

THURROCK SCHOOLS' FORUM

16th January 2025 at 10:00 – 12:00

Virtual Meeting – Microsoft Teams

AGENDA

Multi Academy Trusts

Catalyst Academies Trust
Harris Federation
Ormiston Park
Mossbourne Federation
Osborne Co-operative Academy Trust
REAch2 Academy Trust
South West Essex Community Education Trust
The Gateway Learning Community Trust (GLC)
Vine Schools Trust
Christus Catholic Trust

Name

Mr T Parfett (Vice Chair)
Mrs N Graham
To be advised
Ms Claire Lane-Craig.
Mr Griffiths
Mr E Samuel
Mr S Munday
Mrs V Reid (Chair)
Mrs E Wigmore
Mrs J Seymour

Secondary Voluntary Aided School

Grays Convent

Name

Mrs P Johnson

Standalone Academy Trusts

Woodside Academy
Giffards Primary

Name

Mr S Proctor
Mrs N Haslam-Davis

Infrastructure Groups

TASS
TPHA

Name

Mr S Bell
Mrs J Sawtell-Haynes

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
0-11 Representative
11-19 Representative

Name

Miss S Jones
G Corry
Mr A Melbourne
Ms A Jones
Mr S Bowak

THURROCK SCHOOLS' FORUM

16th January 2025 at 10:00 – 12:00

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Introductory Items		
Item	Item	Time Guide
1.	Welcome from Chair	10:00
2.	Apologies for Absence	10:02
3.	Introductions New member - Ms Claire Lane-Craig (The Mossbourne Federation)	10:05
4.	<i>For decision</i> Dedicated Schools Grant 2025/26 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• David May presenting	10:15
5.	<i>For decision</i> Growth and Falling Rolls Fund 2025/26 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sarah Williams presenting	10:40
6.	<i>For information</i> Review of Forward Plan 2024/25 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sarah Williams presenting	11:05
Closing Items		
7.	Minutes of the previous meeting held on 28th November 2024	11.25
8.	Action Log	11:35
9.	Any Other Business	11:45
	Date of next meeting Thursday 13 th March 2025	

Thurrock Borough Council
Schools Forum - Action Log - Agenda Item: 8

School Forum Meeting Date	Agenda Item	Action details	Action Owner	Action or Decision	Relevant Timescales	Action Status	Additional information
28/11/2024	5	As part of the National Funding Formula the Area Cost Adjustment is received, that is then distributed based on the post code. Action:Mr D May to investigate the Area Cost Adjustment and if that is distributed completely across schools to meet the fringe payments	DM			Completed	To be covered in the annual budget presentation.

THURROCK SCHOOLS FORUM REPORT

DATE:	16 January 2025
SUBJECT:	Dedicated Schools Grant 2025/26
REPORT OF:	David May
THE REPORT IS:	For Decision

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides details of the settlement information for 2025/26.
- 1.2 Officers continue to work through the detail. At the meeting a presentation will be made on all key issues and decisions required to finalise the 2025/26 DSG budget

2. Dedicated Schools Grant 2025/26

- 2.1 On 18 December 2024, Department for Education announced the schools funding settlement for 2025/26, reflecting the outcome of the October 2024 school census. The Dedicated Schools Grant to be received by Thurrock in 2025/26, before academy recoupment, is shown in the table below:

Dedicated Schools Grant	2024/25	2025/26	Increase
	£m	£m	£m
Schools Block	167.156	180.524	13.368
Central School Services Block	1.610	1.598	(0.012)
High Needs Block	39.083	41.870	2.787
Early Years Block	22.127	30.192	8.065
Total	229.977	254.184	24.207

- 2.2 The key headline announcements are:
- Funding for mainstream schools in DSG will increase by 2.15% per pupil, this includes existing funding and full year impact of the 2024 pay award.
 - On high needs, the average funding increase is 9% in cash terms, with local authority-level increases between 7% and 10% per person aged 2-18.
 - Alongside the Dedicated Schools Grant, councils will receive a separate core schools budget grant to pass on to special schools and alternative provision to continue funding costs of 2024 teachers' pay and pension and other staff increases.
 - Around £8 billion will be allocated for early years settings through core funding rates. No significant changes have been made to the funding methodology from 2024/25, other than including the expansion of the 2-year-old and under 2s working parent entitlements to 30-hours, which will be available from September 2025.

