

**ROTHERHAM SCHOOLS' FORUM  
FRIDAY 13 SEPTEMBER 2024**

Kirstey Peart - Sitwell Infant (Maintained) (as Chair for Item 1 and Items 3 to 18)  
Joshua Amahwe – Head of Finance, CYPS  
Ashley Blackwell – EHCP Team Manager  
Mark Cummins, SEND Project Lead, CYPS  
Dr. Sipra Deb (PVI Nursery)  
Chris Eccles – Oakwood (Academy)  
Wayne Greenhough – Nexus MAT (Special Academy)  
Lindsey Hadfield – Executive Head, Arnold Nursery  
David Horrigan – Maltby Learning Trust (Primary Academy)  
Lee Morrill – Aspire  
Lewis Moat – GMB Representative  
Colin Price – NEU Representative  
Mark Ryan – RNN Group  
Sharon Stones – Head of Arnold Nursery and Children’s Centre  
Cary-Anne Sykes – Head of Service, SEND  
Nevine Towers - Head of Business and Operations (Primary Academy)  
Pam Ward – Head of Service, Education, CYPS  
Sarah Whitby - Head of Service - Access to Education  
Nathan Williams – Roughwood Primary (Primary Academy)  
Mark Windle – Badsley Primary (Primary Maintained)

**Apologies were received from:-**

Councillor Victoria Cusworth – Cabinet Member for CYPS  
Niall Devlin – Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion  
Louise Keith – Principal Finance Officer, CYPS  
Amy Leech – HR Business Partner  
Lisa McCall – Wales High School  
Vera Njelic - Principal Finance Officer, CYPS  
Steve Scott – Happy Kids (PVI Nursery)

**13. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

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

**14. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR**

Nominations were sought by the Clerk for the position of Chair of the Rotherham Schools Forum for the next two years.

Mrs. K. Peart was proposed and seconded and duly appointed to the position of Chair of Rotherham Schools’ Forum with immediate effect.

**Agreed:-** That Mrs. K. Peart be appointed Chair of the Rotherham Schools Forum for the next two years (2024/25 and 2025/26 academic years).

**15. APPOINTMENT FOR VICE-CHAIR**

Nominations were sought for the position of Vice-Chair of the Rotherham Schools Forum for the next two years.

Mr. M. Windle was proposed and seconded and duly appointed to the position of Vice-Chair of Rotherham Schools' Forum with immediate effect.

**Agreed:-** That Mr. M. Windle be appointed Vice-Chair of the Rotherham Schools Forum for the next two years (2024/25 and 2025/26 academic years).

**16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made.

**17. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

Consideration was given to the minutes from the previous meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2024.

**Agreed:-** That the minutes be approved.

**18. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES**

There were no matters arising.

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

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

The Forum noted that a subgroup was due to meet on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> September to be to review the constitutional and organisational elements of the Forum.

The outcome of those discussions would be reported back to Schools Forum at the November meeting.

**20. SCHOOLS BUDGETS 2024-25 - LATEST POSITION**

Consideration was given to a report presented by Joshua Amahwe, Head of Finance (CYPS) which provided an update on the school's budget for 2024/25 and outlined the main funding changes announced by the DfE since the last Schools Forum in June 2024.

The latest confirmed DSG funding allocation for Rotherham for 2024/25 was £109.7m which included a total of £30.4m in Schools Block funding.

The latest allocation included a change of £363k on the High Needs Block. All other blocks remained unchanged from the last position reported to Schools Forum in June 2024.

The funding allocated to the Local Authority and delegated to maintained schools was 30.45m. The de-delegated budgets for Schools in Financial Difficulty (SIFD) and School Improvement and Trade Union activities were showing a balanced position for 2024-25.

The Local Authority was committed to supporting two schools using the SIFD funding for 2024/25 and it was likely that additional commitments would need to be made as schools continued to face rising costs alongside a drop in pupil numbers.

The latest confirmed allocation of 1.57m for the central block remained unchanged from the March 2024 allocation.

