

# Islington Schools Forum

Meeting documents and minutes published on [Islington Schools Forum webpage](#).

Draft minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2024 at 2pm in Committee Room 4, Islington Town Hall.

## Attendees

### Present

- Maggie Elliott (ME): Governor, Montem Primary School (Edventure Collaborative Federation with Drayton Park) (Chair)
- Alan Streeter (AS): Headteacher, Beacon High Secondary School (Islington Futures Federation)
- Patrick Mildren (PM): Headteacher, Canonbury Primary School
- Anthony David (AD): Headteacher, St Mary's C of E Primary
- Sophie Gavalda (SG): Headteacher, William Tyndale Primary
- Susan Service (SS): Headteacher, Arts & Media School Islington (Vice-chair)
- Fiona MacCorquodale (FM): Headteacher, Prior Weston Primary School and Children's Centre (Vice-chair)
- Diana Valcheva (DV): Headteacher, Kate Greenaway Nursery School
- Joe Simpson (JS): Governor, St Peter and St Paul's Primary
- Cllr Angelo Weekes (AW): Islington Council – non-Executive Member (remote access)
- Andrew Bosi (AB): Governor, Rotherfield Primary School
- Cerys Normanton (CN): Headteacher, Samuel Rhodes Special School

### Other attendees

- Jon Abbey (JA): Corporate Director of Children and Young People
- Tim Partington (TP): Assistant Director Finance, Children's, Schools & Resources
- Jane Wright (JW): Manager Schools and EY Governance (Clerk)
- Debbie Stevenson (DS): Head of Schools & Early Years Finance Services

- Alison Cramer (AC): Assistant Director, School Support and Information Services
- Sarah Callaghan (SC): Director of Learning and Achievement
- Agnes Narkotey (AN): Finance Service, Islington Council

## Apologies

- Paul Lasok (PL): Governor, St Aloysius Secondary School (and St Joseph's)
- Penny Barratt (PB): Chief Executive Officer, The Bridge MAT
- Francis Gonzalez (FrG): Headteacher, Richard Cloudesley Special School
- Joy Odunayo Abegunde (JA): VCS Providers, Islington Play Association
- Jenny Lewis (JL): Headteacher, Thornhill Primary School
- Nigel Smith (NS): Headteacher, New River College (Pupil Referral Unit)
- Sarah Gill (SG): Head, Hugh Myddelton Primary (The Learning Quarter)

## Not in attendance

- Ana Sevilla (ASe): Executive Head, New River Green and Packington Children's Centres
- Matthew Hillman (MH): Headteacher, The Pears Family School (AP Academy)
- Colleen Marshall (CMa): City and Islington College for 14-19 Partnership

## Meeting minutes

### 1. Welcome/Apologies for absence/not in attendance

ME welcomed all to the meeting and invited them to introduce themselves. Apologies were as above.

### 2. Declaration of Interest

No declarations of interest were declared.

### 3. Schools Forum composition – for information and discussion

JW (the clerk) spoke to a report previously circulated.

## **Apportionment of primary and secondary places in line with School Census 2023**

JW advised there was no need to adjust the apportionment of seats following the census.

### **Update on vacancies:**

#### **Secondary Academy**

There were two vacancies for representatives from the senior leadership teams of the secondary academies. Four emails to them from the clerk had not elicited any response. At the last meeting of Forum, ME agreed to contact Mark Emmerson, CEO of City of London Academy Trust, to see if he could encourage engagement. She had done this with no success as yet.

**Action: SC to follow this up.**

#### **Primary Governor Representative:**

With the term of office of Joe Simpson (JS), governor at St Peter and St Paul's Primary due to end on 5.3.24, the clerk had written to chairs of maintained primary schools in January asking for any objections to JS undertaking a second term of office (he had indicated he was willing to do this) or inviting nominations from primary school governors by 8 February 2024. As of the Forum meeting, JW had received one email endorsing JS undertaking a second term.

