

**ROTHERHAM SCHOOLS' FORUM
FRIDAY 16 JANUARY 2026**

Present:-

Mark Windle – Badsley Primary (Primary Maintained) (in the Chair)
John Barnett – Thorogate Junior and Infant (Primary Maintained)
Kate Blythe – Rawmarsh Ryecroft Infant (Primary Maintained)
Carol Brookes – Wales High School (Academy)
Simon Currie – School Governor Representative (Primary Maintained)
Lynsey Hadfield - Executive Head, Arnold Nursery (Maintained)
David Horrigan – Maltby Learning Trust (Primary Academy)
Colin Price – NEU Representative
Mark Ryan – RNN Group
Karen Smith - Nexus MAT (Special Academy)
Nevine Towers - Head of Business and Operations (Primary Academy)
Paula Williams – Special School Governor Representative (Special Academy)
Joel Wirth – Principal TRC and Deputy CEO Inspire Trust (Secondary Academy)

Joshua Amahwe – Head of Finance (CYPS)
Aileen Chambers – Head of Service – Early Years and Childcare
Mark Cummins – Transformation Lead Officer (CYPS)
Niall Devlin – Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion
Louise Keith – Principal Finance Officer (CYPS)

Apologies were received from:-

Councillor Victoria Cusworth – Cabinet Member for Children and Young People
Paul Higginbottom – Swinton Queen Primary (Primary Academy)
Lee Morritt – Rotherham Aspire (PRU)
Steve Scott – Happy Kids (PVI Nursery)

36. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

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

37. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

38. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous meeting held on Friday 5th December 2025.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 5th December 2025 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

39. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

No matters arising arose during the consideration of the previous meeting minutes.

40. 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 resignation of Sarah Philips, representing Primary School Governors be received.

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

The Principal Finance Officer presented a report on the latest position of the schools' budget for 2025/26 and commented on the following:

- The latest confirmed DSG funding position, which included a reduction to the Schools Block following a maintained secondary school academisation and a small increase to Early Years funding reflecting updated pupil premium and entitlement data
- The latest forecasted position for the Centrally Retained Schools Block and the factors that were attributable to the variance.
- The anticipated DSG reserves deficit, which differed from the balanced position expected under the final year of the Safety Valve Agreement and reflected cumulative SEND demand and cost pressures in recent years.
- The extension of statutory DSG deficit protections, which provided the Council with flexibility to carry forward the forecast year-end deficit, and the DfE's request for a new five-year DSG plan setting out the financial trajectory beyond the Safety Valve Agreement and demonstrating medium-term sustainability.
- The latest delegated schools budget position for maintained schools, which showed an overall increase in balances, driven by rises in

nursery and PRU balances, but partly offset by reduced primary balances and the impact of a secondary school converting to academy status.

- The latest position of the three schools operating with licensed deficits, all of which remained on track to return to a sustainable financial position and continued to be closely monitored.
- The 2025/26 February monitoring returns from local authority maintained schools which would be submitted to the Council on 6 February 2026.

It was also noted that the meeting date stated in the report title was incorrect and should read 16th January 2026.

Resolved:

That the Schools Forum:

1. Noted the latest DSG funding for schools for the 2025/26 financial year.
2. Noted the forecast positions of Rotherham's maintained schools and the centrally retained DSG budgets for the year.

42. SCHOOLS FUNDING SETTLEMENT (2026/27)

The Head of Finance provided details on the 2026/27 schools funding settlement for Rotherham, as announced by the Department for Education in December 2025.

The total provisional Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocation for Rotherham amounted to £391.148m representing an overall increase of £23.505m compared with the previous year. The DSG continued to be made up of the Schools, High Needs, Early Years, and Central Schools Services blocks and funding allocations were noted as follows:-

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| • Schools Block funding | £271.959 million |
| • Central Schools Services Block funding | £2.488 million |
| • Early Years Block funding | £49.712 million |
| • High Needs Block funding | £66.989 million |

Attention was drawn to the rationale for the various increases in funding with particular attention drawn to the continued fall in pupil numbers, which was directly impacting the Schools Block despite overall funding increases.

The Head of Finance went on to explain that this was a year of national transition, with the High Needs National Funding Formula suspended and

major SEND reforms expected in 2026. Early Years funding had risen significantly due to the Government's expansion of childcare entitlements, while the High Needs Block continues to face the greatest financial pressure, intensified by the forthcoming end of Safety Valve support.

The Forum was advised that Pupil Premium Grant allocations for 2026/27 were still to be confirmed, and that forthcoming national changes to free school meal (FSM) eligibility from September 2026 would significantly widen entitlement. The PE and Sport Premium was expected to continue at similar levels to 2025/26, with allocations based on pupil numbers recorded in the January 2025 census.

The Forum discussed the suspension of the High Needs National Funding Formula and the challenges this presented for planning a longer-term strategy.

