ROTHERHAM SCHOOLS' FORUM

Date and Time:- **Friday 18 September 2026 at 8.30 a.m.**

Venue:- **Rockingham Professional Development Centre, Roughwood Road, Rotherham. S61 4HY**

The items which will be discussed are described on the agenda below and there are reports attached which give more details**.**

AGENDA

1. Welcome and Introductions

Welcome by the outgoing Chair and introductions.

2. Appointment of Chair

To receive nominations and agree the Chair of Schools Forum for the academic years 2026/27 and 2027/28.

3. Appointment of Vice Chair

To receive nominations and agree the Vice Chair of the Schools Forum for the academic years 2026/27 and 2027/28.

4. Apologies for Absence

To receive apologies from any Forum Member who are unable to attend the meeting.

5. Declarations of Interest

To invite Forum Members to declare any interests they may have on agenda items to be considered at this meeting, to confirm the nature of those interests and whether they intend to leave the meeting for the consideration of the item.

6. Minutes of the Previous Meeting (Pages 5 - 10)

To receive and approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on 12th June 2026.

7. Matters Arising from Previous Minutes

To consider and report on any matters arising from the previous minutes.

8. Membership and Constitution of the Rotherham Schools Forum (Pages 11 - 15)

To consider and approve the amendments/updates to the membership of the Rotherham Schools Forum.

9. Schools Budgets 2026-27 - Latest Position (Pages 17 - 22)

Report from the Principal Finance Officer (Schools Finance).

Recommendations:

That Schools Forum:

1. Note the latest DSG funding for schools for the 2026/27 financial year.

2. Note the forecast positions of Rotherham's maintained schools and the centrally retained DSG budgets for the year.

3. Note the government changes to Free School Meals from September 2026.

10. DfE Consultation on voluntary upfront funding for mainstream school SEND provision - Rotherham's position (Pages 23 - 27)

Report from the Head of Finance (CYPS).

Recommendations:

That Schools Forum:

1. Note the content of the DfE consultation 'Upfront funding for mainstream schools: creating a 'local SEND inclusion formula'', which closes on 18 September 2026.

2. Note Rotherham's position not to submit an expression of interest to participate in the first phase of this approach for the 2027/28 financial year, for the reasons set out in section 6 of this report.

11. Local Area Reform SEND Plan Update (Pages 29 - 34)

Update from the Transformation Lead (CYPS)

Recommendation:

1. That Schools Forum receive and note the update.

12. Special School Placement & Capacity (Pages 35 - 40)

Report from the Head of Service - SEND.

Recommendations:

That Schools Forum:

1. Note the current sufficiency position.

2. Note the regional and national benchmarking information.

3. Support ongoing SEND Sufficiency planning to meet projected EHCP growth and future placement demand.

13. Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) Annual Update (Pages 41 - 42)

Report from the EHCP – Team Manager

Recommendation:

1. That Schools Forum receive and note the update.

14. Part-time Timetables 2025 - 2026 (Pages 43 - 45)

Report from the Head of Service - Access to Education

Recommendation:

1. That Schools Forum receive and note the update.

15. Placements at Aspire (Pages 47 - 49)

Report from the Service Director – Education and Inclusion

Recommendation

1. That Schools Forum note Option 1 as the preferred option - a recharge of £50 per day will be made to the 'home' school by Aspire PRU for students accessing the provision.

16. Schools Forum Forward Plan (Pages 51 - 52)

To consider the attached Forward Plan of agenda items and receive any updates.

17. Any Other Business

To receive any other items of urgent business.

The next meeting of the Rotherham Schools Forum will be held on Friday 4 December 2026 commencing at 8.30 a.m. in Rockingham Professional Development Centre.

John Edwards,
Chief Executive.

ROTHERHAM SCHOOLS' FORUM
FRIDAY 12 JUNE 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 (Secondary Academy)
Dr Sipra Deb – Wickersley Nursery (PVI Nursery)
Lynsey Hadfield - Executive Head, Arnold Nursery (Maintained)
Paul Higginbottom – Swinton Queen Primary (Primary Academy)
David Horrigan – Maltby Learning Trust (Primary Academy)
Lee Morritt – Rotherham Aspire (PRU)
Mark Ryan – RNN Group
Karen Smith - Nexus MAT (Special Academy)
Nevine Towers - Executive Director of Business and Operations (Primary Academy)
Joel Wirth – Principal TRC and Deputy CEO Inspire Trust (Secondary Academy)

Joshua Amahwe – Head of Finance (CYPS)
Mark Cummins – Transformation Lead
Niall Devlin – Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion
Cary-Ann Sykes – Head of SEND
Sarah Whitby – Head of Service – Access to Education
Angela Kemp – Governance Advisor / Clerk to the Schools Forum

Apologies were received from:-

Councillor Simon Currie – School Governor Representative (Primary Maintained)
Councillor Victoria Cusworth – Cabinet Member for Children and Young People
Colin Price – NEU Representative
Steve Scott – Happy Kids (PVI Nursery)
Paula Williams – Special School Governor Representative (Special Academy)

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

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

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous meeting held on Friday 27th March 2026.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 27th March 2026 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

It was noted that an update on Special School Place Planning would be presented to the Forum in September, and that the Schools Forum induction materials were currently in development.

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

Members noted that, following discussion and agreement with the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services (CYPS), they would continue to receive agenda papers via the standard publication process but will not be formally invited to attend Schools Forum meetings. Notwithstanding this, and in line with the Forum's Terms of Reference, the Cabinet Member for CYPS will retain the ability to attend and contribute to meetings as appropriate.

6. SCHOOLS BUDGET - 2025-26 OUTTURN AND 2026-27 LATEST POSITION

The Head of Finance (CYPS) updated the Forum on the final 2025/26 outturn position for maintained schools and centrally retained DSG budgets, together with the latest 2026/27 funding and budget projections, highlighting the following:

2025/26 outturn position

- The overall surplus position for maintained schools at the end of 2025/26 was broadly in line with previous years (after adjusting for schools that converted in the year), with a small number of schools remaining in deficit and supported through recovery plans.

- A significant level of surplus balances was reported by some schools in 2025/26. Work has commenced through the clawback process to review those positions and agree appropriate use of funds, with outcomes expected by September.

- An overall deficit was reported in the centrally retained DSG budgets, primarily driven by significant pressures within the High Needs Block, although mitigated by underspend in early years. The high needs budget deficit is due to increased SEND demand, , alongside higher-than-anticipated pupil numbers and inflationary cost pressures.

- The centrally retained DSG overspend has been transferred to the DSG reserve and will be carried forward into 2026/27 in line with statutory override arrangements.

- The Government introduced a High Needs Stability Grant to support local authorities with significant historic DSG deficits. This financial support forms part of the wider SEND reforms and operates alongside the statutory override arrangements, which will remain in place until 31 March 2028.

2026/27 schools budget

- Detailed budget plans were submitted by all maintained schools by May 2026. Schools budget plans are currently being assessed by the council to ensure they are realistic and achievable. A small number of schools are forecasting budget deficit - this is consistent with the previous year. These schools would be supported through financial recovery plan arrangements.

- Key risks for school budgets in 2026/27 includes: uncertainty around teacher pay awards, ongoing inflationary pressures and falling pupil numbers.

- The High Needs Block continued to represent a significant financial risk, driven by increasing SEND demand, cost pressures, and reliance on high-cost placements. Risks are further compounded by uncertainty linked to SEND reforms and wider funding constraints.

Forum Members discussed the early years block underspend, with clarification provided that this was primarily due to the lagged funding system and differences between planned and actual pupil numbers. It was noted that a significant proportion of the reported underspend would be adjusted and recouped by the DfE following recalculation based on the January 2026 census data. Changes to the funding system from 2026/27, including termly census counts, were expected to reduce year end variances going forward.