A cost pressure of 1.5m was forecasted for the High Needs block. There was a small increase in the deficit compared with the position in the Safety Valve agreement due to inflationary pressures, increases in EHCP pupils in mainstream settings and specialist provision and continued placements in out of authority independent settings. Work was continuing through the SEND Sufficiency programme to create more local places and provision for pupils with complex needs with the aim of reducing out of authority specialist placements.

Forum Members were assured that although the position on the High Needs Block was slightly adrift from the planned position it was not an immediate cause for concern when compared with the reported position of other Local Authorities.

A balanced budget position was currently forecasted across the Early Years Block, with the brought forward balance at the start of 2024/25 being utilised to fund the Inclusion Support Grant payment to providers. At this stage participation numbers are expected to be in line with budget projections, however Autumn term data (when available) would provide a clearer indication of the overall position.

The Delegated Schools Budget total net balances for maintained settings was set out at 6.1 of the report. When compared to the original budget the July position indicated a net improvement of £536k.

The July budget monitoring showed a decrease in net surplus of £604k compared to the 2023/24 outturn position and was reflective of the increased financial pressures faced by schools.

The latest position also indicated that five schools were now reporting a

deficit balance compared to the original three that had licensed deficits from May's budget submissions. One school had returned to a balanced position.

Since the original budget submission, a further three schools were now projecting deficits in their July budget statements.

It was noted that the Local Authority would continue to monitor those deficits and work closely with schools to support them with recovery plans to manage their overall financial position.

Forum Members were advised that the Department for Education (DfE) had announced that teachers would receive a 5.5% pay increase from September 2024.

The DfE are providing in the region of £1.1 billion in additional funding nationally to support schools (including mainstream, special and alternative provision) with overall costs.

Additional funding would be provided through a new Core Schools Budget Grant which was based on a combination of per-pupil allocation, a lump sum and weighting for disadvantaged pupils.

Schools would receive one payment to cover the 2024-25 financial year and it was expected that that would be paid by the ESFA in November 2024 for local authorities and December 2024 for academies. It was noted that schools were able to check their indicative allocations utilising a calculating tool provided on the DfE website.

Forum Members were informed that due to the timing of the general election the ESFA were unable to announce the school's budget or publish the indicative schools and high needs national funding formula allocations for 2025-26 and as a result the annual funding cycle would differ from previous years and new timelines would be confirmed in due course.

**Agreed:-** (1) That that latest DSG funding for schools for the 2024/25 financial year be noted.

(2) That the financial position of Rotherham's maintained schools and the identified financial risks against the schools DSG budgets for the year be noted.

(3) That the announcements of the Teachers Pay Award alongside the Core School Budget Grant allocation be noted.

(4) That the delay to the publication of the indicative schools and high needs national funding formula (NFF) allocations for 2025-26 due to the timing of the general election be noted.

**21. GROWTH FUND POLICY**

Consideration was given to a report presented by Joshua Amahwe, Head of Finance (CYPS) which provided a timely update on the changes introduced by the DfE in relation to the administration and distribution of growth funding by local authorities.

In 2024/25 more stringent guidelines were introduced by the DfE for the administration and distribution of growth funding. Reference was made to the official policy document appended to the report which provided a clear focus on how growth funding should be utilised.

The Head of Finance explained that the policy was not significantly different to previous practice and growth funding would continue to be ringfenced from the school block funding. The policy set out the criteria that would be applied to allocate funding and funding would then be used to manage and fund impact on schools where agreed growth was identified. It was also clarified that there was provision within the criteria related to funding pupil intake to ensure schools would not be financially disadvantaged.

The Head of Finance confirmed further updates on Growth Funding would be brought to Schools Forum as required.

**Agreed:-** (1) That the changes introduced by the Department for Education (DfE) be noted.

(2) That the local Growth Policy be approved and adopted for Rotherham.

**22. FREE SCHOOL MEALS - AUTO ENROLMENT UPDATE**

Consideration was given to a report presented by Joshua Amahwe, Head of Finance (CYPS) which provided an update on the final results of the Free School Meals (FSM) auto enrolment process.

