

**ROTHERHAM SCHOOLS' FORUM
FRIDAY 27 MARCH 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)
 Dr Sipra Deb – Wickersley Nursery (PVI Nursery)
 David Horrigan – Maltby Learning Trust (Primary Academy)
 Lee Morrill – Rotherham Aspire (PRU)
 Colin Price – NEU Representative
 Steve Scott – Happy Kids (PVI Nursery)
 Karen Smith - Nexus MAT (Special Academy)
 Nevine Towers - Head of Business and Operations (Primary Academy)
 Nathan Williams - Roughwood Primary (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)
 Sarah Whitby – Head of Service – Access to Education
 Angela Kemp – Governance Advisor / Clerk to the Schools Forum

Apologies were received from:-

Lynsey Hadfield - Executive Head, Arnold Nursery (Maintained)
 Paul Higginbottom – Swinton Queen Primary (Primary Academy)
 Mark Ryan – RNN Group
 Niall Devlin – Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion
 Louise Keith – Principal Finance Officer (CYPS)

50. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

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

51. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

52. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous meeting held on Friday 16th January 2026.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 16th January 2026 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

53. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

It was noted under Minute No. 48 (Any Other Business) that discussions would take place with those members who had volunteered to support the development of induction material following today's meeting.

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

No changes to the membership or constitution of the Rotherham Schools Forum were proposed.

55. SCHOOLS BUDGETS 2025-26 - LATEST POSITION (MARCH 2026)

The Head of Finance (CYPS) presented a report on the latest position of the school's budget for 2025/26 and commented on the following:

- The January DSG funding allocation which had remained unchanged from the November position.
- An additional DSG update received which confirmed an increase to the DSG position for 2025/26, reflecting additional Early Years funding.
- The forecasted position for the Centrally Retained Schools Block and the factors that were attributable to the variance.
- The ongoing management of the DSG deficits which had been due to the cumulative impact of demand challenges and cost pressures facing the SEND system over recent years.
- The conclusion of the Safety Valve Programme on 31 March 2026 and future sustainability being addressed through the SEND reforms and associated SEND Action Plans.
- The High Needs Stability Grant which would provide financial support to authorities with DSG deficits at the end of 2025/26, covering up to 90% of accumulated deficits, subject to approved SEND reform plans.
- The February forecasted delegated schools budget position for maintained schools, which indicated a reduction in surplus balances compared to the 2024/25 outturn, largely due to academy conversions, alongside increased financial pressures. The

February monitoring position also highlighted an overall improvement in reported balances against the original budget, driven mainly by improved positions in primary, nursery schools and the PRU.

- The three schools who were operating under licensed deficits in 2025/26, two of which would receive support through the Schools in Financial Difficulty fund, with all schools having agreed recovery plans in place and subject to ongoing monitoring

A Forum member reflected on admissions and appeals costs within the Central Schools Services Block, particularly the perceived fairness of costs falling on schools with higher levels of parental preference and suggested that alternative funding mechanisms for appeals could be explored. It was noted that these pressures had been raised previously in other meetings and are recognised as system-wide challenges.

Following a comment made relating to the equity of de-delegated funding arrangements for maintained schools, the Head of Finance clarified that DSG was managed as a single funding pot and could not be ringfenced for specific sectors, reflecting national requirements.

Forum Members sought assurance regarding the position at the conclusion of the Safety Valve Programme and the approach to managing remaining DSG deficits. Members were advised that progress against Safety Valve plans had been subject to regular performance reporting to the DfE, with performance and financial targets monitored throughout the year. Access to the High Needs Stability Grant was conditional on the submission, approval and ongoing monitoring of local SEND reform plans with any delays potentially affecting the timing of grant allocation.

The Forum also sought clarification on the Early Years underspend and whether projected participation, eligibility levels, and birth-rate trends would be reflected in future funding. The Head of Finance confirmed that Early Years funding operated on a lagged basis, with adjustments made once updated census data was available, and that local budgets were set using reasonable projections to reflect expected participation and demographic change. Members were advised that funding adjustments were applied nationally and that planned changes to termly funding from next year were expected to reduce the levels of future adjustments.

Further discussion focused on pressures within the High Needs system, including the projected post-Safety Valve deficit, the effectiveness of the programme, future demand management, and the sustainability of SEND provision. Members raised concerns regarding placement sufficiency, system capacity, and the impact on schools and staff, and emphasised the importance of ensuring decisions remained needs-led.

The Head of Finance indicated that the Safety Valve Programme had

delivered on the expansion of local provision, it had also increased outreach, reduced reliance on independent placements and a number of tribunal cases had also been successfully challenged. It was emphasised that the remaining deficit reflected funding constraints rather than programme failure, and that financial considerations did not drive individual placement decisions.