#### **Special Academy Representative**

With the term of office of Penny Barrett, Director of Bridge Academy, due to end on 31.3.24. the clerk had written to PB and the Head of the other special academy in January asking them to let her know, by 8 February, how they wanted the representation to continue from April and advising that PB had indicated her willingness to complete another term of office.

**(Update 29 January 2024 – the Heads confirmed that PB was to undertake a second term of office from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2028.)**

### **Noted**

#### **4. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 9 November 2023**

#### **Accuracy**

The minutes were agreed as a true record subject to these corrections:

Under Apologies – Sophie Gavalda, not Garalda, and Headteacher of William Tyndale not Hugh Myddelton Primary.

Under Dates of future meetings – Forum will meet on Thursday 23 not 24 May 2024

There were no matters arising.

#### **5. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Settlement (2024-25) - for information**

DS spoke to a spreadsheet that had been circulated prior to the meeting.

The LA received the DSG settlement for 2024/25 on 19 December 2023. This was based on a reduction of 439 pupils – from 19,806 to 19,367. Teachers' salaries and the Mainstream Schools Additional Grant (MSAG) were now included. 2024-25 was the final year of the DfE's three-year funding settlement 2021-24.

**Central School Services Block (CSSB)** - while the rateable value was up, there was a net decrease due to drop in pupil numbers. The Historic Commitments continued to be cut each year by 20% (-£60K) to £270K.

**High Needs Block** - 1.8% net increase (4%). There will be more changes to this block as part of the annual place change process, where resulting DSG allocation adjustments are updated in March 2024.

**Early Years Block** – there was a welcome increase in the unit costs while the extension of the free early years education offer was being implemented gradually. The rate of two-year-olds was increasing by 49%, for 3s and 4s only a marginal increase. The offer was being extended:

- from April 2024 to eligible working parents of 2-year-olds (currently just low-income families / vulnerable 2-year-olds eligible) – 15 hours per week (38 weeks a year)
- from September 2024 to eligible working parents of children aged 9 months to 2 years old – 15 hours per week.
- from September 2025 to eligible working parents of children aged 9 months to school-age – 30 hours per week.

A consultation with EY providers on the maximum funding for providers was due to take place shortly. An increase in teachers' pay and teachers' pension employer contribution was included in the allocation.

There were to be changes in the High Needs and Early Years blocks – DS will keep Forum informed.

## **Noted**

### **6. School Funding Formula (2024-25) – for decision**

DS spoke to a report previously circulated.

November Forum agreed, in principle, to formula factors, centrally retained funds for growth and to continue the current de-delegated services. Now with the information about the DSG settlement, Forum was being asked to make decisions. The strategy used before when the size of the envelope needed to be adjusted was to adjust the base rate for all schools.

To determine the envelope size, it was necessary to take into account:

- NNDR (business rates)
- PFI school – inflated by November RPIx – 4.1%
- One-off lump sum to Vittoria as it amalgamated with Copenhagen
- Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) set at maximum of 0.5%.

DS added that no schools had been capped in relation to funding based on pupil characteristics. She was able to confirm in response to a question from AB that we had good data on children meeting the national criteria for eligibility for free school meals (FSM) – schools worked effectively with parents, particularly of Reception and Year 7 pupils, to capture that data. DS added that yearly audits enabled schools to pick up changes in eligibility. The FSM data was needed to access Pupil Premium as well as the formula indicators within the Schools Block.

There was still some funding left over - £247K. The proposal was to adjust the base rate for primary, KS3 and KS4 proportionally. All factors would remain in line with National Funding Formula (NFF) tolerance thresholds permitted by the ESFA. A decision was needed on this and the formula factors and values in the local School Funding Formula.

A decision was also needed on whether to retain £150K growth funding – this would only be used to support one primary school where the PAN increase had previously been agreed by the LA.