It was noted that work on the project had begun in November 2023. The main aims of the project were to ensure that families were receiving what they were entitled to and that schools received the pupil premium grant associated with free school meals.

The project involved carrying out a data matching exercise using revenue and benefit data and school census data. Following the completion of the data matching work a list of families eligible but not currently claiming Free School Meals was collated.

Three hundred and sixty letters were issued to eligible families requesting consent to register for Free School Meals, of those letters issued three opted out of the process.

Following completion of the exercise a total of three hundred and forty

children were auto enrolled resulting in an approximate saving for families of £136,000 and approximate additional Pupil Premium funding of £502,560 for schools.

Details relating to which schools would see the biggest gain in funding were set out in section 4.3 of the report.

The Head of Finance emphasised that it remained important for schools to reflect the information in their census data returns as this would drive funding for the national funding formula and pupil premium.

The Forum commended the excellent piece of work carried out and welcomed the positive outcome achieved.

**Agreed:-** That the total number of additional families identified through the process and the additional pupil premium generated be noted.

## 23. MATRIX OF NEED

Consideration was given to a presentation provided by Cary-Anne Sykes, Head of Service - SEND (circulated with the agenda papers) which provided an overview on the development of a key piece of work relating to SEND Thresholds.

The presentation highlighted:-

- A SEND Thresholds document would be created based on a Graduated Approach to identifying and meeting needs.
- The work was part of the national agenda and linked to the SEND Strategy currently out for consultation.
- The three key priorities for the Borough – Equity, Inclusion and Ambition.
- The need for consistency across the whole system with a transparent approach.
- Guidance to be created as an online document. Reference was made to the Gateshead paperwork as an example, detailing clear blocks for Early Years, Primary and Secondary (mainstream) and Post 16.
- Detailed threshold descriptors for each block.
- Cognition and learning would be the biggest piece of work to make Rotherham centric.
- Every area at every level would have a Preparation for Adulthood (PfA) outcome.
- Task and Finish Groups to be established to review the document and ensure it reflects Rotherham. Engagement would be welcomed with as many as possible in each area.
- SEND Thresholds would provide a framework and clear pathway and understanding of each level of need.
- The Thresholds guidance would be used for consistency of

judgement and was expected to lead to improved transitions between academic phases.

- The need for full and ongoing involvement of the young person and their parent/carers.
- The provision of a Training programme to support implementation alongside personal support and advice.

It was acknowledged that this was a huge piece of work, with the primary focus initially being the development of the Thresholds document. Consideration would then be given to the criteria for entry for each provision and each area would be broken down into detail to provide clarity.

Discussion ensued about how Post 16 providers would be involved in the work and how information would be shared. Comments were also acknowledged regarding the potential impact of any associated costs to mainstream settings.

It was confirmed that all areas would be invited to participate in the development of the threshold proposals and once developed detailed consultation with various stakeholders would then take place.

Agreed:- (1) That the presentation be received and the contents noted.

(2) That the link to the document be re-circulated to Schools Forum Members via the Clerk.

(3) That SENCO Leads be invited to attend a 1-hour online session to discuss the SEND Threshold proposals.

## **24. SEND SUFFICIENCY UPDATE**

Consideration was given to the report presented by Mark Cummins, Transformation Lead, which provided an update on Rotherham's SEND Sufficiency data that provided comparisons to the national position where data was available to do so.

The data included within the report had been taken from a number of different sources including the local authorities Safety Valve data dashboard, SEN2 statutory returns and placement tracking information.

A number of key points from the report were highlighted:-

- 22.2% of Rotherham statutory aged pupils had either a statutory plan for Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND), known as an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or were receiving SEND support. This compared to a national average of 18.4%.
- 5.5% of Rotherham's statutory agenda pupils had an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) compared to a national average of 4.8%.

