



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

MINUTES OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM

held on Wednesday 16 January 2019 at 6.15 pm

PRESENT

Governors

Mike Heiser (Chair)
Helga Gladbaum
Tim Jones
Jo Jhally
Narinder Nathan
Martin Beard
Titilola McDowell

Head Teachers

Lesley Benson
Martine Clark (Vice-Chair)
Michelle Ginty
Raphael Moss
Vivien Dean
Gerard McKenna
Andy Prindiville

Early Years PVI

Paul Russell
Sylvie Libson

Trade Union

Lesley Gouldbourne (substitute)

16-19 Partnership Representative

Mark Stacey

Officers

Brian Grady
Andrew Ward
Dena Aly
Nigel Chapman (observer)
Nikolay Manov

1. Apologies for Absence and Membership

Governors Geraldine Chadwick

Head Teachers Melissa Loosemore
Jayne Jardine
Gill Bal

Special Kay Charles

Trade Union John Roche

Lead Member Councillor Agha

Absent

Governors Michael Maurice

The Governance Officer informed the Schools Forum that the Chair had been delayed and it was **RESOLVED** that Martine Clark (Vice-Chair) would chair the meeting until the arrival of Mike Heiser (Chair).

Martine Clark took the chair.

It was noted that there were three vacancies on the Forum - a Nursery Governor; an Academy Primary Head Teacher; and a Maintained Secondary Head Teacher.

2. Declarations of Interest

None.

3. Deputations (if Any)

None

4. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 12 December 2018, be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

5. Actions arising

The Forum examined the Action Log which had been included in the Agenda pack for the meeting.

It was noted that:

- Updates on Actions 28, 29 and 30 would be provided at the Schools Forum meeting on 12 June 2019.
- Actions 32, 33, and 40 would be considered at the present meeting.
- In relation to Action 34, it was noted that once Full Council had been made a decision on the Council's budget, an update on any specific implications for schools, would be provided to the Schools Forum.
- Action 36 would be marked 'completed' as 'Dedicated Schools Grant Budget Forecast 2018/19' had been made a standing item on the agenda.
- Action 39 had been completed.
- The due date of Action 41 would be confirmed at a future meeting of the Schools Forum.

6. Dedicated Schools Grant Schools Budget Forecast - 2018/19

Andrew Ward introduced the report which provided an update to the Q3 forecast position of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Schools Budget for 2018/19, noting that the paper had been focused on changes to the forecast that had been presented to the Schools Forum in December 2018. Mr Ward pointed out that the position had slightly worsened due to an updated forecast on pupil growth funding and on the cost of therapies in the High Needs Block. The paper also took into account the additional in-year funding for the High Needs Block announced by the Secretary of State for Education in December 2018. As a result, Brent's High Needs Block allocation had increased by £0.8 million on 2018/19.

In response to a question raised by a non-school member, Mr Ward clarified that the £0.8 million funding allocation would be repeated the following year, i.e. the High Needs Block's income would be approximately £55.8 million which would balance part of the forecasted overspend.

It was noted that the current forecast for DSG reserves showed that they would be reduced by approximately £250,000 to £3.2 million into 2019/20. As High Needs pressures continued to rise and reserves continued to be depleted, greater real increases in government funding than the ones that had been announced would be required to maintain the current level of provision for High Needs pupils.

RESOLVED that the contents of the Dedicated Schools Grant Schools Budget Forecast - 2018/19 report, be noted.

Mike Heiser jointed the meeting at 6:24 pm and took the chair.

7. 2019/20 Dedicated Schools Grant Schools Budget Setting

Andrew Ward introduced the report which set out the proposed Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Schools Budget. He noted that although there had been some funding increases, the imbalance between High Needs funding and expenditure (£2.5 million) remained a concern. The proposals included in the report would leave DSG reserves at the end of the 2019/20 financial year at £1 to £1.5 million. This was much lower than

last year's balance, exceeding £7 million, prior to the planned allocations made by the Schools Forum.

