of children with SEND in terms of childcare. She would like to know if The Sunshine centre was part of this report.

***Action 1: Mrs A Winstone to find out if The Sunshine centre was part of the report.***

Mr A Melborne advised staffing is an issue for all settings. There is an ever increasing need for places and this is a long term challenge. Mrs A Winstone advised they are helping new providers where they can. A big part of the problem is suitable premises that are available. Mr A Melborne asked what happens in the Wards that need additional places. Mrs A Winstone advised that as part of Miss S William's role in Pupil Place Planning all new builds would be asked to provide S106 money for nursery places. They are also looking for new providers to come forward and they will help with the setting up.

## **AGREED**

All forum members noted the contents of the Annual Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2021.

## **6. Outcomes of Disadvantaged Children – Oral Update**

Mrs M Lucas advised that they met as a working party and Mr J Revell in partnership with Dr S Asong were going through the latest dataset. They will be able to report back to the next school forum.

Dr S Asong advised there is an urgency for change management. Mr R Latham advised this should be presented at TASS and THPA to get wider engagement.

***Action 2: Mrs M Lucas to report datasets at next school forums and present the dataset at TASS and THPA***

## **AGREED**

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

## **7. School's Forum Forward Plan**

Miss S Williams shared with members the forward plan for the next meetings in this academic year. Mrs M Lucas commented that there is an emphasis on early years and there is an increase in EHCPs from this area. She advised has emailed health to see if there is any support we could put in early years to help. This needs to be added to the forward plan.

***Action 3: Miss S Williams to add Early Years to January agenda. Miss S Williams to add the following items to the forward plan:***



- 1.1 19-25 growth data linked to cost increase
- 1.2 SEND success stories
- 1.3 Education offer for SEND pupils

## **8. Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2021**

The Chair went through the Minutes of the previous meeting for accuracy.

All governors were happy with the content.

## **9. Matters Arising**

None.

## **10. Any Other Business**

Mr T Parfett advised that Dr Asong has had her name put forward for Vice Chair by TASS. Dr S Asong advised that she thought she would be a place holder until TASS agreed a new placement. Mr S Bell advised they all agreed that Dr S Asong should be Vice Chair. All members agreed.

Mr Tony Parfett thanked Mr D May for the clarity he always provides in his reports.

## **11. Date of next meeting**

Thursday 13 January 2022 – Virtual meeting Microsoft Teams