Schools Block

- 2.3 The 2025/26 Schools National Funding Formula will use the same factors as in 2024/25. Protections will remain compulsory in the local authority funding formulae at minimum per pupil levels (Primary £4,955, KS3 £6,221, KS4 £6,831) and the funding floor that ensures that a school's funding is protected from excessive losses year-on-year.
- 2.4 The only structural changes being made to the NFF for 2025/26 are in relation to the PFI factor. In Thurrock, with no PFI schools this will have no impact.
- 2.5 The teachers' pay additional grant (TPAG) and the teachers' pension employer contribution grant (TPECG) 2024 will be rolled into the NFF for 2025/26. The recently announced core schools budget grant (CSBG) will also be rolled into the schools NFF for 2025/26.

Local authority formulae in 2025/26

- 2.6 As in previous years, local authorities will be responsible for deciding local funding formulae for mainstream schools in their area. The funding levels that schools – both maintained schools and academies – receive will be determined by the respective local formulae.
- 2.7 In 2025/26, each local authority will continue to set a local schools funding formula, in consultation with local schools. Local authorities were required to bring their own formulae closer to the schools NFF from 2023/24. This transition will continue in 2025/26.
- 2.8 Thurrock's funding formula will implement the following principles consistent with the decision made by Cabinet from 2020/21:
- National Funding Formula including Area Cost Adjustment values to be applied.
 - Where this is unaffordable the Basic Entitlement value, to be included, will be reduced to contain within the funding available. The reduction to be applied will be weighted, consistent with the distribution of funding between Primary and Secondary.
 - Growth fund to be retained to support sufficiency of school places.

Cabinet will formally agree to the continuation of these principles at its meeting on 22 January 2025. Political approval is required as part of the APT (local formula) submission to the Department for Education.

Central School Services Block

2.9 This funding block is subject to a 20% year on year reduction to historic commitments. Officers continue to work through the detail with detailed budget information to be presented at the meeting.

2.10

Central School Services Block (CSSB)	2024/25	2025/26
CSSB unit of funding	£41.24	£43.75
CSSB pupil count	28,891	28,866
Funding for historic commitments	£418,776	£335021
Total central school services block	£1,610,221	£1,597,884
Change in Funding	(£22,579)	(£12,337)
Change in Historic Commitments funding	(£104,693)	(£83,755)

High Needs

2.11 In 2025/26 the High Needs Block funding has an allocation of £41.870m, an increase of £2.787m (7.13%). Whilst the increase is welcome, Thurrock continues to experience high level of demand for Specialist places and Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCP).

2.12 In 2025/26, the expansion of the local offer will increase commissioned numbers for the academic year to 904, an increase of 81. This reflects planned expansion of Primary Autism, Secondary SEMH and Specialist provision. In addition, Top-up values across all providers will be increased.

2.13 Thurrock as part of the Delivering Better Value SEND programme in 2023/24 received a grant from the Department for Education for additional funding of £1 million for 2024/25 to develop initiatives to support the reduction of EHCP and the upskilling of school-based staff. This was to support the long-term management of DSG. It is expected in the new year that the Government will outline its long-term plan for the management of SEND.

Early Years

2.14 On 10 December 2024, the Department for Education announced the local authority hourly funding rates for April 2025 to March 2026. These are the rates that the Department for Education (DfE) will pay to each local authority to fund the early years entitlements. This includes:

- the 15 hours entitlement for eligible working parents of children from 9 months up to 2 years old (due to be extended to 30 hours from 1 September 2025)
- the 15 hours entitlement for eligible working parents of 2-year-old children (due to be extended to 30 hours from 1 September 2025)
- the 15 hours entitlement for families of 2-year-olds receiving additional support (formerly known as the 2-year-old disadvantaged entitlement)
- the universal 15 hours entitlement for all 3 and 4-year-olds
- the additional 15 hours entitlement for eligible working parents of 3 and 4-year-olds

- 2.15 Local authorities are best placed to determine how to use their total funding allocation to meet the needs of their communities. So, using DfE rates as a starting point, local authorities set their own provider hourly rates using their own local formulae. These formulae and the provider hourly rates are different to the rates announced by DfE and are decided at a local level.
- 2.16 Before deciding on their local formulae and provider hourly rates, local authorities must consult with their schools forum to decide how the money will be spent.
- 2.17 The Local Authority is expected to announce their funding rates to childcare providers by 28 February 2025. This will be mandated as a requirement in the regulations from the financial year 2026/27.

2.18 Officers continue to work through the detail to determine the local funding formula that can be applied within Thurrock to support settings and the expansion of the early years offer. Consultation will take place with Thurrock Schools Forum in January the outcome of which will be report back to Cabinet for agreement in February.

3. REFERENCES TO OTHER KEY DOCUMENTS / PREVIOUS REPORTS

- School Forum meeting 28-11-24 – Dedicated Schools Grant 2025/26

4. CONTACT DETAILS OF LEAD OFFICER / AUTHOR

If you have any queries or comments in advance of the Schools Forum meeting about this report, please contact.