Members discussed the impact and delivery of early years SEND support, highlighting rising levels of complexity in pupil needs. It was noted that work is underway with the Early Years team to strengthen tracking and monitoring, ensuring data is captured in a clear, consistent and usable format to support effective planning and provision.

Forum Members were also advised that further details on future PE and Sports Premium funding were awaited.

Resolved:

That the Schools Forum:

1. Noted the final reported outturn position for Local Authority maintained schools and centrally retained DSG budgets for 2025/26.

2. Noted the latest budget projections for Rotherham's maintained schools for 2026/27, including the identified financial risks relating to the schools and centrally retained DSG budgets.

7. SEND SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY ANNUAL UPDATE

Consideration was given to an update presented by the Transformation Lead on the SEND Sufficiency Strategy 2026–2029, noting its approval by Cabinet in February 2026 and its focus on improving local provision following the end of the Safety Valve programme.

The report highlighted progress made to date, including increased local specialist provision, expanded outreach, a strengthened graduated response, and improved quality assurance arrangements. Ongoing challenges were also noted, particularly rising demand and increasing unit costs.

Forecasts indicated significant future growth in demand for specialist, special school, post-16 and independent placements if unmitigated. The strategy set out key ambitions and was to be delivered through established workstreams, including resource provision, quality assurance, future sufficiency planning and post-16 pathways, all of which were now operational. It was also noted that this work aligned with forthcoming SEND reforms, with a local reform plan due for submission in June.

Members discussed KPI performance and benchmarking in relation to SEND provision and were advised that current levels remained above national averages, with a higher proportion of pupils in specialist settings and post-16 education. While progress had been made in narrowing these gaps, further work was required to align more closely with national and statistical neighbour averages, taking account of local context and rising demand.

Further discussion highlighted increasing EHCP requests and workforce pressures on SENCOs. Members noted plans to strengthen post-16 pathways through additional specialist capacity and partnership working with providers, alongside continued investment in mainstream inclusion through capital funding and resource provision.

Resolved:

That the Schools Forum noted the update.

8. LOCAL AREA SEND REFORM PLAN

Consideration was given to an update on the Local Area SEND Reform Plan proposals presented by the Service Director for Education and Inclusion.

The plan was informed by a programme of consultation, alongside financial modelling and a maturity assessment, culminating in the submission of an initial version to the DfE in May.

The plan has been based on key priorities to enhance early support, increase capacity, and strengthen provision, particularly in pre-5 and post-16 phases.

The “Experts at Hand” model was highlighted as a central approach, providing multidisciplinary, non-referral-based support for children without EHCPs, alongside increased specialist capacity and a focus on early intervention.

Improvements in data, parental confidence, the graduated response, and access to specialist support were also outlined.

It was noted that the annual 0.5% transfer into the High Needs Block was under review, with the intention to cease this transfer. This would result in approximately £1.4m being retained by schools each year, supporting schools to further develop their SEND provision.

Forum Members acknowledged the limited timeframe for consultation on the initial version but welcomed further planned engagement in developing future iterations of the plan.

Resolved:

That the Schools Forum noted the update.

9. EDUCATION, HEALTH AND CARE PLAN (EHCP) FUNDING MODEL, DECISION MAKING AND LINKS TO SECTION F

Consideration was given to a briefing paper presented by the Head of Service – SEND, which provided context and an overview of the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) funding model.

The revised approach, trialled since September, had operated alongside the existing system and reflected a change in how funding was described, moving from hours to banded allocations, without altering the actual funding provided to children and young people. It was reiterated that no child’s funding would be reduced and that allocations would remain subject to annual review.

The banded model was noted to improve transparency and consistency, provide greater clarity regarding support (including unstructured times), and reduce reliance on referencing hours, which had previously led to challenges. It was confirmed that cases could be referred back to panel where additional need was evidenced, ensuring a fair and needs-led system.

Forum Members welcomed the model for its clarity and focus, as well as the shift in language. Planned sessions to support parents' understanding of Section F were also welcomed.

Resolved:

That the Schools Forum noted the update.

10. SCHOOLS FORUM FORWARD PLAN

The Forward Plan was reviewed by the Forum and Members were invited to suggest any relevant issues they considered appropriate for inclusion in future reports.

Resolved:

1. That regular updates on the Local Area SEND Reform Plan be included on the Schools Forum forward plan.

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

11. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There were no other urgent business items raised.

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

Rotherham Schools Forum: Constitution – Proposed from September 2026

Position	Name	End of Term	School/Body	Comment
SCHOOL MEMBERS				
MAINTAINED MEMBERS				
Nursery School Head Teacher x 1	Lynsey Hadfield	~~September, 2026~~ August 2030	Executive Head Teacher and Head of Centre, Rawmarsh Nursery School and Children's Centre	Approve a revised four-year term of office commencing from September 2026 and ending in August 2030.
Primary School Head Teachers x 3	Mark Windle	~~September, 2026~~ August 2030	Head Teacher of Badsley Primary	Approve a revised four-year term of office commencing from September 2026 and ending in August 2030.
	John Barnett	March, 2028	Head Teacher of Rawmarsh Thorogate Junior and Infant School	**Confirmed 28.03.25**
	Kate Blythe	March, 2028	Head Teacher of Rawmarsh Ryecroft Infant School	**Confirmed 28.03.25**
Primary School Governors x 3	Simon Currie	June, 2028	Kimberworth Community Primary School	**Confirmed 13.06.25**
	Mehdi Najefi	June, 2028	Sitwell Infant School	**Confirmed 13.06.25**
	Vacancy			

Pupil Referral Unit Head Teacher x 1	Lee Morritt	~~September, 2026~~ August 2030	Head Teacher of Aspire	Approve a revised four-year term of office commencing from September 2026 and ending in August 2030.
ACADEMY MEMBERS				
Primary Academy Representatives x 6	David Horrigan	~~September, 2026~~ August 2030	Executive Director of Primary Education, Maltby Learning Trust	Approve a revised four-year term of office commencing from September 2026 and ending in August 2030.
	Nathan Williams	November, 2026	Head of Roughwood Primary School	**Confirmed 18.11.22**
	Nevine Towers	~~September, 2026~~ August 2030	Executive Director of Business and Operations, Diocese of Sheffield Academies Trust (DSAT)	Approve a revised four-year term of office commencing from September 2026 and ending in August 2030.
	Paul Higginbottom	March 2028	Head Teacher of Swinton Queen Primary School	**Confirmed 28.03.25**
	Vacancy			
	Vacancy			
Secondary Academy Representatives x 6	Joel Wirth	~~September, 2026~~ August 2030	Deputy CEO Inspire Learning Trust and Principal of Thomas Rotherham College	Approve a revised four-year term of office commencing from September 2026 and ending in August 2030.

	Lisa McCall (Substitute Carol Brookes)	~~September, 2026~~ August 2030	Head Teacher of Wales	Approve a revised four-year term of office commencing from September 2026 and ending in August 2030.
	Vacancy			
	Vacancy			
	Vacancy			
	Vacancy			
Special Academy Representative x 1	Karen Smith (Substitute Joel Hardwick)	~~September, 2026~~ August 2030	Nexus MAT	Approve the reconfiguration of the Special Academy Representative arrangements by appointing Karen Smith as the named representative and Joel Hardwick as the substitute representative and approve a revised four-year term of office from September 2026 to August 2030
Academy Members: Governors x 6	Sacha Schofield ~~Paula Williams~~	December 2028	Hilltop School (Nexus Multi Academy Trust)	Approve the appointment of Sascha Schofield as the Special Academy Governor Representative on the Schools Forum, replacing Paula Williams

	Vacancy			
	Vacancy			
	Vacancy			
	Vacancy			
	Vacancy			
NON - SCHOOLS MEMBERS				
Diocesan Representative x 2	Vacancy			
	Vacancy			
Private, Voluntary and Independent Sector Nursery x 2	Steve Scott	~~September, 2026~~ August 2030	Happy Kids	Approve a revised four-year term of office commencing from September 2026 and ending in August 2030.
	Dr. Sipra Deb	January, 2027	Nursery Provider	**Confirmed 13.01.23**
16-19 Provider x 1	Mark Ryan	~~September, 2026~~ August 2030	RNN Group	Approve a revised four-year term of office commencing from September 2026 and ending in August 2030.
Trades Union Representatives x 2	Lewis Moat	~~September, 2026~~ August 2030	GMB/Unison	Approve a revised four-year term of office commencing from September 2026 and ending in August 2030.