Mr Ward directed members' attention to section four of the report (pages 18-19 of the Agenda pack) which provided information about schools funding announcements that would have an impact on the 2019/20 DSG income. In addition, the Teachers' Pay grant, which sat outside the DSG, would be worth £2 million to schools and academies in Brent in the next financial year. The additional grant announced by the Chancellor in October 2018 would contribute a further £1.5 million to Brent schools. It was noted that additional information about specific allocations could be found on the Education and Skills Funding Agency's website. In addition, the Early Years funding had been confirmed, and the Schools Block and the Central School Services Block's income had been increased by £400,000 and £50,000 respectively in comparison to 2018/19. However, the recent change whereby the number of primary pupils had stopped growing and was now reducing had led to Brent losing £1 million of its growth funding. Moreover, the growth fund budget had been reduced in 2019/20 to the level of expected spend in 2018/19 in order to avoid any future top slicing in future years.

The High Needs Block income had been provisionally announced at £56.1m. This would be £1.6m more than in 2018/19, made up of the £0.8m planned 0.5% funding increase, and an additional £0.8m announced in December 2018.

Regarding the Early Years Block, it was noted that the budget presented at Appendix A (page 23-24 of the Agenda pack) was indicative and balanced against the provisional income of £23.4m. In relation to the Schools Block and the Mainstream Funding Formula, the Forum heard that no changes to de-delegation rates had been proposed.¹ Appendix B (page 25 of the Agenda pack) set out the funding rates for the funding factors within the local funding formula. Mr Ward reminded members that in 2018/19 £2.5 million of DSG reserves had been allocated to the funding formula which had allowed rates to be increased by nearly £100 per primary pupil. Although additional funding had been allocated, it would not be sustainable to continue using reserves. More information could be found at Appendix C (pages 27-28 of the Agenda pack) which contained an analysis of the funding formula by individual school, giving both the total formula funding and per pupil funding against the previous two years.

Mr Ward reminded members that the proposed budget included 0.5% (£1.1 million) transfer of Schools Block to the High Needs Block which required approval by the Schools Forum. He added that other local authorities had taken a similar approach to help relieve the pressure on the High Needs Block. An alternative option would be to allocate the £1.1 million through the funding formula, but this increased the risk of the DSG going into deficit. It was noted that High Needs provision had been expanded and more places were offered in the Borough which was in line with the strategy for managing High Needs costs and delivered better value for money. However, in addition to the requested transfer of funds between the Blocks, the 2019/20 High Needs budget would require £1.5m of support from DSG reserves. This would halve the projected DSG reserve of £3m for 2019/20, with the other £1.5m held as a contingency which could be carried forward into 2020/21.

¹ These had been based on pupil numbers, but the rate per pupil had been frozen.

The Schools Forum welcomed the report and members asked questions that related to the proposed transfer of funds from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block and to the scope of the Teachers' Pay Grant. Mr Ward clarified that the proposed 0.5% would have been approved by the Forum on an annual basis and that the Teachers' Pay Grant applied to nursery schools. A Primary Head Teacher commented that if the Local Authority took measures to relieve the funding pressure experienced by the High Needs Block, the government may make a decision not to allocate additional funding as they could assume that the Council was performing well. Mr Ward responded that a number of local authorities in London were in a similar position and the report clearly showed the £2.5 million gap between a challenging budget and the High Needs income that the Local Authority received. Therefore, agreeing the transfer was an action consistent with the view that High Needs funding was not sufficient.

A Secondary Academy Head Teacher enquired if the High Needs Task Group still met and whether a report on its activity could be presented to the Schools Forum. Mr Ward said that the Task Group had held several meetings which had been useful to explore issues related to High Needs provision and raise awareness about them. It had also taken the lead on allocating approximately £200,000 from the inclusion fund. Nevertheless, there was a need for the Group to hold another meeting to consider national research and suggestions on using the High Needs Block.