Name: David May
Role: Head of Strategic Finance, Corporate Finance
E-Mail: dmay@thurrock.gov.uk

THURROCK SCHOOLS FORUM REPORT

DATE:	16 January 2025
SUBJECT:	Growth and Falling Rolls Fund 2025/26
REPORT OF:	Sarah Williams
THE REPORT IS:	For Decision

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report seeks for the Schools Forum to agree to the process for the allocation of growth funding for schools and academies who take bulge classes or expanding schools and academies whereby schools and academies increase their published admission number at the request of the Council.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 To agree the proposed criteria for schools and academies accessing funding allocated for growth for the academic year 2025/26.
- 2.2 To agree to the continued use of the age weighted pupil unit value for the academic year 2025/26.
- 2.3 To agree a Growth Fund budget for the financial year 2025/26 of £1,106,741.
- 2.4 To keep under review the need to establish a Falling Rolls Policy

3. GROWTH FUND

- 3.1 Following the annual review of Pupil Place Plan and school places across Thurrock the Head of Education Support Services and the Head of Strategic Finance have worked together to present the forecasted growth budget for 2025/26.
- 3.2 The local authority continues to work with schools and academies to ensure that there is a sufficiency of school places to meet local demand across the borough. In certain circumstances this may involve increasing the published admission number (PANS) in those schools and academies 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.

Growth Criteria

- 3.3 The Schools Operational Guide 2025/26 published by the ESFA outlines the principles for a growth fund. Local authorities may centrally retain funding within the schools block in order to create a growth fund to support schools and academies which are required to provide extra places in order to meet basic need within the authority, including pre-opening.
- 3.4 The growth fund may not be used to support schools and academies in financial difficulty.
- 3.5 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 to meet basic need in the area (either as a bulge class or on-going commitment).
 - support where a schools and academy has increased its PAN in agreement with the local authority to meet basic need in the area.
 - Funding will be provided 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. Funding in the second year will be based on the difference in actual numbers of children on roll at the October census and the bulge class number. No funding will be provided in year 3.
- 3.6 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 and academies 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.

Funding Requirements 2025/26

- 3.7 The local authority is required to publish the methodology used to provide additional growth funding to schools and academies and it must be applied in the same way regardless of the type of school.
- 3.8 Within the operational guide 2025/26 the common methodology used is the age weighted pupil unit. The AWPU value to be paid for the academic year 2025/26 would be Primary £3,995 and Secondary £5,630 per pupil. These values have been updated and reflect the Primary and KS3 Basic Entitlement to be used in funding formula.

3.9 For the academic year 2025/26 a growth class of 30 would receive, Primary £119,850 and Secondary £168,900.

3.10 The Local Authority has received within the DSG Schools Block funding allocation the following growth and falling roll funding:

Table 1: Thurrock DSG Schools Block Growth Fund Allocation 2025/26

Growth and Falling Rolls Fund 2025/26	Numbers	ACA	Value	Allocation
Growth Fund Primary	114.00	1.03854	£1,570	£185,878
Growth Fund Secondary	443.00	1.03854	£2,350	£1,081,174
Falling Roll Primary	0.00	1.03854	£140,000	£0
Falling Roll Secondary	1.00	1.03854	£141,890	£147,359
Total	558.00			£1,414,411
Growth Fund 2024/25	591.50			£1,276,875

3.11 Thurrock has experienced significant growth in the area for a number of years. The table below shows existing commitments for Summer 2025 and the areas currently identified where additional places will be required in 2025/26:

Table 2: Thurrock Growth Fund 2025/26

Pupil Growth 2025/26	Pupil Growth	Year Group	Growth 2025/26	Funding Per Pupil 2024/25	Total Cost 2025/26
Primary	180	tbc	120	£3,995	£479,400
Secondary	90	tbc	77.5	£5,630	£436,325
	270		198		£915,725
				Growth Fund Agreed 2024/25 Summer Term	£191,016
Thurrock Retained Growth					£1,106,741

3.12 To support existing commitments and the need for an additional 270 places during the academic year 2025/26, a retained growth fund of £1,106,741 is required.

3.13 The balance of the funding is being used to support Thurrock Local Funding formula to allow the National Funding Formula values with Area Cost Adjustment to be applied. This has a cost implication of £0.225m. In addition, confirmed growth is included in line with the guidelines at a cost implication of £0.083m.