Members queried the potential impact of future changes, and it was noted that significant national reform was expected, with the forthcoming publication of the SEND White Paper.

The Forum also considered the continuing fall in overall pupil numbers alongside rising numbers of pupils with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). It was confirmed that the reduction of 467 pupils related to total school-age population within the Schools Block and did not include special schools. High Needs demand was expected to continue rising, including within mainstream settings.

Questions were raised regarding the forthcoming widening of FSM eligibility from September 2026 and specifically implications for special schools. It was noted that no specific funding guidance had yet been issued for special schools, and indicative analysis had identified that the changes may not lead to a significant net increase in eligible pupils due to transitional protection changes. Funding arrangements for free school meals would be managed separately and would not form part of the DSG.

Members also sought an update on potential High Needs top-up rate increases from April. It was confirmed that the High Needs budget was still being developed and would be reported to Schools Forum in March. Given rising EHCP numbers and bespoke cost pressures, no indication of uplift levels could yet be provided, and further internal discussions remained ongoing.

The Forum was advised that a discussion with the DfE had been arranged to consider approaches to deficit management and longer-term financial planning.

Resolved:

That the Schools Forum noted the content of the report.

43. SCHOOLS BLOCK DSG BUDGET (2026/27)

The Principal Finance Officer presented an overview of the 2026/27 Schools Block allocation, noting that the overall budget had increased, largely due to rolled-in grant funding and national uplift adjustments.

Reference was made to the National Funding Formula per-pupil funding rates for both primary and secondary pupils, and it was highlighted that, despite a reduction in pupil numbers, the overall funding position remained broadly consistent with the national settlement.

Rotherham's local formula continued to move closer to the National Funding Formula, with uplifts applied to the basic entitlement and additional needs factors.

The Minimum Funding Guarantee had been set at 0%, ensuring that no school would see a reduction in per-pupil funding. Seven schools would receive protection through the MFG, representing a significant decrease from the previous year.

To manage affordability, capping and scaling measures had been applied, and funding for growth and falling rolls would continue to be administered outside the main formula. Reference was also made to the agreed transfer of 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block as agreed by the Schools Forum at its previous meeting.

Forum Members discussed the proposed de-delegated funding, with a particular focus on the contingency budget allocation which had increased despite falling pupil numbers. The Head of Finance explained that changes across some budget lines were largely due to a reduction in the number of maintained schools and ongoing academisation. The contingency amount reflected the level of support anticipated for schools expected to experience financial pressures in the coming year.

Forum Members also discussed the wider challenge of forecasting financial pressures, noting that fluctuating live birth rates and changing pupil numbers made forward planning increasingly difficult. This was emphasised as a particular concern for infant schools managing high levels of SEND within a small and variable pupil cohort.

The maintained Primary and Secondary school representatives undertook a formal vote on the de-delegation proposals set out in the report. All four representatives eligible to vote participated and unanimously supported the proposals.

Resolved:

That the Schools Forum:

1. Noted the Schools Block DSG allocation for 2026/27 and the

implemented changes to the local schools funding formula as outlined in paragraphs 7 to 19 of this report.

2. Noted that the proposed 2026/27 schools funding formula incorporates a funding transfer of 0.5% to the high needs block (as approved by the Forum on 5th December 2025).
3. Approved the funding for maintained primary & secondary schools outlined in paragraph 22 to be de-delegated and retained by the Council to fund schools related expenditure.

44. EARLY YEARS BLOCK DSG BUDGET (2026/27)

The Head of Finance (CYPS) outlined the proposed funding arrangements for Rotherham's Early Years Block for 2026/27.

Rotherham's provisional settlement for the 2026/27 early years block was £49.7m which represented an increase of £7.3m. The increase was driven by expected growth in take-up of entitlements, particularly for two-year-olds and under-2s, alongside national increases to funding rates.

The Early Years National Funding Formula (EYNFF) continued to underpin allocations, with 2026/27 funding rates rising by 5.3% for 3–4-year-olds and 4.3% for under-2s to reflect cost pressures across the sector. The significant growth in funding for two-year-olds and under-2s, reflected the full-year effect of the entitlement expansion.

Grants including National Insurance and teachers' pay grant had been rolled into the Early Years DSG to simplify the funding model. The Forum's attention was drawn to the DfE's move to a termly funding system which would represent a significant change to current arrangements. The new model was expected to provide more accurate in-year allocations compared with the previous system, which often lagged behind actual participation.

Reference was made to the consultation undertaken with Early Years providers on the proposed funding changes, including the Government's increase in the pass-through requirement from 96% to 97%. Feedback from providers had been generally supportive of the proposals.

Attention was also drawn to the draft Early Years budget for 2026/27 as set out in paragraph 6 of the report.