	Colin Price (Substitute Karen Houghton)	September, 2028	NEU	**Confirmed 12.09.25**
Education Funding Agency	Name notified to School Governor Services in advance of attendance.	N/A	EFA	
Total Places	**34**			
Total Places Filled	**16**			
Total Vacancies	**18**			

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REPORT FOR SCHOOLS FORUM

1.	**Date of meeting:**	**18th September 2025**
2.	**Title:**	**Schools Budgets 2026-27 – Latest Position (July)**
3.	**Directorate:**	**Corporate Services**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To provide an update on the schools funding for 2026/27 and the latest monitoring position for the Local Authority maintained schools budgets and centrally retained Dedicated Schools Grants (DSG) budgets.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

2.1 It is recommended that the schools forum note the latest DSG funding for schools for the 2026/27 financial year.

2.2 That Schools Forum note the forecast positions of Rotherham's maintained schools and the centrally retained DSG budgets for the year.

2.3 That Schools Forum note the government changes to Free School Meals from September 2026

3. LATEST DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT 2026/27

3.1 The latest confirmed DSG funding allocation for Rotherham for 2026/27 is £127.69m, which includes a total of £24.60m in Schools Block funding for the LA maintained schools.

	Mar 2026 Allocation (£m)	Jul 2026 Allocation (£m)	Change (£m)
Schools Block	270.49	24.60	-245.89
Central Schools Services Block	2.49	2.49	-
Early Years Block	49.71	49.71	-
High Needs Block	52.05	50.89	-1.16
Total DSG	**127.49**	**127.69**	**-247.05**

3.2 The latest allocation includes the following changes since the last position reported to School Forum in June 2026:

- **Schools Block** – The July DSG allocation reflects the recoupment adjustment relating to academies. This is a cost neutral adjustment, as the £24.60m funding represents the net budget for LA maintained schools.

- **High Needs Block** – the overall reduction of £1.16m is driven by the following factors:

  - reduction of £0.22m as expected due to import/export funding adjustment for pupils placed in other local authority areas
  - reduction of £0.94m relates to the recoupment for high needs places in academy trusts funded directly by the DfE.
  - The net impact on Rotherham's HN budget from the above adjustments is a negative **£0.16m** – as some of the adjustments were anticipated and allowed in the 2026/27 budget.

4. UPDATE ON CENTRALLY RETAINED DSG BUDGETS

4.1 These relate to budgets for schools' expenditure that are retained centrally and where it is cost effective to be managed by the council. It comprises in the main, elements of the schools' block, early years, and the high needs DSG blocks. The table below summarises the latest forecast position across all the centrally retained DSG budgets.

	Budget 2026/27 (£m)	July 2026 Forecast (£m)	Forecast Variance (£m)
Schools Block	0.44	0.44	-
Central Schools Services Block	2.49	2.49	-
Early Years Block	47.57	47.57	-
High Needs Block	52.55	58.96	6.41
Total DSG	**103.06**	**109.46**	**6.41**

<u>Schools Block</u>

4.2 The centrally retained schools block budget of £0.44m comprises the following:

- amount de-delegated from maintained schools' DSG funding (£0.19m), which relates to the following : Schools in Financial Difficulty (SIFD), School Improvement and Trade Union Facility Time. A balanced budget position is current forecast against all the de-delegated budgets.
- DSG budgets managed centrally by the council but relates to all schools and academies (£0.25m) – i.e. Growth Fund and Pupil Falling Rolls. A balanced position is currently forecast for against these budgets.

<u>Central Schools Services Block (CSSB)</u>

4.3 The DSG allocation for CSSB remains unchanged at £2.49m for the year. The funding is used to support ongoing commitments such as SACRE, Teachers Pensions costs, Schools Forum admin costs, Schools Admissions and Copyright Licensing. A balanced budget position is currently forecast for the year across all the CSSB budgets.

High Needs Block Budgets

4.4 A cost pressure of £6.41m is currently forecast for the High Needs block and mainly relates to SEND provision and support. The latest forecast is an increase compared to the planned approved deficit for 2026/27 of £5.5m. The forecast deficit is mainly due to the following; inflationary costs; increase in EHCP pupils in mainstream and special schools; and continuing placements in out of authority independent settings.

4.5 It should be noted that DSG deficits is usually managed within allocated DSG funds, as LAs are not allowed to cover DSG deficits using their General Fund resources. Financial support previously provided through the Safety Valve Agreement ended in 2025/26, the final year of the programme.

4.6 The Government has replaced this with a High Needs Stability Grant, which will fund 90% of DSG deficits accrued by local authorities up to 31 March 2026 (Rotherham's net DSG deficit position is £2.9m at 31 March 2026). Access to this funding is conditional on DfE approval of Rotherham's Local SEND Reforms Plan. The reforms are intended to support a more sustainable SEND system through earlier intervention and increased inclusion in mainstream education settings.

4.7 While Govt funding is yet to be confirmed for 2026/27, it is anticipated that the DfE would provide financial support to local authorities for the current financial year, potentially through an extension of the High Needs Stability Grant.

Overall DSG Reserves forecast position

4.8 Without Government funding or support, the DSG reserve is forecast to reach a cumulative deficit of £9.3m by the end of 2026/27 (this includes the deficit carry forward of £2.9m from 2025/26). Under the current statutory deficit override protection, this cumulative deficit would be rolled forward into 2027/28.

5. UPDATE ON DELEGATED SCHOOLS BUDGETS

5.1 The forecast net balances as reported by 20 LA maintained primary schools, nurseries and the PRU in their July budget monitoring statements are shown below.

	2025/26 Outturn (£m)	2026/27 Original Budget (£m)	2026/27 Latest forecast (£m)	2026/27 Variance (£m)
Nursery	0.93	0.81	0.83	0.02
Primary	1.05	0.73	0.71	-0.02
PRU	-	0.12	-0.02	-0.14
	1.98	**1.66**	**1.52**	**-0.14**

5.2 The main highlights from the above are as follows:

- The July forecast positions indicate a decrease in surplus balances of £0.46m compared to the 2025/26 final outturn position. This could be explained by the increasing use of surplus balances by schools to manage cost pressures.

- When compared to the original budget, the July position shows a net decrease in reported balances of £0.14m. This is driven mainly by a decrease in the PRU balance.

- The latest position includes one school that is operating under a licensed deficit for 2026/27 and has a budget recovery plan in place to return their budget to a sustainable position with an agreed timeframe. The July position shows this school is now projecting a slight surplus for 2026/27.

	Original budget	July 2026 position	Comments
Aston Fence J&I	-£0.002	£0.012	

- Local Authority maintained schools will submit their 2026/27 revised budgets to the council on 16th October 2026.

6. OTHER FUNDING UPDATE

Free Schools Meals

6.1 From September 2026, all children from households in receipt of Universal Credit will become entitled to a free school meal, following new duties introduced through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026. This creates two categories of benefits-based FSM.

Targeted FSM – Children from households earnings of less than £7,400, continuing to attract pupil premium and disadvantage funding.

Expanded FSM Children from households in receipt of Universal Credit, with annual household earnings exceeding £7,400 will be entitled to expanded FSM (meals only).

