

**ROTHERHAM SCHOOLS' FORUM
FRIDAY 12 SEPTEMBER 2025**

Present:-

Mark Windle – Badsley Primary (Primary Maintained) (in the Chair)
John Barnett – Thorogate Junior and Infant (Primary Maintained)
Carol Brookes – Wales High School (Academy)
Lynsey Hadfield - Executive Head, Arnold Nursery (Maintained)
Paul Higginbottom – Swinton Queen Primary (Academy)
David Horrigan – Maltby Learning Trust (Primary Academy)
Lee Morritt – Rotherham Aspire (PRU)
Sacha Schofield –Governor Representative (Special School Academy)
Steve Scott – Happy Kids (PVI Nursery)
Karen Smith - Nexus MAT (Special Academy)
Nevine Towers - Head of Business and Operations (Primary Academy)
Joel Wirth – Principal TRC and Deputy CEO Inspire Trust (Secondary Academy)

Joshua Amahwe – Head of Finance (CYPS)
Niall Devlin – Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion
Cary-Anne Sykes – Head of Service (SEND)
Sarah Whitby – Head of Service (Access to Education)

Observers:

Sarah Philips – Blackburn Primary School Governor
Colin Price – NEU Representative

Apologies were received from:-

Simon Currie – School Governor Representative (Primary Maintained)
Dr Sipra Deb – Wickesley Nursery (PVI Nursery)
Mehdi Najefi - School Governor Representative (Primary Maintained)
Mark Ryan – RNN Group

12. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to today's meeting and introductions were made.

13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

14. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous meeting held on Friday 13th June 2025.

Resolved:

- That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 June 2025 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

15. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

Further to Minute No. 7 of the Schools Forum meeting held on 13 June 2025, the Head of Finance (CYPS) clarified the operational differences in insurance provisions in response to a query regarding notice periods.

16. MEMBERSHIP AND CONSTITUTION OF THE ROTHERHAM SCHOOLS FORUM (STANDING ITEM)

Consideration was given to the membership and constitution of the Schools' Forum and suggested changes were put forward for the Forum's approval.

Resolved:

- That the appointment of Joel Wirth as a Secondary Academy representative, replacing Chris Eccles, be agreed.
- That the appointment of Sarah Phillips as a Primary School Governor representative for a term of three years be agreed.
- That the renewal of Colin Price's term of office as a Trades Union representative for a further three-year period be agreed.
- That the appointment of Karen Houghton as a substitute attendee for Colin Price, Trades Union representative be agreed.
- That the removal of Sharon Stones as the substitute representative for Maintained Nursery Schools be noted.
- That formal thanks be recorded to the outgoing Schools Forum Members, Chris Eccles and Sharon Stones, in recognition of their valued service and contribution to the Schools Forum.

17. DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT / SCHOOLS BUDGET UPDATE 2025/26

The Head of Finance (CYPS) presented a report on the latest monitoring position of the Local Authority maintained schools' budgets and centrally retained Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budgets for 2025/26, and commented on the following:

- The latest confirmed DSG funding allocation which had remained broadly unchanged from the position reported to Forum on 13 June

2025, with only a small reduction highlighted due to the academisation of a maintained primary school.

- The positive movement in both the Early Years and High Needs block funding allocations and the factors that had contributed to those adjustments.
- The latest forecasted position across all centrally retained DSG budgets.
- The centrally retained Schools Block, the Central Schools Services Block and the Early Years Block budgets which were all currently forecasting a balanced budget position.
- The forecasted deficit position for the High Needs Block budgets and the factors that were attributable to this.
- The anticipated deficit position in the DSG reserves in 2025/26 which differed from the balanced position assumed in the Safety Valve Agreement.
- The Government's extension of statutory deficit protections to March 2028, which would provide the Council with additional flexibility to carry forward the 2025/26 year end projected deficit.
- The ongoing work taking place with the DfE to develop a new 5-year financial plan and the increasingly challenging financial outlook.
- The latest forecasted position of the 24 local authority maintained delegated school budgets which indicated a reduction in surplus balances compared to the 2024/25 final outturn position.
- The latest position of those schools operating with licensed deficits which continued to be closely monitored.

Resolved:

- **That the Schools Forum notes the latest DSG funding for schools for the 2025/26 financial year.**
- **That the Schools Forum notes the forecast positions of Rotherham's maintained schools and the centrally retained DSG budgets for the year.**

18. SCHOOLS BUDGET PLANNING & FUNDING 2026-27

The Head of Finance (CYPS) presented a report outlining the schools budget planning and funding arrangements for the financial year 2026/27. The report focused on the Schools Funding Block, the funding formula for determining individual school budgets, and the proposed distribution of Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funding within the Schools Block.

Budgets for maintained schools in 2026/27 would consist of funding from Core school funding, Pupil Premium Grant and other grant funding. There were no significant changes expected to the funding framework for schools and core funding would continue to be allocated using the National Funding Formula (NFF).

Rotherham's local funding formula had been progressively aligned with the NFF. The Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) continued to apply, with the Department for Education (DfE) expected to confirm recommended protection levels when the NFF allocations were published.

Reference was made to the Schools Budget Support Grant and National Insurance Contributions Grant, both of which would be rolled into the NFF from 2026/27. Those grants would no longer be issued separately and would therefore affect the core budgets that maintained schools would receive from April 2026.