As part of the next steps and in line with statutory requirements, all Early Years providers would be informed of their confirmed base rate by 28 February 2026.

Forum Members went on to discuss the use of the EY Journal Tool within the ISG Tier 2 and Tier 3 processes. The methodology for Tier 3 funding distribution was currently under review, with a finalised approach still to be

confirmed. Tier 2, which covered low and emerging needs, was aligned with government guidance, and the local approach was designed to move increasingly towards this national position.

Forum Members noted that only four maintained schools had responded to the consultation and expressed concern regarding the low response rate. Although all schools with Foundation Stage 1 provision had been contacted, the reasons for the low level of response remained unclear. The local authority confirmed that substantial efforts had been made to promote the consultation, including four virtual information sessions and engagement through cross-sector groups.

The Early Years team was commended for the quality of its service; however, Forum Members remained concerned about the low level of school engagement with the consultation and agreed that the approach to issuing future consultations should be reviewed to improve participation.

Resolved:

That the Schools Forum:

1. Noted the provisional DSG funding settlement for the early years block for Rotherham for 2026/27.
2. Noted the proposed arrangements for allocating the early years funding to providers for 3 & 4 year olds, 2 year olds and under 2's.
3. Endorsed the proposed early years funding rates to providers for the 2026/27 financial year.

45. CENTRAL SCHOOL SERVICES BLOCK DSG BUDGET (2026/27)

The Head of Finance (CYPS) presented the Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) budgets for 2026–27. It was noted that the CSSB provided funding to the local authority to deliver statutory and regulatory education functions on behalf of all schools, with allocation levels driven by pupil numbers and a nationally applied funding rate.

The confirmed allocation for 2026/27 was broadly in line with the previous year, with only minimal variation once rolled-in grants had been taken into account.

Forum Members were advised that the allocation was divided into two categories: services that do not require Schools Forum approval, and those that do. Ongoing commitments requiring approval included school admissions, Schools Forum administration, SACRE, safeguarding duties, retained duties, and other statutory responsibilities. No significant changes were proposed to those budgets other than a small increase to the school admissions budget to reflect pay and National Insurance cost pressures, with all other budget lines remaining at 2025/26 levels.

Eligible members voted on whether the Schools Forum agreed with the proposed 2026/27 funding arrangements for ongoing commitments as set out in paragraph 16 of the report and unanimously supported the proposals.

Resolved:

That the Schools Forum:

1. Noted the DSG Allocation for Central Schools Services Block for 2026-27.
2. Approved the proposed 2026-27 budget allocation as outlined in the table in paragraph 16 of the report.

46. SEND SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY MID YEAR UPDATE

The SEND Transformation Project Lead presented an update outlining the development of the new SEND Sufficiency Strategy, which will replace the current strategy delivered through the Safety Valve programme when it concludes at the end of the 2025/26 financial year.

The new strategy aligned closely with the Rotherham SEND Strategy *My Life My Rights* and supported the continued ambition to enable more children to be educated within their local communities.

Significant progress had been made under the current strategy, including the creation of additional resource provision places and growth in specialist school capacity. Demand continued to rise, with 4,065 children holding an EHCP, increasing pressure on specialist settings which are already operating over capacity.

Place planning data indicated that Rotherham currently provided more special school places than national averages, while fewer children with EHCPs are educated in mainstream compared to national levels, although this gap has narrowed significantly.

The new strategy would continue to develop local provision across mainstream, specialist and independent sectors, with a stronger emphasis on the graduated response, outreach support, and ensuring sufficiency at pre-16 and post-16 phases.

Stakeholder consultation had informed the development of the strategy, which sets out seven key aspirations for strengthening local SEND provision. Progress will be overseen through the SEND Sufficiency Board, the SEND Executive Partnership Board, and through annual Scrutiny and Cabinet reporting. A formal decision on the approval of the new strategy was scheduled to be considered by Cabinet in February.

Forum Members discussed the sustainability of new resource provisions, emphasising the importance of ensuring the right level of support to ensure models remained effective and sustainable.

The Forum noted the ongoing gap between local and national levels of mainstream inclusion, with further work required to increase the proportion of pupils supported in mainstream settings. Members also acknowledged the strong partnership working between the local authority and special schools, and emphasised the importance of clear pathways, effective transition planning, and ensuring that internal resources are appropriately supported.

Resolved:

That the Schools Forum received and noted the update.

47. SCHOOLS FORUM FORWARD PLAN

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

Resolved:

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

48. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Induction for New Members

It was agreed that a Working Group would be established (via the Clerk) to consider arrangements for the induction of new Forum members.

49. DATES AND TIMES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Resolved:

1. That the next meeting of the Schools' Forum takes place on Friday, 27th March, 2025 at 8.30 a.m. at Rockingham PDC.
2. That the dates proposed for future meetings as listed on the agenda be agreed.

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