6.2 From 2026/27, schools will receive additional funding to meet the increased costs of providing free meals under the expanded FSM entitlement, with mainstream, special and AP schools funded through a new FSM expansion grant.

6.3 For mainstream schools, the grant will bridge the gap until lagged core funding catches up, calculated on the increase in FSM eligibility between the October 2025 and October 2026 census, at £505 per pupil per annum (pro-rated to £295 for September–March). Allocations will be issued in February 2027 for maintained schools and March 2027 for academies, with academies receiving a further £210 per pupil from April–August 2027.

6.4 From 2027–28, both targeted and expanded FSM funding will flow through core allocations for mainstream schools and through high needs DSG for special and AP schools. Accurate October census returns and verified eligibility rechecks between 1 June and 1 October 2026 are essential, as only pupils with confirmed eligibility will attract funding in 2027–28.

6.4 Schools and local authorities must complete annual eligibility rechecks for all pupils receiving FSM:

- Recheck window: 1 June – 1 October 2026.
- Only pupils with verified eligibility in this period will attract funding in 2027–28.
- Schools must record whether each pupil is targeted or expanded FSM in the October census.
- Accurate October 2026 census returns are critical for funding allocations.

NAMES & CONTACT DETAILS

Louise Keith
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REPORT FOR SCHOOLS FORUM

1.	**Date of meeting:**	**18th September 2025**
2.	**Title:**	**DfE Consultation: Upfront funding for mainstream schools – creating a 'local SEND inclusion formula'**
3.	**Directorate:**	**Corporate Services**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To inform Schools Forum of the Department for Education's (DfE) consultation 'Upfront funding for mainstream schools: creating a 'local SEND inclusion formula'', which proposes enabling local authorities to voluntarily transfer funding from the High Needs Block (HNB) to the Schools Block (SB), to increase the level of SEND funding mainstream schools receive upfront in their core budgets.

1.2 To seek Schools Forum's views of Rotherham's response to this consultation, having regard to the Council's current High Needs Block financial position, as set out in section 5 of this report

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

2.1 That Schools Forum notes the content of the DfE consultation 'Upfront funding for mainstream schools: creating a 'local SEND inclusion formula'', which closes on 18 September 2026.

2.2 That Schools Forum notes Rotherham's position not to submit an expression of interest to participate in the first phase of this approach for the 2027/28 financial year, for the reasons set out in section 6 of this report.

3. BACKGROUND / CONTEXT

3.1 The consultation was published by the DfE on 10 July 2026 and follows the wider 'SEND reform: putting children and young people first' consultation and the Schools White Paper, Every Child Achieving and Thriving, published on 23 February 2026. Both set out a longer-term ambition to rebalance high needs funding into mainstream schools' core budgets, to support earlier and more proactive intervention ahead of any statutory reform, which is not expected before September 2029.

3.2 Mainstream schools are currently expected to meet the first £6,000 of SEND support costs per pupil per year from their core budget, before applying to the local authority for High Needs ‘top-up’ funding. This threshold has been unchanged in cash terms since 2013. The DfE’s stated view is that this has driven growing reliance on top-up funding, more assessment-led processes, and delay in support reaching children.

3.3 This report asks Schools Forum to consider the proposal in the context of Rotherham’s own High Needs Block position and to note the Council’s response and position not to support participation in the first phase of this implementation.

4. ROTHERHAM’S FINANCIAL CONTEXT

4.1 The context for implementing this proposal is one of increasing SEND demand and financial pressures – a recurring theme over the past few years and is anticipated would continue over the medium term. The DSG reserve (mainly driven by the high needs budget) is forecast to reach a cumulative deficit of £9.3m by the end of 2026/27, rising to £19.9m by March 2028 when the statutory override is due to end.

4.2 The increasing number of (as well as cost of supporting) pupils with EHCPs in mainstream schools and requiring specialist support in special and independent schools continue to exert pressures on the high needs budget. This is in addition to a challenging economic landscape of rising inflationary cost pressures.

5. SUMMARY OF THE DfE PROPOSAL

5.1 The DfE’s proposal forms part of its wider SEND reform programme and is intended to begin rebalancing SEND funding so that a greater proportion is allocated directly to mainstream schools through their core budgets, rather than being accessed through individual high needs funding applications.

5.2 The DfE's stated objective is to enable schools to identify and support pupils’ needs earlier, reduce reliance on statutory assessment and top-up funding processes, and provide schools with greater certainty and flexibility to plan inclusive provision. The proposal is intended to support a more proactive and responsive approach to SEND support, reduce administrative burdens associated with funding applications, and allow schools to invest in both individual and cohort-based interventions before needs escalate.

5.3 The 2027/28 arrangements are proposed as a voluntary ‘test and learn’ phase to help the DfE and local authorities understand how funding can be rebalanced effectively ahead of any wider statutory reforms expected from 2029. The key features of the proposal are summarised below.

- Participating authorities would consult Schools Forum on: the proposed new SEND cost threshold (replacing the current £6,000); the total funding to be transferred from the HNB to the SB; and how that funding would be distributed to schools.
- Funding would be distributed through a new, locally designed ‘local SEND inclusion factor’, on top of the existing schools funding formula, using proxy factors already permitted in the National Funding Formula (e.g. deprivation, low prior attainment, EAL, mobility) rather than being linked to individual EHCPs or assessed need.
- The Council would retain its statutory duty under Section 42 of the Children and Families Act 2014 to secure the provision specified in EHC plans and would need to satisfy DfE that funding transferred is adequate for schools’ increased responsibilities.
- Authorities would require DfE approval to vary the threshold and would report the transfer through the Authority Proforma Tool (APT); some discretionary High Needs funding could be retained to manage schools with disproportionately high EHCP numbers.
- The DfE has stated that, in this context, it would not expect a participating authority also to propose a transfer of funding back from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block – participation is, in practice, a one-way commitment of HNB funding into schools’ core budgets, reapplied for annually until any statutory reform takes effect

6. ROTHERHAM’S CONCERNS WITH THE PROPOSAL

6.1 The following are the key concerns with the proposal to voluntarily transfer funding from the high needs block to mainstream schools for SEND inclusion

Does not address underlying SEND demand pressures

6.2 The proposal redistributes a fixed pot of existing high needs funding more broadly across mainstream schools; it brings no new money into the system and does not change the trajectory of EHCP growth projections for Rotherham. Rotherham’s EHCP requests have doubled since 2021/22 and the Council’s own forecasting indicates this growth will continue over the medium term.

6.3 Transferring a proportion of high needs funding to mainstream schools, allocated by national proxy factors rather than assessed need, risks reducing the resources available to meet the top-up and specialist placement costs that are the actual drivers of the Council’s High Needs deficit, regardless of where the £6,000 threshold is set.

Statutory accountability and responsibility remain with the Council

6.4 Under Section 42 of the Children and Families Act 2014, the Council retains the legal duty to secure the special educational provision set out in every EHC plan, irrespective of the proportion of High Needs funding transferred into schools' core budgets. The consultation document confirms this legal duty is unaffected by the transfer of funding.

6.5 The Council would therefore be taking on the financial and operational risk of a funding transfer, at a time when its high needs / SEND budget is faced with increasing financial deficits, whilst still retaining full statutory and operational accountability for SEND outcomes.

No accountability by schools for how funding is used

6.6 Beyond the general requirement to publish an annual inclusion strategy, there is no mechanism in the proposal that ties this funding to demonstrable SEND outcomes, nor any sanction if a school's use of the funding does not match the needs it was calculated against.

Funding is not directly linked to EHCP pupils in schools

6.7 The funding would be allocated to schools, via a proposed local SEND inclusion factor as a non-ringfenced, formula-based allocation, not linked to individual pupils, assessed need, or the provision specified in a Section F. This stands in direct contrast to Rotherham's existing EHCP top-up model, which is deliberately needs-led and tied to the specific, quantified provision set out in Section F of the EHC plan.