The Chair referred to an email he had received from a Primary Governor who had not been able to attend the meeting. He read the contents of the email, pointing out that the Primary Governor had expressed their support for all recommendations outlined in the report and the proposed transfer of £1.1 million from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block in particular. They considered that there would be a bigger risk if this was not done, especially with the new DSG deficit planning and the fact that in an event a High Needs overspend, it would be taken from DSG reserves. In addition, they suggested that the proposal to create a falling rolls fund be revisited in order to address extreme cases of reduction in numbers in primary schools located in areas of deprivation which otherwise may fall into deficit. Mr Ward commented that there was a drop in primary pupil numbers which was the reason for reductions in funding.² He reminded members that the Schools Forum had previously considered and rejected the proposal to create a falling rolls fund.

A Primary Maintained Head Teacher raised the issue of contingency plans for small schools with a falling budget and risks to providing sufficient numbers of staff to teach pupils. This led to a question about Brent's preparedness to respond to unpredicted events which could cause a fall in pupil rolls and would require the needs of children to be addressed adequately and promptly. Mr Ward said that the DSG had the Minimum Funding Guarantee but it did not protect against a sudden drop in pupil numbers. As funding followed pupils, a significant reduction in pupil numbers could have a severe impact on a school's budget. Mr Grady pointed out that it was important to differentiate between a school going through a period of decline and exceptional circumstances where a school experienced a critical issue. Officers would have to examine these two policy areas and report potential mitigation measures to a future Forum.

² The funding rate had not changed.

A specific concern raised by both Primary Maintained and Secondary Academy Head Teachers related to the difficulties associated with accessing contingency funding and reserves, and the fact that sixth form numbers had not been taken into account on an annual basis. This led to situations when schools would not receive funding for extra pupils until the following year when numbers might be lower.

Members of the Forum questioned the way the 2019/20 funding formula had been calculated by using the October 2018 census. They argued that there was a substantial number of pupils moving in or out of the Borough after the first term which meant that numbers had not been accurately reflected. In response to a question whether the calculation could be based on the January census as it would provide more stability, Mr Ward said that all local authorities based their funding formulae on the October one as per the national framework. Nevertheless, the final pupil premium and Early Years allocations were based on the January census. Mr Ward agreed to feed this inconsistency back to the Department for Education (DfE).

Three areas were identified for further examination as a result of the present discussion:

- issues related to exceptions and contingencies
- options available to address some of the concerns raised by primary schools related to the disadvantages they experience such as the funding-related inconsistencies and falling rolls
- potential mitigation measures to support schools experiencing periods of decline in pupil numbers or exceptional circumstances

The proposed de-delegation arrangements set out within the report were put to the vote by show of hands and declared **CARRIED**.

The transfer of £1.1 million (0.5%) from the Schools Block to support the High Needs Block was put to the vote by show of hands and declared **CARRIED**.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) The contents of the 2019/20 DSG Schools Budget Setting report, be noted;
- (ii) The proposed de-delegation arrangements set out within the report be approved;
- (iii) The transfer of £1.1 million (0.5%) from the Schools Block to support the High Needs Block be approved;
- (iv) The DSG Schools Budget, including the mainstream funding formula, be recommended for adoption to the Council;
- (v) A senior officer would meet with representatives of the school referred to in the email from the Primary Governor and would report any major issues back to the Schools Forum if necessary;
- (vi) Potential mitigation measures to support schools experiencing periods of decline of pupil numbers or exceptional circumstances be considered and a report be provided a future meeting of the Schools Forum;

- (vii) The inconsistency of the funding formula being based on the October census and the final pupil premium and Early Years allocations being based on the January census be fed back to the London regional meeting attended by representatives of DfE; and
- (viii) A letter to the DfE addressing the issues outlined in (vii) be drafted on behalf of the Chair.

8. Early Years National Funding Formula – Year 3, 2019/20

Mr Ward introduced the report which set out the proposed Early Years budget. The funding for Brent from the National Early Years funding formula had been confirmed which meant that the local Single Early Years Funding Formula had to be set for 2019/20. Mr Ward confirmed that the funding rates allocated to Brent for 2, 3 and 4 year old provision had been frozen. The Local Authority continued to retain 5% of the total allocation which would be used to support central Early Years services, with the remaining 95% allocated to providers. The base funding rate had been agreed in January 2017 and, therefore, continued to be £4.46, which constituted 90% of the total allocated funding. The remaining 10% had been allocated by the deprivation factor. Furthermore, in January 2018 the Schools Forum agreed to allocate some of the money used to fund the 30-hour provision to children whose parents qualified for free school meals. This practice had continued until the summer of 2018.