In light of the concerns raised regarding pressures within the High Needs system, Forum Members agreed that a detailed update on SEND sufficiency and place planning would be welcomed for discussion at a future meeting.

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.

56. HIGH NEEDS BUDGET AND FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS 2026/27

The Head of Finance (CYPS) presented the funding arrangements for the High Needs budget block and the approach taken to determine the 2026/27 budget, and highlighted the following:

- The High Needs Block funding envelope for 2026/27, which reflected an increase in baseline funding and included the agreed 0.5% transfer from the Schools Block, as previously approved by Schools Forum.
- The consolidation of a number of legacy grants into the High Needs allocation for 2026/27, which would continue to be passported to special schools and Alternative Provision, meaning the increase in baseline funding would not represent additional flexible funding.
- The suspension of the High Needs National Funding Formula for 2026/27, with allocations based on prior-year levels as part of a temporary system reset in advance of SEND reforms.
- The proposed High Needs expenditure for 2026/27, which would result in a planned in-year deficit, driven by ongoing demand growth, inflationary pressures, and changes to funding methodology.
- The cumulative DSG reserve deficit, which was forecasted to increase by the end of 2026/27 through the combination of the

brought-forward deficit and the planned in-year shortfall, partially offset by the anticipated High Needs Stability Grant.

- A change to funding arrangements for Early Years children with complex needs, transferring costs to the High Needs Block without impacting on provision.
- Planned expenditure reflecting continued efforts to reduce reliance on independent non-maintained special schools and specialist post-16 provision through expanded local capacity and increased inclusion within mainstream settings.
- The continuation of the statutory override allowing DSG deficits to be carried forward until March 2028, and that access to the High Needs Stability Grant was conditional upon approval of the Council's SEND Reform Plan.
- Anticipated changes to future High Needs funding and accountability arrangements from 2028/29, forming part of a wider national system reset.

Forum Members discussed the importance of keeping Schools Forum informed on the development and implementation of the SEND Reform Plan. It was noted that schools would play a fundamental role in delivering SEND reforms and appropriate mechanisms for their involvement would need to be determined.

Members further highlighted the importance of SEND sufficiency and place planning, and would welcome threshold descriptors for 2026/27 to be developed in collaboration with schools prior to implementation.

Resolved:

That the Schools Forum:

1. Noted the high needs funding settlement for 2026/27.
2. Noted the proposed funding requirements across the range of SEND provision and the number of commissioned SEND places for 2026/27.

57. FALLING ROLLS AND NEW HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS

Consideration was given to a briefing paper presented by the Head of Service (Access to Education), which provided context and understanding on falling rolls, place planning, and the impact of new housing developments on educational provision.

Forum Members were advised of the methodology used for place planning, including the use of NHS birth data, school census information, migration trends, and pupil yield data to inform pupil number forecasts.

The annual School Capacity (SCAP) return was used to assess the sufficiency of places borough-wide, with the next return scheduled for completion in summer 2026.

It was noted that housing developments with a high likelihood of delivery were included in forecasting, using DfE pupil yield multipliers alongside local data, and that Section 106 contributions were considered where developments created additional demand.

Areas of surplus or deficit school capacity were reviewed on a case-by-case basis, with engagement taking place with schools and trusts where action may be required, including adjustments to Published Admission Numbers or, where appropriate, short-term measures such as bulge classes. Parent preference was identified as a variable that could not be fully predicted, with increasing numbers of families choosing schools outside their local area.

The Forum was advised that on Secondary National Offer Day, 97.7% of pupils were allocated a place at one of their preferred schools, which compared favourably with national performance. It was further noted that, for Primary National Offer Day in 2025, 99.1% of pupils were offered a place at a preferred school, demonstrating that place planning was operating effectively in enabling children to access schools of parental preference.

It was noted that falling pupil numbers in the primary sector presented an ongoing challenge and could have implications for the sustainability of some schools, given the difficulty in forecasting demand over the longer term.

Forum Members discussed the importance of long-term place planning, particularly in understanding where pupil numbers were declining and how this aligned with future housing growth and the Local Development Plan. The Head of Service confirmed that education needs were considered through the planning and Section 106 processes, supported by a strong working relationship with the planning authority, with education sufficiency considered at an early stage in discussions on significant developments. Forum Members also noted that greater clarity around how information relating to significant developments was communicated directly with schools would be helpful.

Resolved:

That the Schools Forum received and noted the update.

58. SCHOOLS FORUM FORWARD PLAN

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 an update on SEND Place Planning and future direction be included as a future item on the Forward Plan.
- That any additions to the Forward Plan be submitted to the Secretary of the Forum for consideration and inclusion.

59. 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.