Risk that funding is used to manage wider school budget pressures

6.8 Rotherham's schools are facing rising staff related and inflationary costs (in spite of further government grant funding) – with schools having to use carry forward balances to mitigate some of these pressures. Since funding transferred under this proposal would be allocated to schools as core funding rather than ring-fenced SEND grant, schools could use it to balance their overall budget rather than to fund additional SEND support.

6.9 The consultation proposes no mechanism to prevent this or to track the use of this funding by mainstream schools.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 Rotherham's High Needs Block already carries a significant and growing deficit. The Council's statutory duties in respect of SEND provision are unaffected by where funding sits.

7.2 The Council's view is that this proposal would transfer funding to schools from the high needs budget, without reducing the Council's underlying exposure, without any mechanism to hold schools accountable for the funding's use, and with a material risk that it is absorbed into wider school budget pressures rather than SEND support.

7.3 Participation would also be difficult to reverse once agreed, as DfE would not expect an authority to subsequently transfer funding back from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block

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Schools Forum
SEND Reform Plan update – September 2026

Page 29

Agenda Item 11

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

SEND Reform Plan

Key Dates

- Plan submitted 19th June
- Feedback on the plan expected shortly

Project Implementation progress

- Project management resources identified
- Project Documents – PID, Risk Register, Workstream TOR's, Comm's Plan established

Strategic Goal	Reform Plan Priority	Output
Early Identification, access and timely multi-disciplinary support	1/Make early, multi-disciplinary support the default response	Experts at Hand (EAH) deployed across all phases and localities, with clear access routes, response expectations and operating standards.
Consistent Inclusive practice, attendance and engagement across education	2/Reduce variation in inclusive practice across schools and trusts 3/Improve attendance, inclusion and engagement for children and young people with SEND	Co-produced Threshold of Need and graduated response embed across all schools and multi academy trusts, supported by quality assurance, targeted CPD and proportionate challenge. Clearer pathways for attendance, persistent absence, exclusions and emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA)
Co-production, confidence and shaping demand across the SEND system	4/Shift the system from managing demand to shaping demand 5/Lock in consistency through governance, monitoring and accountability	Integrated data, quality assurance and governance improve confidence and actively shape demand.
Strong local provision, mainstream capacity and system accountability	6/Strengthen mainstream capacity to meet predictable need locally	Inclusion bases established as time limited, needs led interventions aligned to priority need clusters, with clear entry and exit criteria and an explicit outreach and reintegration function.

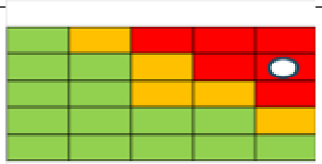
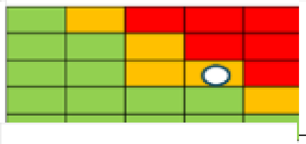
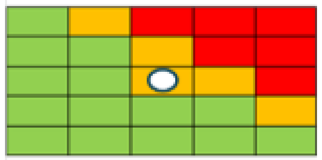
Workstreams

Workstream	Key Deliverables
1 – Specialist Support	Develop, deploy and monitor Experts at Hand
2 – Strengthening Inclusion	Inclusion Bases, Outreach, capital projects
3 – System Leadership	Placement monitoring, schools inclusion report, voice and participation. Data dashboard, evaluation
4 – Culture and Behaviours	Graduated Response, thresholds document, pathways, cross-MAT collaboration and QA.

Key Activity for the next period

- Establish EAH – key posts, offer, identification of schools
- Establish Inclusion Base support offer and timeline for developing new bases.
- Implement Rotherham Parent Forum Ltd – parental voice and confidence delivery plan
- Mobilise workstreams
- Finalise comm’s and stakeholder plan
- Develop performance dashboard

Risks

Risk	Impact	Likelihood	Risk Rating ^Likelihood > Impact	Mitigation Summary
1.Workforce Capacity Recruitment/ Retention e.g. Therapy workforce constraints delay EAH impact	4	5		Joint LA/ICB recruitment; group models; commissioning
Inclusion base openings slip (estates/planning)	3	4		Early feasibility; trust MoUs; travel impact assessment
Increased demand for EHCP’s	4	5		Universal offer agreement; QA reviews; SIT outreach
Financial Plan	4	5		Commissioning challenge (EHCP/ Special/ ISP); in-borough capacity; PfA routes
Data quality/latency hampers decisions	3	3		Single dashboard; definitions; QA cycles; training

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

BRIEFING		
	TO:	Schools Forum
	DATE:	18th September 2026
	LEAD OFFICER:	Cary-Anne Sykes
	TITLE:	Special School Placement & Capacity

1. Background

1.1 Rotherham continues to experience significant growth in demand for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision. The number of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) continues to rise locally and nationally, creating sustained pressure on special school places and High Needs Block expenditure Within Rotherham, special schools are operating at, capacity. Regional benchmarking demonstrates that Rotherham has a higher proportion of EHCP pupils educated in special schools than neighbouring authorities and the national average, indicating a greater reliance on specialist provision.

Rotherham Special Schools

School	Type of Need	Capacity
Newman School	Complex SEND	**185**
Kelford School	**SLD**	**165**
Hilltop School	**SLD**	**180**
Abbey School	**MLD**	**218**
Willows School	**MLD**	**197**
Milton School	**MLD/ASD**	**179**

2. Key Issues

2.1 **Regional Benchmarking**

Percentage of EHCP Pupils Educated in Special Schools

Rotherham's special school placement rate is 7.8 percentage points above the national average.

England Average	25.0%
Local Authority	**Percentage**
Rotherham	**32.8%**
Sheffield	29.2%
Doncaster	26.5%
Barnsley	18.1%
Wakefield	18.4%

2.2 **Import and Exports of pupils with SEND**

Rotherham continues to experience a significant net increase in children and young people with EHCPs moving into the authority.

- Total Imports: 176
- Total Exports: 77
- **Net Increase: +99 pupils**

This demonstrates that Rotherham remains a substantial net importer of children and young people with EHCPs.

2.3 EHCP Mobility Comparison by Provision Type 2025 to August 2026

Provision Type	Imports	Exports	Numerical Difference	% Difference (Imports vs Exports)
Mainstream Schools & Colleges	85	40	+45	**+112.5%**
Special Schools	27.5	16.5	+11	**+66.7%**
Independent Specialist Provision (ISP)	10	5	+5	**+100.0%**
Alternative Provision / Specialist Post-16	17.5	8	+9.5	**+118.8%**
NEET / EHE / Awaiting Provision / No Placement	37.5	14	+23.5	**+167.9%**

2.4 Out of Area Students in Rotherham Special Schools

Rotherham’s special schools have a strong regional reputation for quality and specialist expertise. As a result, 164 non-Rotherham pupils from neighbouring local authorities have placed children in Rotherham’s specialist settings.