Mr Ward said that the Early Years numbers had decreased and pointed out that the allocations included in the paper were indicative and could change, depending on the January census for Early Years. Therefore, the actual amount of funding available to the central Early Years team would be lower than in the previous year. Furthermore, the provisional allocation of resources to maintained nursery schools had been reduced from £797,000 to £778,000 and the Disability Access Fund had been reduced from £98,000 to £84,000.

The Chair referred to an email he had received from a Primary Governor who had not been able to attend the meeting. It had been focused on the disapplication of the deprivation factor for Early Years (paragraph 6.2 of the report on page 31 of the Agenda pack) which had ceased for those children that were most deprived. The member asked how specific establishments could access funding to support such children as the current arrangements appeared to favour specialist nurseries to maintained nurseries supporting children with special needs and wishing to maintain full time places for deprived parents.

A Primary Governor commented that a number of parents had not been contacted and were not aware of the universal 15 hours free child care they were entitled to. Therefore, a number of eligible children had been disadvantaged by not receiving the funding. They highlighted that only 1009 eligibility codes had been issued and enquired about the total number of parents that had been identified as eligible. This led to a discussion about the importance of the Local Authority having effective engagement with parents. A Nursery Head Teacher reminded members that a project focused on increasing take up had been previously rejected by the Schools Forum.

She added that there were children who did not access the free entitlement and their number often varied by ward.

Brian Grady explained that the 30 hour take up in Brent continued to rise and following the autumn 2018 headcount, the Borough was 11th out of 33 London local authorities. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that it was important to continue to focus on uptake and said that a report could be presented at a future meeting of the Schools Forum.

A non-school member enquired whether the maximum percentage retained by the Local Authority for central spend could be reduced considering the fact that the number of children supported had been decreasing. This would mean that more funding would be available to children and providers would be able to be more flexible. However, it would be key to establish whether the numbers were going down because there were less children in the Borough or because less children went for assessment. Members asked for an update on how the Local Authority had been proactive in reaching out to parents to encourage them to send their children to settings. Mr Grady suggested that a report on the uptake of the 30 hours free child care be presented at the next Schools Forum meeting to cover the points raised by members.

A Nursery Head Teacher suggested that consideration be given to reducing the maximum percentage retained by the Local Authority for central spend, as the early Years Block had not had its funding increased despite its rising costs. This view was shared by a non-school member who said that despite the excellent support Brent's Early Years Team provided to private nurseries, parents no longer made top up payments which meant that nurseries had to cope with frozen budgets and inflationary pressures. Furthermore, the declining number of available staff could affect provision and the quality of service would decrease should more establishments close down. Using Dedicated Schools Grant reserves to support the Early Years Block was also suggested as an action to be considered.

Mr Ward explained that the 5% allocated for central spend in the current financial year was part of the third year of the National Early Years funding formula. He emphasised that the amount allocated to 2019/20 would be lower in real terms than the one for 2018/19 due to inflation, the decrease in the overall funding for Early Years and higher staff costs. However, the Council was permitted to retain that funding and the Early Years Task Group could explore how it was spent.

The Schools Forum discussed the need for the Early Years Task Group to be reconvened to provide a steer on the way Early Years funding could be used by the Local Authority; to review the actions that had been taken to increase the 30 hour take up; and to consider the impact of a potential reduction of the maximum percentage for central spend.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) The contents of the Early Years National Funding Formula – Year 3, 2019/20 report, be noted;
- (ii) Brent's Early Years Funding Formula for 2019/20 be approved;

- (iii) A report on the uptake of the 30 hours free child care be presented at the next meeting of the Schools Forum;
- (iv) The Early Years Task Group be reconvened with the following aims:
 - to provide a steer on the way Early Years funding could be used by the Local Authority
 - to review the actions that had been taken to increase the 30 hour take up
 - to consider the impact of a potential reduction of the maximum percentage for central spend.
- (v) A report on the findings of the Early Years Task Group be presented at a future meeting of the Schools Forum.