## Recommendations

That Schools Forum agree:

- Base Rate unit value be increased proportionally across primary, KS3 and KS4 to meet affordability limits of Schools Block funding
- Formula factors and values used in local School Funding Formula were agreed
- £150k was retained for Growth funding

## Agreed

- 7. Quality Assurance – Confidential Item for information and consultation on processes** – for members of Forum only to access.
- 8. DSG Central Retention (2024-25) – for decision**

TP spoke to a report previously circulated. A decision was needed only in relation to CSSG.

EY – as reported under Item 5, a consultation was about to go out about the level of retention by the LA.

TP recapped that the funding for CSSG had been reducing for the past three years – it was £1.319m in 2024-25 compared to £1,379m in 2023-24. There was also a prior year balance of £0.205m which could be used to smooth out reductions in funding.

The costs of services in 2024-25 were reducing a little due to efficiency savings, for example in business support, by the council in back-office services – these would not impact on the provision of services to schools.

The copyright licences top-slicing was automatically taken by the DfE - £136K.

The increases to funding in the **EY Block** for expanding the free offer and childcare would apply to all sectors, including private and voluntary. The 5% top slice (limit DfE allows LAs to retain – is likely to reduce as the new entitlements become embedded) would increase and the consultation of providers would include looking at the extent to which this money should be retained. It was too early to know what the additional costs to the LA of this expansion would be, with increased provision needing more support and other costs of implementing the scheme. The proposal was to keep the extra funding in a separate pot and drawn down later as needed. In recent years, underspends in the EY Block had been used to cover fluctuations in participation in the free offer, for example during Covid.

The findings of the consultation would be considered by the EY Subgroup at their February meeting – if there was dissension in the consultation to the proposals for LA to retain the full 5% and/or significant issues were raised, it was proposed to hold an extraordinary meeting of the Forum in March 2024.

### **Recommendations:**

That Schools Forum:

- a) Agree the proposed central retention in the CSSB
- b) Note that an update report will be brought to Schools Forum in the first meeting of the autumn term to provide details of progress against actions from the quality assurance meetings in December
- c) Note the proposed central retention in the Early Years Block and that this will be brought back to an extraordinary meeting of Schools Forum for agreement following the EY funding consultation if needed. **Update: no dissension so no extra meeting in March.**

### **Agreed**

#### **9. Specialist Provision Place Numbers (2024-25) – for decision**

DS spoke to a report that had been previously circulated. A decision was needed in principle on how to determine the numbers of SEND places commissioned by the LA and the arrangement for allocating top-up funding. A final decision would be needed in May 2024.

The January Schools Census was taking place that day. The proposal was that the process would be that, after the census, there would be a conversation with the relevant schools and SEND commissioning officers about the number of places needed based on current occupancy and any known movements in roll.

The top-up funding for pupils in these places would be increased, initially in line with national guidance on allocating additional funding coming into the High Needs Block – eg inflationary increases and teachers' pay increases. The HN group would then consider options for allocating additional funds if available.

## **Agreed**

### **10. Licensed Deficits - processes - for information**

TP spoke to a report that had been circulated previously.

At the meeting of Forum in November, it had been requested that details be given of the process for licenced deficits, as set out in the scheme for financing schools. See the report and Appendix A for the exact wording.

In brief, if a school is projecting a deficit budget, the governing body must apply for a Licensed Deficit Agreement (LDA) that allows for the setting of a deficit budget for an agreed period not exceeding three years. In cases where a governing body considers a deficit unavoidable the chair of governors must make a formal application in writing to the Director of Learning and Achievement.

For schools newly in deficit, they will then be invited to join an LA-led project group meeting once every half term while the school is establishing a detailed deficit recovery plan (DRP). Once the plan is established, meetings move to termly.

For existing schools in deficit, they will already be in a project group meeting termly which is monitoring the progress of their DRP.

The procedures also focus on schools with an emerging in-year deficit and emerging schools in deficit (future years).