Rotherham has placed 68 (1.68%) of Pupils in Other Local Authorities

School	Total Pupils	OOA Pupils	% OOA
Abbey	189	36	19.0%
Abbey HUB	+50	-	-
Elements	144	12	8.3%
Elevate	28	1	3.6%
Hilltop	178	24	13.5%
Kelford	169	10	5.9%
Milton	177	14	7.9%
Newman	148	6	4.1%
Newman NAR	38	2	5.3%
Willows	197	9	4.6%
TOTAL	**1,268**	**114**	**9.0%**

	Drivers include: • parental preference • proximity for border families • specialist curriculum not available locally • lack of local place availability at the time of need
3. Local Sufficiency under Pressure	
3.1	The inflow of 164 out of borough pupils reduces local availability and can lead to: • pressure on mainstream schools • increased use of independent placements • constrained flexibility during Annual Review driven changes of placement
3.2	**Parental Preference (Inward and Outward)** Parental preference is a key factor for both: • families from neighbouring LAs choosing Rotherham schools, and • Rotherham families choosing schools in Sheffield, Doncaster, or Barnsley. The statutory framework means LAs must comply with a parent’s preferred school unless certain legal criteria are met.
3.3	**Cross Border Commissioning Variation** Differences in SEND banding models, top-up rates, and decision pathways create administrative and financial complexity for both inward and outward placements.
3.4	**Financial Pressure on the High Needs Block** • Outward placements for 68 Rotherham pupils—particularly when specialist or independent—carry higher costs. • Inward placements can also lead indirectly to increased spend if Rotherham must commission alternative or independent placements for displaced local pupils.
3.5	**SEND Sufficiency Programme** Rotherham has already taken steps to increase specialist provision through capital investment and expansion programmes.
3.6	**EHCP Assessment and Annual Review Activity** The demand for specialist placements is directly linked to increasing activity within the EHCP Service. The EHCP Team continues to manage: • A sustained increase in requests for Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments. • Rising volumes of annual reviews and phase transfer reviews. • Increased complexity of needs identified through assessment processes. • Growing requests for specialist placements and specialist provision naming within EHCPs. • In-year placement changes resulting from annual review processes and changes in need. The EHCP Team plays a critical role in balancing parental preference, professional advice, available provision and statutory duties. As local specialist capacity becomes increasingly constrained, identifying appropriate placements within statutory timescales becomes more challenging and can contribute to increased placement negotiations and escalation activity.

3.7	**SEND Tribunals and Dispute Resolution** The authority continues to experience increasing levels of challenge through mediation and SEND Tribunal activity, reflecting national trends. The SEND Tribunals Team manages: • Appeals relating to placement decisions and parental preference. • Appeals concerning EHCP assessments and amendments. • Tribunal-directed requests for specialist and independent provision. • Preparation of legal evidence and representation at hearings. • Resolution activity aimed at avoiding formal tribunal proceedings where appropriate. Tribunal outcomes can have a direct impact on sufficiency planning and High Needs expenditure, particularly where independent specialist placements are sought. The increasing demand for specialist placements and limited local availability can contribute to a higher risk of legal challenge where parental preference cannot be met.
4. Risks	
4.1	Without continued sufficiency investment, the authority faces: **Increased Independent Placement Costs** A shortage of local specialist capacity increases dependency on independent specialist placements at significantly higher costs. **Transport Pressures** Greater use of out-of-borough provision increases home-to-school transport expenditure. **Placement Delays** Demand exceeding available places can delay placement decisions and increase tribunal risks. **High Needs Block Pressures** Continued EHCP growth without increased local capacity places further pressure on High Needs funding. These risks are particularly relevant given Rotherham's specialist placement rate already exceeds national comparators.
4.2	**Future Place Planning Priorities** The Local Authority should continue to focus on: - Development of specialist resource provision and enhanced mainstream pathways. - Strengthening autism and communication-focused provision to reflect the primary need profile. - define post-16 specialist capacity and preparation-for-adulthood pathways. - Reducing reliance on independent and out-of-authority placements. - Supporting financial sustainability of the High Needs Block through investment in local provision.
4.3	**Statutory Compliance and Tribunal Pressure** Increasing demand for EHCP assessments, annual reviews and specialist placements creates additional pressure on the EHCP and SEND Tribunals Teams. Without sufficient local specialist capacity, the authority faces: • Increased levels of parental dissatisfaction. • Growth in mediation and tribunal appeals.

	• Greater legal and administrative costs. • Increased risk of independent specialist placements being directed through tribunal proceedings. • Additional pressure on statutory timescales for assessment, review and placement processes. These pressures have both financial implications and workforce implications for SEND services and further reinforce the need for continued investment in local provision.
4. Summary	
4.1	Rotherham's special school system is experiencing significant and sustained demand. Benchmarking data demonstrates that Rotherham places a greater proportion of pupils with EHCPs in specialist settings than both regional comparators and the national average. Current occupancy levels show that existing provision is operating at, or beyond, planned capacity. Demand pressures are particularly evident within SLD provision, where 41 KS1 and KS2 pupils are currently awaiting a special school placement. At the same time, 111 pupils are being supported within SEP provisions in mainstream schools, underlining the growing requirement for specialist support across the continuum of provision. Rotherham's specialist schools are also educating 114 out-of-area pupils, representing 9.0% of the total specialist population. Within the borough's SLD, ASD and complex needs schools, approximately 93 places are occupied by pupils from neighbouring authorities. Were these places available for Rotherham children, the authority would have sufficient capacity to accommodate the current waiting list and create additional capacity for future demand. However, the authority's continued growth in EHCP numbers, combined with inward migration of children with EHCPs, means that even this additional capacity would be unlikely to provide a sustainable long-term solution. Alongside the pressure on specialist school places, increasing EHCP assessment activity, annual reviews and tribunal appeals continue to place significant demand on both the EHCP Team and the SEND Tribunals Team. These services are required to manage complex placement decisions, statutory processes and parental expectations within an increasingly constrained specialist provision system. The relationship between placement sufficiency, statutory compliance and tribunal activity means that investment in local capacity remains a key factor in supporting both service sustainability and positive outcomes for children and young people. The evidence therefore strongly supports the continuation of the SEND Sufficiency Programme and the strategic expansion of specialist inclusion bases across the borough in line with the Governments Inclusion Strategy. Ensuring sufficient local specialist places will improve outcomes for children and young people, reduce reliance on independent and out-of-authority placements, decrease transport costs and support the long-term sustainability of the High Needs Block.
	Schools Forum is asked to: 1. Note the current sufficiency position. 2. Note the regional and national benchmarking information.

	3. Support ongoing SEND Sufficiency planning to meet projected EHCP growth and future placement demand.

Schools Forum Highlight Report: Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) Service

Highlight Data from SEN2 (January 2026 – for the 2025 calendar year):

- EHCP caseload continues to grow significantly, with 4,062 active EHCPs as at census day, an increase of 439 plans (12.1%) from 3,623 last year.
    - This is ranked 14th out of 15 local authorities in the region, indicating a significantly higher EHCP prevalence than most neighbouring authorities.
    - EHCP rates are particularly high for:
        - 11-15 year olds: 873.79 per 10,000 (1,528 plans)
        - 16-19 year olds: 758.37 per 10,000 (988 plans)
        - 20-25 year olds: 135.70 per 10,000 (231 plans)
- The Local Authority received 1,111 new requests for EHC needs assessments, an increase of 125 requests (12.7%) compared to the previous year.
- 797 requests were agreed for assessment during the year, up by 95 (13.5%), while 289 requests were refused, down by 19 from the previous year.
- The authority issued 576 new EHCPs during the collection period. Rotherham's rate of issuing new EHCPs is above regional average.
- There were 322 EHCP transfers into the authority, an increase of 57 (21.5%), adding further pressure to placement sufficiency and casework capacity.
- Performance against the statutory 20-week timescale improved slightly, with 440 of 549 EHCPs (80.1%) issued within the required timeframe, compared with 79.3% in the previous year.
- Demand for specialist provision continues to increase, reflected in the Yorkshire and Humber Regional Dashboard. Rotherham has a lower proportion of children with high needs in mainstream schools (42.5%) compared to regional average (47.4%).
- The number of young people recorded as NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) with an EHCP increased to 92, compared with 60 last year. This is due to a significant focus on the post 16 cohort and ensuring tighter oversight on placement and progression.

Currently, the EHCP Service continues to manage significant and sustained growth in demand, whilst maintaining strong performance across several key statutory functions. The number of children and young people with an EHCP has increased by 12% over the last year, rising from 3,737 to 4,198 plans, reflecting ongoing pressures across the SEND system. A total of 334 new requests for assessment have been received since April 2026 (3 months).

Despite increased demand, front-end statutory performance remains strong, with 93.8% of requests progressing to assessment within the statutory six-week timescale. Transition review performance continues to be a particular strength, with 99.5% of primary transition reviews and 90.3% of secondary transition reviews completed within statutory deadlines.