Local authorities remained permitted to transfer funding between DSG blocks and Rotherham's proposals for a block transfer in 2026/27 would be included in the planned Autumn consultation with schools.

Attention was drawn to the expected timeline for the schools budget planning process which was outlined in Section 9 of the circulated report.

Resolved:

- **That the Schools Forum notes the proposed funding framework and structure of Rotherham's local funding formulae for 2026-27.**
- **That the Schools Forum notes the schools budget planning key dates for determining the schools block funding for 2026-27.**

19. EXCLUSION AND SUSPENSIONS ANNUAL REPORT

Consideration was given to a briefing presented by the Head of Service (Access to Education), which provided an overview of local data relating to permanent exclusions and suspensions for secondary and primary settings during the academic year 2024-25.

For all schools, permanent exclusions overall showed a 10.6% reduction for the academic year 2024/25 compared to the previous year's position. Higher numbers of permanent exclusions were observed during the Autumn term, prompting an increase in transitional support.

The highest number of permanent exclusions occurred in Key Stage 3, with a significant proportion involving pupils with SEND needs and those eligible for Free School Meals.

Suspensions increased across all school phases from 2020/21 and continued to rise slowly in 2024/25. This trend was not consistent across all schools, with a notable rise in primary suspensions.

Attention was drawn to several key actions and timelines outlined in Section 3 of the circulated report.

Forum members suggested that future reports included data which

tracked suspensions that led to permanent exclusions, alongside any linkages to reduced timetables.

A breakdown of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 suspensions would be shared in briefings for primary and secondary Head Teachers and further engagement with Primary Leaders would be offered to enhance support at primary level.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the content of the briefing.

20. PART TIME TIMETABLES ANNUAL REPORT

Consideration was given to a briefing paper presented by the Head of Service (Access to Education), which provided context and understanding of the use and prevalence of Part Time Timetables across Rotherham settings.

Data on the use of part-time timetables was collected from schools using Trade Rotherham with the vast majority of part-time timetables being put in place to support emotionally based school avoidance.

Reported data for 2024–25 highlighted that 45% of pupils on a part-time timetable were also supported by an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

Inclusion events were due to be delivered throughout 2025/26 as one-hour monthly online briefings, focused on specific topics and designed to be accessible for a wide range of participants. Recordings of sessions would also be made available to support wider engagement.

Various comments were raised by Members of the Forum which reflected on what confidence the Local Authority had that schools were reporting the use of part time timetables, the consistency of application across settings and the need for local guidance for schools to be produced.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the content of the briefing.

21. EDUCATION, HEALTH AND CARE PLANS (EHCPs) ANNUAL UPDATE

Consideration was given to an annual update on Rotherham's Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) profile, presented by the Head of Service (SEND).

The paper highlighted that the number of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) had followed a consistent upward trajectory over the past

two years, with 3,909 active plans now recorded in Rotherham . A large proportion of those plans related to communication and interaction needs and work was underway to strengthen the graduated approach within schools, supported by cross team collaboration.

The paper also referenced the significant Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs cohort, emphasising the importance of enhanced mental health provision, pastoral support, and trauma-informed approaches within schools. To address this, a fully comprehensive training offer was under development, with a clear timetable of free support to be made available to schools.

There was a pronounced concentration of EHCPs among the 13-15 year old age range, which was likely to correspond to the transition phase from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4. An increasing number of requests were starting to emerge in Years 4 and 5 along with an increase in early years and post 16 referrals. Analysis was underway to understand the reasons behind those trends.

A SEND workforce plan was being developed to ensure adequate support for young people, with a focus on targeted engagement.

The number of requests progressing to assessment had increased annually, reflecting rising demand and a greater proportion meeting the statutory threshold. It was acknowledged that schools continued to face challenges when EHCPs were not issued, and efforts to strengthen the graduated response approach through engagement with schools and SENCOs remained ongoing.

Parental requests for EHCPs were increasing for a variety of reasons and support for parent understanding was being addressed through dialogue at parent/carers forums.

Strong performance was reflected in initial assessments and phase transfers whilst areas for improvement were highlighted in annual review scheduling and timely completion of amended plans.

Forum Members raised concerns about the tensions created within the system when decisions were taken to not proceed with a referral. It was recognised that current feedback mechanisms were lacking, and while the team were exploring ways to improve this, time constraints remained a challenge.

Forum members also expressed concern about the level of awareness of existing protocols. Reference was made to the SEND Code of Practice and the importance of clearly setting out expectations with a piece of work planned to share this more widely.

It was noted that work had begun with the Parent Carer Forum to support parental understanding of the assessment process. To improve parental

access to information about specialist settings, the development of prospectuses and video profiles was also suggested.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the content of the briefing.

22. SCHOOLS FORUM FORWARD PLAN

The current version of the Forward Plan was reviewed by the Forum. Members were invited to suggest any relevant issues they felt should form the basis of a future report.

Resolved:

- **That the Forward Plan be noted.**
- **That any additions to the Forward Plan be submitted to the Secretary of the Forum for consideration and inclusion.**

23. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There were no other urgent business items raised.

The Chair of the Forum concluded business and thanked everyone for their attendance and contributions.