Appendix B set out the Escalation Process with the steps that will be taken when schools are, over time, not able to move out of deficit. The ultimate back stop is that the LA can take back the school's budget, but that is very much the last resort.

AD asked if the LA charged interest on deficits as a deterrent – TP replied that no, there were no plans for this to happen here.

## **Noted**

## **11. Forward planning – for information**

Quality Insurance was a standing item on all agendas, but it was highlighted that there would be a substantial item on this at the November 2024 meeting.

### **Noted**

## **12. AOB - Roll Projections – for information** (this was discussed after AOB - Subgroup Updates)

AC tabled a presentation and confirmed it would be circulated.

The LA had a duty to plan school places, to forecast pupil numbers and provide this information to the DfE in the annual school capacity survey (SCAP).

In relation to Falling Rolls funding, DS advised Forum that the DfE had extended the criteria to include schools with an Ofsted judgement of Requires Improvement as well as Good or better.

The GLA had commissioned roll projections and modelled changes. The projections were too high in 2022, based on 2021 Census. They projected a big drop in reception children for autumn 2022 and again in January 2023 but these were still too high. The projections were based on historical data. Relatively recent developments such as cost of living crisis and the state of the rental market were taken into account, but the projections could not keep up with the speed of these developments.

Births had gone up in 2021 but dropped by 4% in 2023. The 2024 projections indicated there would be 60 fewer children in reception and Year 7 in September 2023.

FM suggested it would be helpful to overlay the expected impacts of the phases of the School Organisation Plan over the projections. Phase 1 reduced places by 2.5 FTE classes, Phase 2 due to reduce places by 6 FTE classes.

SC suggested overlaying the map with the schools, their deficits, places and their childcare offer.

In response to a question about the impact of purdah on Phases 2 and 3 of the School Organisation Plan, Legal had advised that we could proceed as long as formal consultations were completed and decisions needed have gone to Executive Board by April 2024.

### **Noted**

## **13. AOB: Subgroup updates**

There were no updates of subgroup meetings.

ME made two pleas in relation to the **Capital Subgroup:**



Firstly, for schools to note and apply for match funding for capital projects – they only needed to find 25% of the funding, but it would need to be for a capital project, not small items bundled together. Decisions would be made in March/April. FM asked if funding could be offered more than once a year – it was easy to miss out if a particular need for funding cropped up in say April. ME replied that not all of last year's funding had been allocated and some projects didn't go ahead, so potentially it might be possible to come in at a different point so long as the proposed project met the same requirements. The money for match funding comes from the schools capital allocation provided to the borough by the DfE. The letter asking for applications was due to go to schools before the end of January.

Secondly, ME encouraged more people to join this subgroup. Primary and nursery head teachers could join one meeting to see if it was for them. **AD agreed that he would join the subgroup.**

### **Noted**

Tim Partington was moving role at the council – as this was his last attendance at Schools Forum, he was thanked by the Chair and members for his many years of service to the Forum and his helpful explanations of complicated matters. Agnes Narkotey (observing the meeting) from the Finance Service would be taking up this work from Tim in the future. There being no further business, ME thanked all for attending the meeting and for their contributions.

The meeting ended at 3.36pm.

## **Dates of future meetings**

(Virtual meetings on MS Teams unless otherwise indicated)

### **Schools Forum**

- Thursday 23 May 2024, 2 to 4pm (Town Hall, Committee Room 4)
- Thursday 11 July 2024, 2 to 4pm (222, Room GA)

### **Chairs Subgroup**

- Wednesday 15 May 2024, 2 to 3pm
- Wednesday 3 July 2024, 2 to 3pm

### **Early Years Subgroup**

- Thursday 8 February 2024, 1 to 2.30pm
- Friday 17 May 2024, 1 to 2.30pm

## Capital Subgroup

- Friday 9 February 2024, 12.30 – 2pm
- Thursday 16 May 2024, 12.30 to 2pm

## High Needs Subgroup

- Monday 20 May 2024, to 11am to 12.30pm

DRAFT