Growth Fund DfE 2025/26	£1,414,412
NFF & ACA Applied	(£224,721)
Confirmed Growth	(£82,950)
Growth Fund	£1,106,741

4. FALLING ROLLS FUND

- 4.1 For the first time in 2024/25 the funding formula included provision for falling rolls.
- 4.2 Local authorities will continue to have discretion over whether to operate a falling rolls fund. Where local authorities operate a fund, they will only be able to provide funding where school capacity data 2022 (SCAP) shows that school places will be required in the subsequent three to five years.
- 4.3 The guidance requires such funds to set out clear criteria containing objective trigger points for eligibility or qualification and a clear formula for calculating allocations.
- 4.4 The requirement that schools must be Ofsted rated 'good' or 'outstanding' to be eligible for falling rolls funding no longer applies.
- 4.5 The key principles that drive the need to maintain a falling rolls fund are to ensure that places are expected to be required in 2025/26 or the subsequent 2 years, based on the most recent school capacity (SCAP) survey and that neither the local authority, nor schools/academies incur unnecessary costs in relation to short-term temporary losses in pupil numbers.
- 4.6 In consideration of the data available it is not considered that this would be appropriate as the conditions outline above would not be met within Thurrock in 2025/26. Officers will annually consider if circumstances require the development of a policy.

5. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Schools Forum Report 16 January 2024 - Growth and Falling Rolls Fund

6. CONTACT DETAILS OF LEAD OFFICER / AUTHOR

NAME: Sarah Williams

ROLE: Head of Education Support Services

EMAIL: sjwilliams@thurrock.gov.uk

NAME: David May

ROLE: Head of Strategic Finance

EMAIL: dmay@thurrock.gov.uk

Thurrock School Forum Forward Plan for 2024 – 2025		
Date of meeting	Agenda Item	Report Author
Thursday 28th November 2024	Dedicated Schools Grant – 2024/25 and 2025/26 Finance Report & presentation - Decision	David May
	Schools Budget Survey 2024/25	David May
	ESFA Consultations - Standing	David May
	Pupil Place Planning Review	Sarah Williams
	Review of Forward Plan 2024/25 - Standing	Sarah Williams
	Childcare Sufficiency - Standing	
Thursday 16th January 2025	Dedicated Schools Grant – 2024/25 and 2025/26 Finance Report & Presentation - Decision	David May
	Growth Fund 2025/26	David May
	Review of Forward Plan 2024/25 - Standing	Sarah Williams
	Review of Forward Plan 2024/25 - Standing	Sarah Williams
Thursday 13th March 2025	Dedicated Schools Grant – 2024/25 and 2025/26 Finance Report & Presentation - Decision	David May
	Thurrock Budget – Children’s Services	David May
	Dedicated Schools Grant Management Plan – Decision	David May
	ESFA Consultations - Standing	David May
	Thurrock Code of Practice for delivery of early education for 2, 3&4 year olds - Standing	Alison Picknell/Manbir Virk
	Review of Forward Plan 2024/25 - Standing	Sarah Williams
	Dedicated Schools Grant – Finance Report - Decision	David May
	Dedicated Schools Grant Management Plan - Decision	David May
	Meeting dates for the academic year 2025/26	Sarah Williams
	ESFA Consultations - Standing	David May

Thursday 12th June 2025	Pupil Place Planning Review	Sarah Williams
	Union Facility Time Annual Review	Andrea Winstone/Sue Lamkin
	Review of Forward Plan 2024/25 - Standing	Sarah Williams

THURROCK SCHOOLS' FORUM

**28 November 2024 at 10:00 - 12:00
Virtual Meeting - Microsoft Teams**

Multi Academy Trusts Name

The Gateway Learning Community Trust (GLC)
South West Essex Community Education Trust
Catalyst Academies Trust
Christus Catholic Trust

Mrs V Reid (Chair)
Mr S Munday
Mr T Parfett
Mrs J Seymour

Secondary Voluntary Aided School Name

Grays Convent
Diocese of Brentwood

Mrs P Johnson
Ms Grace Corry

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Mrs S Hewitt
Mr J Brewer

Non-school members Name

0-5 EYFS Representative
11-19 Representative
0-11 Representative

Mr A Melbourne
Mr S Bowak
Ms A Jones

Also in Attendance:

Head of Strategic Finance
Head of Service - Education Support Service
Head of Service – School Effectiveness and SEND
Head of Service - Specialist Provision & PEP
Clerk

Mr D May
Ms S Williams
Mrs A Winstone
Mr M W Taylor
Mrs K Swan

Guest Speakers

Ms L Coates
Ms C Hunnisett Olive AP Academy

1. Welcome from Chair

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed everyone.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies received from:

Mrs M Lucas
Mrs N Graham
Mr A Whiles
Mr M Vickers
Mrs Wigmore

3. Introductions

Grace Corry has joined as Primary Link Advisor for Diocese of Brentwood replacing Maria Shepherd.