The service also continues to demonstrate effective management of annual reviews. Of those reviews completed and submitted on time by schools, 96.7% were acknowledged by the EHCP Team within the required four-week timescale, with 72.5% of all annual reviews acknowledged within four weeks including when reports were not submitted on time.

Performance against the statutory 20-week EHCP timescale remains a key area of challenge, with 36.1% of plans issued within timescale during June 2026 (as you can see a significant drop since January 2026). Work is ongoing to improve timeliness through process improvements and targeted recovery activity, particularly in ensuring reports that form the EHCP are submitted on time. Delays within the annual review process also continue to impact overall performance, with 48.2% of annual reviews completed within 12 months of the previous review and 27.5% of amended plans finalised within 12 weeks of the review meeting.

Tribunal activity remains high, driven primarily by increasing demand for specialist placements and complex placement disputes. However, the service continues to achieve positive outcomes through early resolution, with 93% of appeals in 2025/26 concluded without the need for a final Tribunal hearing, resulting in significant cost avoidance and allowing resources to remain focused on frontline delivery. At present, and for the current calendar year there have been 80 tribunals lodged (16% increase from this time last year), with 51 currently active (29 resolved). A new pilot scheme has been introduced during the summer holidays (One Touch appeals) which provide shortened time frames for section I appeals only. As of this date, 4 have been lodged.

Key messages for Schools Forum:

- EHCP numbers continue to rise significantly, increasing demand across the SEND system.
- Strong statutory performance is being maintained at the assessment stage and in transition reviews.
- Timeliness of EHCP issuance and annual review completion remains a priority area for improvement.
- Tribunal volumes continue to increase, reflecting wider pressures relating to specialist placement sufficiency.
- Rotherham are a regional (and national) outliers for percentage of EHCPs issued and maintained as well as the proportion of pupils with EHCP in mainstream/specialist provision.

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

BRIEFING		
	TO:	Schools Forum
	DATE:	18th September 2026
	LEAD OFFICER:	Kelly Robinson Strategic Lead for Inclusion and Alternative Provision
	TITLE:	Part Time Timetables 2025 - 2026

1. Background

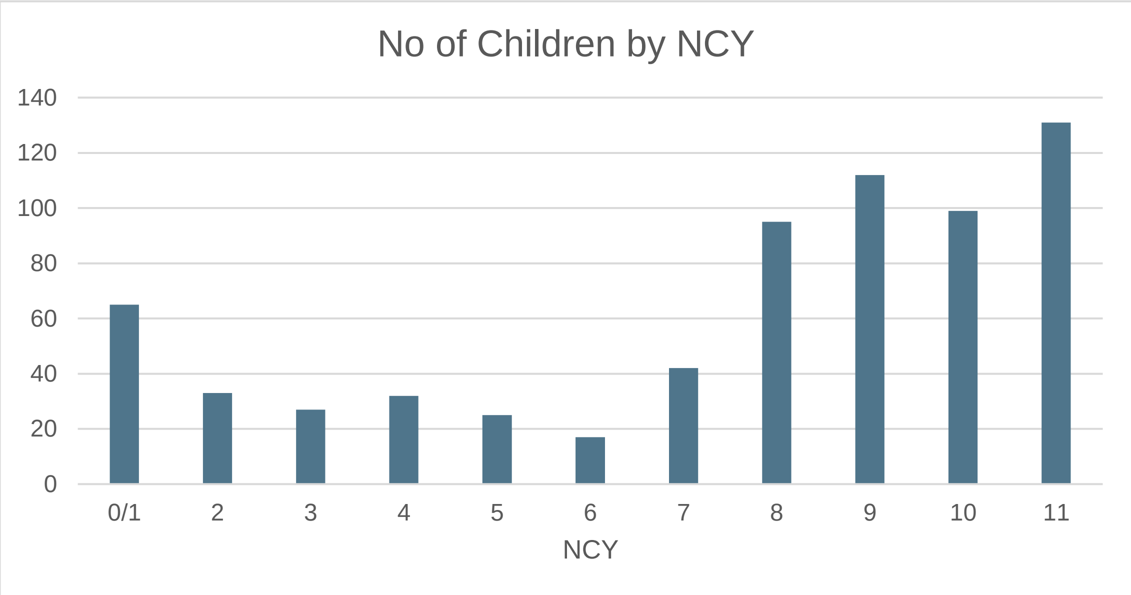
1.1	Working together to improve school attendance (applies from 19 August 2024) sets out the statutory basis for the use of part-time timetables. The law entitles every child of compulsory school age to an efficient, full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude, and any special educational need they may have.
1.2	For the most vulnerable pupils, regular attendance is also an important protective factor and the best opportunity for needs to be identified and support provided. In very exceptional circumstances, where it is in a pupil's best interests, there may be a need for a temporary part-time timetable. A part-time timetable could be considered to support a medical condition which prevents a pupil from attending school full time and is used to help the pupil access as much education as possible.
1.3	Reporting to the Local Authority the use of part-time timetables enables analysis which support best practice to be shared and any areas of further support to be identified and addressed in partnership across the school and Local Authority systems. This data is requested from the Local Authority during both SEND and Children's Services Inspections and to support this duty all schools are requested to report any use of a part-time timetable for individual students.
1.4	To the end of the academic year 2025-26, Rotherham schools shared 1363 reports for pupils accessing part-time timetables, this represents 678 unique pupils supported by part-time timetables.
1.5	Part-time timetables have been reported through Trade Rotherham, inputted into the Council's Management Information System and reviewed by the Strategic Lead Inclusion and Alternative Provision.

2.	Key Issues

2.1 From school reported data 2025 – 2026, the vast majority of part-time timetable are put in place to support Emotionally Based School Avoidance (100% instances across all year groups Years 3 – 11)
In Year 1, 42% timetables are designed to support integration to school.
In Year 2, 60% medical support, 30% support EBSA, 10% integration to school

2.2 From school reported data 2025 – 2026, 29% of part-time timetables are agreed in order to support pupils in primary schools and 71% agreed for secondary aged pupils.
14% pupils with part-time timetables are in KS1
15% pupils are in KS2
37% pupils are in KS3
34% pupils with part time timetables are in KS4

2.3 This breaks down as follows by year group:



2.4 In 2025 – 2026 58% pupils with part-time timetables in place are male.

2.5 From reported data 2025 – 2026, 51% pupils with a part-time timetable are supported by an EHCP, 39% pupil with a part-time timetable have SEND Support.

2.6

Primary Need	Percentage
Autism Spectrum Disorder	36.5%
Hearing Impairment	0.4%
Moderate Learning Difficulty	2.7%
Other Difficulty/Disability	0.4%
Physical Disability	2.3%
Severe Learning Difficulty	0.4%
Social, Emotional & MH	35.0%
Specific Learning Difficulty	1.1%
Speech, Lang, Comm Difficulty	21%
Grand Total	**100%**

2.7	Across all part-time timetables, the most common number of hours a pupil attends school is 18 hours, at each Key Stage the average hours are as follows; KS1 – 21.25 hours KS2 – 13.75 hours KS3 – 16.75 hours KS4 – 18.5 hours
2.8	For reported part-time timetables 2025-2026, the duration of part-time timetables was as follows; Up to half a term – 14% Between half a term and one term – 31% Between one and two terms – 26% Between two and three terms – 23% Beyond three terms – 6%
3. Key Actions and Timelines	
3.1	September 2024 – Part-time timetable online reporting launched at Trade Rotherham
3.2	September 2025- Reminder to all settings of online reporting pathway for part-time timetable reporting
3.3	2025 - 2026 – Best practice part-time timetable use and models of reintegration sharing through; Primary Inclusion Panel, Locality Partnership Panels, Specialist Inclusion Team support meetings with individual schools, Attendance meetings with individual schools and monthly focus at inclusion events.
3.4	September 2026 – Schools will report use of part-time timetables using EYES
3.5	September 2026 – RMBC Part-time timetable guidance updated to reflect changes in national guidance.
3.6	September 2026- Pupil level information regarding part-time timetables to be shared routinely with SEND support services and attendance services to support their planned meetings with schools.
4. Recommendations	
4.1	That the content of the briefing is noted and consideration given to any additional actions required.