9. Growth Funding for Schools – 2019/20

Dena Aly introduced the report which explained the mechanisms for funding growth in schools in 2019/20. She reminded members that in February 2018 the Schools Forum had approved a new methodology for funding growth in secondary schools, and had voted to retain the existing one in the primary sector. Therefore, increases in pupil numbers in the primary sector during the year would be funded from the rising rolls contingency, the trigger point being 1.75% increase on year pupil growth. As far as the secondary sector was concerned, Ms Aly said that if a school had planned an expansion of at least 30 children, then a pupil variation would be applied in the first year of growth, based on the number of planned places. Any further increases in actual pupil numbers in subsequent years would be funded using the rising rolls mechanism, with the trigger point being an absolute value of 15 pupils.

Ms Aly directed the Forum's attention to section five of the report (pages 36-37 of the Agenda pack) which illustrated an example of growth in the primary sector. Referring to school number five in Table 1, Ms Aly said the pupil number variation of two classes (60 pupils) in 2018/19 would be applied in 2019/20 budget as long as the actual number of students in the census had increased.

Section six of the report (page 37 of the Agenda pack) provided an overview of a secondary school example which had been requested to expand by two forms of entry in September 2019. Table 1 showed pupil number variation of 35 in Year 1, while there was no variation in Year 2. Therefore, the school would receive a pupil number variation in the first year of growth, and would be funded for actual growth in subsequent years via rising rolls.

Appendix A (page 39 of the Agenda pack) illustrated actual primary sector budgets for 2019/20 according to the mechanism explained. A Primary Governor noted that school number five in the table at Appendix A had a year with negative growth (Year 2) and asked how this had been calculated and where it would sit in relation to budget. Mr Ward said that in 2018 the Growth Task and Finish Group had agreed to honour the commitments made to Primary schools that were expanding at the time and fund in-year growth for specific year groups. However, there was a challenge in secondary provision and the current paper provided clarity on secondary growth. Mr Ward emphasised that as pupil numbers were fundamental to funding figures, it was

important for primary schools to understand how the formula and growth funding worked. In relation to growth position within school budgets, Mr Ward explained that it was part of the Schools Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant.

A non-school member commented on the potential inconsistency between guaranteeing funding to schools that had expanded and providing protection to schools with falling rolls. Mr Ward clarified that the Local Authority was not funding establishments with falling rolls, but admitted that, theoretically, if there were a falling rolls fund it would be possible for a school which had received funding to expand to be considered for this type of support. It was noted that guaranteeing growth funding to schools had been a strong incentive to encourage them to expand and meet the demand for school places.

RESOLVED that the contents of the Growth Funding for Schools – 2019/20 report, be noted.

10. Proposed dates for Schools Forum meetings in 2019/2020

Officers recommended that the Schools Forum meeting scheduled to take place on Wednesday 27 February 2019 be cancelled due to lack of agenda items to be discussed.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) Meetings of the Schools Forum be scheduled on the following dates:

Date	Venue	Time
Wednesday 12 June 2019	The Village School	6:00 pm
Wednesday 6 November 2019	Queens Park Community School	6:00 pm
Wednesday 15 January 2020	The Village School	6:00 pm
Wednesday 26 February 2020	Queens Park Community School	6:00 pm

- (ii) Wednesday 11 December 2019 (6.00 pm) be held as a potential date for an additional meeting, if required; and
- (iii) The Schools Forum meeting scheduled to take place on Wednesday 27 February 2019 be cancelled.

11. Any other Urgent Business

Mr Ward informed the Schools Forum that the Department for Education (DfE) had launched a consultation whether it should fund the increased teacher pension contribution (from 16% to 23%). He encouraged members to respond to it as a number of factors, among which funding being identified, had indicated that the DfE had an intention to fund it.

It was noted that the consultation was available on the Education and Skills Funding Agency's website.

The meeting ended at 7:50 pm.

MIKE HEISER
Chair