4. Dedicated Schools Grant 2024/24 and 2025/26.

Mr D May shared the report (from the report pack). Currently forecasting an outturn position of £1.151 million overspend, that is 2% over the budget provision. The key drivers are expansion of places, out of borough placements, medical tuition, top up funding, and post 16 increases. There are several offsets that allow to reduce the overspend, however there are further forecasted potential risks that are not included in the forecast at this stage. Post 16, trying to verify the numbers that are attending the Post 16 placements. There is no contingency with Out of Borough Placements, which there wouldn't be with an overspend but if any more placements go up that would only add to the cost.

Mr D May said that the report shows the continuing increase in EHCP numbers, the position of £1.151 million overspend would change the surplus position on DFE to a deficit of approximately £0.5 million, however with the risks identified this could potentially raise to a £1.5 million overspend.

Mr D May said that there is a lot of national press about the level of DSG balances. Currently there is a statutory override in place, whereby Local Authorities keep the DSG balance off their balance sheet until the end of 2025-26. There is an expectation that further clarity will be provided in the coming months.

Mrs J Sawtell-Haynes asked if Mr D May could provide any more information about medical tuition, which year groups the children are, the reason for medical tuition and if there is any claw back.

Mr D May said that when discussing the High Need Block budget 2025/26 there will be a specific paper on medical tuition as the cost is becoming unmanageable and therefore a need to look at what options are available so there will be a consistent policy.

Mr M Taylor added that the pressures are children that are having trouble with anxiety in secondary school. Post Covid there has been an increase in children with anxiety and medical evidence stating that they are unable to attend school, which has had an impact on demands.

Mrs J Sawtell-Haynes said that "children who are anxious do not get less anxious by being at home".

Mr M Taylor responded that several strategies and initiatives that are taken, locally and nationally to support those children with needs to get them back in to school.

Section 6 in the report is relating to Core Skills Budget Grant, schools and academies should have received their allocation. The report details the AP and Special schools funding allocation of £610 per place. The proposal is to distribute the funding based on the same amount received from the DFE. Mr D May said that the issue now is that when setting 2025-26 budget values

related to the High Needs Block, we must create a per pupil amount for all the additional grants that have previously been received. At this stage if the Government have given £610 and we must distribute £610 next year it makes sense to use the same methodology to be distributed.

Mr D May said that for the Early Years Providers, the amount only applies for 3 and 4 years old, the proposal is to pass in full the 9p per hour received to be paid to all providers. There would be an adjustment payment to all providers on 06 December 2024 for full Autumn Term and for the Spring Term would uplift the hourly rate for 3- and 4-year-olds by 9% so it is paid as part of the advance payment and part of the usual payments.

Mr D May said there is nothing to add on delivering better value schools programme which is ongoing.

Mrs S Hewitt asked Mr D May if everything is being pulled together in April, does that mean that all the historic grants were looking at the methodology being slightly different in the circumstances in different schools, will that all alter as well? As that would significantly disadvantage those schools with a higher level of staff to pupil ratios.

Mr D May said that yes it would have to go into a per pupil amount but cannot answer how because there is no guidance yet to say what the full methodology other than all grants must be distributed on a per pupil place.

Mrs V Reid added that banding was mentioned and asked Mr D May if this could this form part of the methodology?

Mr D May said that the £10,000 will remain and the £660 amount will increase to reflect all the other grants, so they will all become one amount per pupil and there will be the tops ups on top of that.

Decision required: Looking to agree to the distribution Core School Budget as outlined.

Agreement - 16
Abstain - 0
Against - 0

AGREED.

5. Dedicated Schools Grant 2025-26

Mr May shared a short presentation (from information in the report pack) to show the plan for the coming months.

The DFE are trying to release policy documents, but no figures will be released until 16 December 2024, the deadlines for submission and have not changed, they are still linked in with School Forum Meeting in January.

The DSG Management Plan has been updated to reflect the return of the commission numbers that were made to the DFE in late October, including a special school contingency for Post 16 in the next 4 years. Band Values remain as per the estimates at the 3% annual uplift and the hourly rate is at the planned rates that were included in the DSG Management Plan.

The presentation showed the number of commissioned places which continue to grow and show what was submitted to the ESFA, they are ones that are confirmed. The difference between the ESFA and the LA we don't confirm the number with the LA until the setting is formally open.

Mr D May said that the DSG deficit that was forecasted when SEN DVB was submitted in February 2024 was £16.879m. The current position, through the expansion of commissioned placements and the number of EHCP that are being supported has increased the projected deficit to £21.6 million by 2028-29. The detailed will be reviewed once the 2025/26 settlement is confirmed and proposals for 2026-27 are outlined. It is only at this stage that there can be meaningful conversations around what this means for Thurrock.