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Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

BRIEFING	**TO:**	Schools Forum
	DATE:	18th September 2026
	LEAD OFFICER:	Niall Devlin, Service Director – Education and Inclusion CYPS
	TITLE:	Placements at Aspire

1. Background

1.1 Rotherham's approach to reducing exclusion and enabling inclusion is based on a 3-Tier mode. The 3-Tier alternative provision model promotes a continuum of support as part of an integrated system of early intervention and graduated support.
Tier 1 Outreach
Tier 2 Turn Around/Step Out provision
Tier 3 Day 5 (Provision for permanently excluded pupils)

1.2 This is underpinned by the approach that we have interventions not destinations.

1.3 As part of developing this model, a test and trial period of offering time limited KS 2 and 1 placements at Aspire has been undertaken to evaluate outcomes for identified pupils.

1.4 Pupils identified as experiencing SEMH challenges in school have been offered, through referral at Primary Inclusion Panel, a 12-week intervention placement at Aspire with the intended outcome of a successful return to their mainstream school.

2.1 The current model of support follows the 3-Tier continuum as there is an expectation that pupils are supported at Tier 1 by SEMH outreach services, prior to a referral and recommendation at Primary Inclusion Panel that a period of support via a time limited placement at Aspire (Tier 2) would be appropriate.

2.2 If agreed, a 12-week placement is arranged, with a clear focus from the outset on transition back to the 'home' school. The progress of the placement is monitored via Aspire's internal monitoring, regular review with the 'home' school and at Primary Inclusion Panel. The two-year outcomes data is as follows:

2024-2025
18 places offered with 12-week dual registered duration
(3 places not taken up, parent refusal and PEX prior to placement)

83% male 17% female
67% KS2 33% KS1

Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
4	2	3	4	3	2

Onward destinations:
93% maintained school place
6% special school place through EHCP
1 PEX

2025-2026
17 places offered with 12-week dual registered duration

76% male 24% female
59% KS2 41% KS1

FS2	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
1	2	4	5	2	1	1

Onward destinations:
94% maintained school place (1 awaiting special school through EHCP)
6% parent chose EHE

2.3 The test and trial period has shown that tier 2 provision has had a positive impact on children's educational outcomes. It has also been suggested that a fixed cutoff of 12 weeks is not always in the child's best interest and that some child may benefit form a further four weeks (to support transition back to the child's school). The period of test and trial has been subsidised to date through Aspire's base budget. This is funding they receive to discharge statutory duty in respect of permanently excluded pupils and thus cannot be used on an ongoing basis to fund the entire cost of this provision.

2.4 We would like to build on the success of the test and trial and ensure the long-term viability of this provision. It is proposed to make a nominal charge of £50 per day for time limited placements as a contribution towards the actual cost of funding these and to extend the placements to up to 16 weeks to aid more robust transition back to the 'home' school as a result of learning during the test period.

2.5 There are a small number of children where future placements are already agreed through Primary Inclusion Panel. All existing placements agreed will be honoured on the current terms, with charges coming in for future placements agreed and starting after the implementation date.

2.6 Although the rate of permanent exclusions across the borough has remained stable across 2025/26 when compared to 2024/25, there has been an increase at Primary from 6 to 14 evidencing the ongoing need for this provision.

2.7 The intended outcome of maintaining the provision is that there is an option available to schools to commission a short-term placement at Aspire to support reintegration back to school. A potential risk to implementing a charge to the provision is that this disincentivises schools from using the provision as a preventative measure and they move directly to a permanent exclusion to avoid the charge.

2.8 **Options:**

1. Agreement that a recharge of £50 per day can be made to the 'home' school by Aspire PRU for students accessing the provision. This is less than the actual cost of the provision but is a contribution that allows for long term sustainability of the model. This cost is far less than the cost of other externally commissioned AP and so represents a more affordable option for schools- Recommended Option.

	2. Agreement that schools agree to pay for the cost of tier 2 provision through the schools block. 3. No funding mechanism is agreed and the provision ceases. This represents a risk to schools and pupils as it limits options for pupils at risk of permanent exclusions.
3. Key Actions and Timelines	
3.1	September 2026- Schools Forum decision taken September 2026- Communication regarding any agreed funding arrangements to Primary School Leaders. April 2027- new funding arrangements come into place
4. Financial Implications	
	This proposal is intended to establish a more sustainable funding mechanism for the Aspire Tier 2 intervention model. By shifting part of the cost of inclusion support to those schools generating demand it creates a financial incentive for schools to continue utilising outreach and early intervention support before progressing to a Tier 2 placement. <u>Impact on schools budgets</u> For schools accessing the provision, the proposal will result in a direct charge of £50 per day for future placements. Based on a 12-week placement (approximately 60 school days), the cost would be around £3,000 per placement (£4,000 if extended to 16 weeks). The financial impact on individual schools will be limited to those accessing the service. <u>Impact on Aspire PRU</u> For Aspire PRU, the proposal will generate an income stream that contributes towards the ongoing delivery costs of the programme, reducing reliance on its core budget to subsidise these placements. It would improve the financial sustainability of the PRU. <u>Impact on the Authority's High Needs Budget</u> The proposal does not create any additional financial pressure on the Local Authority's High Needs Budget. However, by supporting earlier intervention and successful reintegration into mainstream education, the model has the potential to mitigate future pressures arising from permanent exclusions, alternative provision placements and more costly specialist provision.
5. Recommendations	
5.1	That Schools Forum note Option 1 as the preferred option- a recharge of £50 per day will be made to the 'home' school by Aspire PRU for students accessing the provision.

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Rotherham Schools Forum Forward Plan 2026/2027

Date of Meeting	Agenda & Reports Publication Date	Issues for Consideration	Lead Officer(s)
Friday 4th December 2026	Thursday 26th November 2026	(a) Dedicated Schools Grant / Schools Budget Update 2026/27 (b) Local Schools Funding Formula Consultation (*this matter will require a vote and the meeting must be quorate)* (c) Early Years Annual Update (d) Safeguarding in Schools Annual Update (e) Exclusion and Suspensions Annual Report (f) Local Area SEND Reform Plan Update	Joshua Amahwe/ Louise Keith Joshua Amahwe/ Louise Keith Aileen Chambers Lindsay Wootton Ashforth Sarah Whitby Mark Cummins
Friday 22nd January 2027	Thursday 14th January 2027	(a) Dedicated Schools Grant / Schools Budget Update 2026/27 (b) Schools Funding Settlement (2027/28) (c) Schools Block Dedicated Budget (2027/28) (d) Early Years Block Dedicated Budget (2027/28) (e) Central School Services Budget Block (2027/28) (f) SEND Sufficiency Strategy Mid Year Update	Joshua Amahwe/ Louise Keith Joshua Amahwe/ Louise Keith Joshua Amahwe/ Louise Keith Joshua Amahwe/ Aileen Chambers Joshua Amahwe/ Louise Keith Mark Cummins

		(g) Local Area SEND Reform Plan Update *(items' c, and e may require a vote and the meeting must be quorate)*	Mark Cummins
Friday 19th March 2027	Thursday 11th March 2027	(a) Dedicated School Grant (DSG) and Schools Budgets 2026-27 Outturn (b) High Needs Budget Block (2027/28) (c) Local Area SEND Reform Plan Update	Joshua Amahwe/ Louise Keith Joshua Amahwe Mark Cummins