Mr D May highlighted that the comparison between 2023-24 and 2024-25 Residential and Specialist Placements numbers are relatively consistent however the increase in cost is significant. The other pressure on the HNB is movement in year, from pupils that are funded through the Schools Block into the High Needs Block. In the Schools Block the funding that was received was £0.176m but the cost implication to the High Needs Block is £1.2 million. It is clear that funding is not flowing through in a timely manner, and it is not near the value that is needed to support those within the High Needs Block.

The budget for 2025-26, £2.3 billion has been released of extra funding of which £1 billion is for the High Needs Block and the £1.3 billion will cover the remaining cost of the teachers' pay award. The mainstream national funding formula has increased and there is also an increase to the pupil premium. No information has been realised on CSSB or Early Years at this stage.

Within the Schools Block, all the additional grants have been incorporated into the national funding formula therefore no grants will be paid next year but the values will be increased, they will uplift the national formula factor values. Additional grants will be paid to schools for the change to the National Insurance contribution. The funding floor is set at 0% and the minimum funding guarantee will be between minus 0.5% and 0% so they are not building in any guaranteed increase in funding.

Mr D May said that for the High Needs Block the national funding formulas will be looking to increase, there will be a 7-10% per head to reflect the demands of the High Needs Block however the minimum funding guarantee will be 0%. Additional high needs funding within the DSG must be converted to a per place amount. They are going to announce reforms, funding changes for 2026-27.

Mr D May said that within Thurrock, there needs to be a discussion about what happens going forward, it has already been agreed there will be no high needs transfer from the Schools Block. A positive for the Schools Block where this year £400,000 was transferred, that will then be available to schools and provide some increase. Minimum inflation increase is provided through National Fair Funding formula. The DFE have acknowledged that a separate NI grant will be paid, Mr D May asked if a separate pay award would be made, they did say that at this time no decision had been made, it is not something they will agree until they know what the pay awards are in the new year.

Mr D May said that for the local formula, Cabinet continue to support the principles which are all consistent with what those agree since 2021. The national funding formula value will be implemented in full however where this is not possible the basic entitlement will be reduced. Mr D May said that within the Special Schools the band values do need to be reviewed, there needs to be a more phased approach but would need to know the implications of what is coming from the budget.

Mr D May shared the timetable and proposed that at the January meeting the focus will be on Schools and Early Years. The detail discussion on the High Needs Block can be delayed until March meeting because all the changes become effective from the start of the academic year.

Mr A Melbourne said about the impact of national and minimum wage on Early Years and the change in employment allowance which will affect what can be reclaimed in terms of PAYE costs. Where schools have different pipelines of grants, the settings do not have those other income streams. Mr D May said that the Local Authority will receive a grant for National Insurance, but it is believed to be only for the employees that are employed under the additional cost. What is in the press is that the Local Authority will not receive any funding for national insurance for any commissioned services that it provides, it looks like Local Government is getting a rise, but it then must fund all the increasing costs. Mr D May said there are a lot of challenges ahead and until we get the detail to understand what the figures show.

Ms V Reid added that it seems that there is a commitment to funding for Early Years and expanding that provisional and money going into capital, but the providers are struggling. Some settings are closing which causes pressure to the surrounding schools which are already full.

Mr S Proctor asked Mr D May if there is any data around unofficial places and support being offered via schools, they are the commissioned places but there are many schools with unofficial bases and meeting need as well. Is there any record around numbers who are accessing the same type of provision?

Mr M Taylor said that they are aware of the bases from the visits and there are many primary schools with the visits, there is a record if the additional funding put into high needs pupils, most of those are within bases, although not all. Mr M Taylor said that he is anticipating bringing a report to the SEN subgroup of the Schools Forum around those needs because of the secondary need and will bring to the next Schools Forum to map out what the level of need is.

Mr S Proctor said that from a school point of view, there will be at least the same number of children in school run bases not being funded anywhere near the same rate. Without additional funding and with budgets ultimately running out because of the continual deficit there will be more pressure on bases and special schools when there is already pressure. Mr S Proctor said that when looking at the banding, it is appropriate to look at banding for special schools but also looking at the banding for children who qualify for those special schools but cannot access them because there is no space, who then are working in unofficial bases. There are many primary schools in Thurrock who are trying to deal with high level needs children at a significant disadvantage considering the payments. There is an acknowledgement that there is no space in special schools and additional provisions and headteachers accept the responsibility for children in Thurrock but that also includes children who are being significant disadvantaged through a lack of funding which means that they are receiving a poorer offer. Mr S Proctor said that it is felt that they are managing the children's needs not meeting their needs because there is not adequate funding of facilities to meet their needs properly and effectively.

Mr M Taylor added that at the latest TPHA meeting the point was being made about having to provide a service for pupils who otherwise would be in special schools, or for pupils where additional funding must be provided. Because of the large number of those children that have never historically been in primary schools before, Mr M Taylor said that he has been doing visits directly to those pupils and feeding back to the SEN processes where he and Mrs A Winstone adjust the funding around those pupils to take that into account. This is done by using additional top ups however there is still a difference between that and what you would get in a special school placement or a base placement. Part of the answer discussed at TPHA is that the work that Mr D May has been doing looking at the overall banding level to get over the jumps in the special school banding and trying to have a more gradual set of gradations so pupil needs can be adjusted and then do activities with the schools themselves but also across mainstream so there is a more defined level of banding so a category of need can be better identified particularly the high needs and where they would sit in terms of the banding.

Ms A Jones said with regards to the Early Years and the severest children there are only 6 commissioned places in Thurrock, they are taking over that amount. There is no additional funding for those children on the severest end of the spectrum and what they receive is not covering the cost. As a small setting they have 10 high needs children and by covering the costs there is an impact to the setting and their finances.

Mrs J Sawtell-Haynes said that the meeting she attended for the Early Years staff who could not apply for additional funding for children who are challenging in Early Years, the recommendation was that they have 3 plan-do-review cycles but if you have a child for a year that could be 3 plan-do-review cycles. Mrs J Sawtell-Haynes said that she asked for a flow chart but has not seen one yet. Mrs J Sawtell-Haynes asked Mr M Taylor if the plan will be shared of the children who are in mainstream school who will be arriving in secondary school.

Mr M Taylor said that there are cases of children whose needs are highly significant and therefore can ensure that there is some additional funding. There is outstanding work that is being provided in primary schools and in settings around the children with highly complex needs, this is an unprecedented situation, there has never been anything like the level of complex need within the mainstream schools. There have been conversations with Treetops School as an Academy Trust which brings significant challenges to them about an increase in support and accommodation to meet those pupils needs and changes the dynamics within the overall school structure.

Mr P Griffiths said that he is unsure how the free school at Olive Academy is going to contribute to the inclusion agenda at secondary level, because it is important to prepare and the timeframe for preparation is short.

Mr M Taylor said there is some accommodation that is currently under development in Tilbury until the Free School Building Delivery Programme which will be on the site of Olive Academy, that will provide additional resources. That will be opened under a different DFE category as an independent school, those pupils may transfer back. Olive and Osbourne are working closely together in terms of DBV funding in terms of support for transition work and to hold on to some of the children who either come up through the inclusion basis or the SEMH.

Mr P Griffiths said that he was hoping to see a holistic strategy in how the complex needs filter into the primary sector will be picked up in the secondary phase, secondary schools operate an entirely different organisational framework to primary schools.

Mrs S Hewitt said at the moment the DFE and the Government are quiet around their plans for SEND. Issues have been raised by colleagues the secondary creating provisions for children with SEN and the need to allow the secondary curriculum to have the same flexibility that exists within special schools, unless that flexibility is allowed it is a barrier to allow those children to be educated within a secondary setting, this was shut down and it was said that the direction of travel was around inclusion within mainstream.

Mrs A Winstone responded to the questions around early years, there are several streams for Early Years Inclusion Fund, Transitions Funding and Emerging Needs. The funding will never meet the needs of the children unless it is significantly raised, the Area SENCO has said there are 230 children waiting to be seen by Treetops Outreach, they are children where settings are saying they are unable to meet their needs. Usual reception year is usually around 100 children which will then increase to around 150 in a year group, there are still 2 terms for children to start Nursery so the numbers could go up.

Mr S Proctor asked Mr D May if Thurrock still receives the Area Cost Adjustment and is that distributed completely across schools to meet the fringe payments.

Mr D May said as part of the National Funding Formula the Area Cost Adjustment is received, that is then distributed based on the post code.

Action: Mr D May to investigate the Area Cost Adjustment and if that is distributed completely across schools to meet the fringe payments.

6. Schools Budget Survey 2024/25 - October 2024

Mr D May shared the presentation (includes in the report pack)

There are inflationary increases that are greater than the increase in funding, everyone is juggling but the inflation increases continue to rise. There is an increase in the EHCP numbers also with an increase complexity of need.

Mrs J Sawtell-Haynes asked Mr D May, if they are setting budgets using carry forwards, which run out next year, then the year after what is to be cut? This is likely to be support staff which will significantly impact SEN children. Mr D May said that all schools are in the same position because you can use money to fund one off pressures, in the past it has been known for schools to use that to delay a problem which leads to greater costs or budget reductions. There is no more money coming through, it is the whole system that is lacking and needs change.

Mr P Griffiths asked Mr D May if the removal of the ESFA as an organisation is impacting on the lack of information that can be shared at Schools Forum. Does that mean all the staff are going into the DFE or is there a more radical review of staff at the centre.

Mr D May said the delay in information is as a result of new government setting its priorities. The ESFA will absorb into the DfE from 1 April 2025, this he believes is to reduce overhead costs.

Mr S Proctor said if we do not supply more money to meet those needs, in 3-4 years' time the significant rise in exclusions which Thurrock will then have to work out how they will school

those children, this will then be more expensive than funding and supporting schools to meet their needs. Mr S proctor suggested increasing the deficit in the High Needs Block, if this is not dealt with, schools run out of money and the cuts come in, the exclusion rate will then increase, the problem will be bigger and more expensive.

Mr D May said that he hopes the points will be addressed in whatever information is released. Mrs V Reid added that this is not just a Thurrock issue, this is a national issue.

7. **Delivering Better Value Grant**

Ms L Coates reported that the focus is in the primary area to improve the mainstream capacity and ability to meet the needs of children and young people at a SEN support level to improve and strengthen SEND and alternative provision outreach. Early Years was one of the first areas of focus, initially it was planned to focus on the transition work from year 5/6 but as the EHCP came through they had risen exponentially. One of the Primary Executive Heads in the Osbourne Trust has met with many stake holders including the Primary Heads at TPHA, The Early Years Leads, SENCO's and parents so there is a stake holder voice, it became clear that the initial focus needed to be with the outreach focusing on Early Years.

Speech and Language in Early Years has been identified as causing learning gaps which are leading to behaviours that are causing difficulties for pupils when accessing learning. Gaps in early parenting skills are evidenced in the lack of basic skills that early year's children are coming in, on entry. From that a CPD package has been created that is on offer, flyers have been distributed to the Heads, they have been received positively. The training package will be open to support staff and teaching staff regarding speech and language across the whole of Thurrock Primary Schools which will create a baseline on entry but also give a sustainable offer moving forward.

PPP Parenting have now been identified as a preferred provider for gaps in early parenting. They have a highly effective reputation in Barking and Dagenham and can offer training for up to 40 staff across Thurrock Primary Schools.

The requests have been high in terms of the outreach offer, 14 visits have been completed in Autumn One and Autumn Two has already has 6 referrals to date. As they are high, an experienced teacher has been recruited to support the two alternative provisions and key staff have been identified for the deliver of outreach including an Art and Talking Therapist, AST and Behaviour Lead and Trust Lead SENCO.

Rating the current progress for the project which is in early stages is amber/green for DFE, although in the early stages the schools that have engaged with outreach through the Autumn Term have reported there has been improvements to pupils' engagement and behaviour in school and, more significantly no permanent exclusions.

Ms C Hunnisett said that a three-tiered approach programme has been developed and delivered in several schools. The offer has been predominantly targeted towards young people in schools that are at risk of permanent exclusion and need support. One of the biggest pieces of work that has started is around parent partnerships, working with various schools on a parent programme to support the staff in home schools to deliver a programme that is sustainable and can engage parents in positive parenting, therefore have an impact on the young people in school. Feedback has been positive, since presented at a previous meeting, six schools have requested to be involved. Two key people have been appointed for outreach and parenting support and there is a senior member of staff for coordinating. There has been some difficulties around how people request the support and refer in, this is in discussion.

Mrs J Sawtell-Haynes asked Ms C Hunnisett if the transitions if that is sitting outside of the transitions group that has been set up by Local Authority or if it is included within.

Ms C Hunnisett confirmed that it is included in the work being done, working with young people that have already been identified.

Mrs J Sawtell-Haynes asked if there was a guaranteed uptake from secondary schools as there has been a lot of push back previously.

Ms C Hunnisett there is a piece of work being undertaken that is looking from both sides at how we create a package that suits both needs, primary staff transferring the information that is key to secondary staff and vice versa.

Mrs A Winstone said that the only verbal update on the DBV is that a monitoring form will be coming out early December 2024 and has asked that this could be returned by 10 December 2024. There is a payment linked to the form, this needs to be submitted to DFE.

Mr M Taylor asked if schools could publicise any of their training to get as much coverage as possible.

8. Review of Forward Plan 2025/26

Miss S Williams shared Forward Plan for 2024-2025, all in agreement.

9. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 19 September 2024

Reviewed and agreed as an accurate record.

10. Action Log Review

All actions from previous meeting completed.

11. Any Other Business

Ms P Johnson said that they have been using one of the robots at secondary for one of the students that have had back surgery, it is working well.

Date of next meeting

- Thursday 16th January 2025