- Rotherham had 3310 active EHCP's in place for all children and young people 0-25yr old at the SEN2 census date in January 2024. This was 425 more plans than the previous year's return and represented an increase of 14.7% compared to a national increase of 11%.
- Requests for EHCP assessments have continued to rise in Rotherham with a 72% increase since 2018. Over the past 12 months there had been a 16.1% increase in requests.
- 61% of all new requests to assess for an EHCP were from schools, with 30% from parents/carers and family members. These percentages had remained relatively flat since 2018.
- The most local prevalent need types were Autism, SEMH, Speech Language and Communication, and Cognition and Learning.
- Indicators against national comparators show that Rotherham had less children who attended mainstream schools with an EHCP and more children attending specialist provision. This pattern was also replicated in Post 16 education with more children attending independent provision.

Forum Members were advised that the data was used for several different purposes including Safety Valve and Send Sufficiency work.

It was recognised that there had been an increase in the availability of some specialist SEND resource provision for this academic year and further provision was expected to be accessible from the next academic year which should generate a shift in some of the data.

**Agreed:-** That the SEND Sufficiency Update report be received and noted.

## 25. **REDUCED TIMETABLES - UNDERSTANDING AND IMPACT**

Consideration was given to a report presented by Sarah Whitby, Head of Service – Access to Education, which provided context and understanding of the use and prevalence of Part Time Timetables across Rotherham settings.

It was noted that the Local Authority had a statutory duty to monitor and report on pupil's missing out on full time education.

Data referenced within the report focused on data provided from the 2023-24 return. It was recognised that systems for returning information across Rotherham had not been as robust as the service would have liked however the service had worked hard to embed and strengthen those systems.

Of the 120 settings across the Borough, 61 schools provided a return from the 2023-24 academic year and of those schools 56 reported the use of part-time timetables. Five schools reported a nil return each month and the position was unknown for the remaining 59 settings.



A new collection system, which was now in place, would prompt all schools to make a return, including nil returns, to provide assurance that details of all children accessing part-time provision was captured.

The Forum noted that the use of part time timetables had increased in Secondary settings with a peak at KS4. The highest use of part-time timetables in Primary settings was for reception aged pupils, recognising that some children in Reception would not yet have achieved statutory school age.

It was also noted that 79% of students reported were on the SEND register and 43% had an EHCP. Forum Members were advised that to keep the use of part-time provision for students with an EHCP in close focus relevant information was also shared where needed with the EHCP team.

In 2023-24 22% of children reported had an open Social Care involvement and 47% had a least one open Early Help involvement within the academic year.

A relaunch of the part time timetable guidance alongside new reporting arrangements would take place later this month and it was suggested that this also included SENCO networks and the Secondary Heads Forum.

Termly analysis of data would begin alongside the distribution of child level data to relevant teams to share awareness and strengthen collaborative working practices. Proposals were also shared on the commencement of annual reporting on the Use of Part-time Timetables to Schools Forum.

Discussion ensued on the potential linked financial implications of the use of part-time timetables.

Forum Members also expressed an interest in understanding the numbers of children reported using part-time timetables that were on the SEND register that were awaiting special school provision and whether this information could be included in the annual report going forward.

It was recognised that there were several strands to this area of work with a number of wider issues to consider. Understanding the drivers behind the use of part-time timetables was crucial and consequently dialogue with settings would take place if it was identified that part-time timetables had been used inappropriately within a setting.

Forum Members enquired if there was any national data on the use of part-time timetables to be able to compare against Rotherham's position. The Head of Service for Access to Education confirmed that there was no national data available as this data was not published in the same way as attendance and exclusion data.

**Agreed:-** (1) That the report be received and the contents noted.

(2) That a report on the use of Part-time Timetables be presented to the Schools Forum on an annual basis.

## **26. ANNUAL EXCLUSIONS DATA**

Consideration was given to a report presented by Sarah Whitby, Head of Service – Access to Education, which provided context to the rising use of suspension and exclusions reported nationally and mirrored locally.

The report highlighted that there had been a rise in the use of suspensions and exclusions reported nationally and similar trends had also been seen locally with rates for permanent exclusions rising above national levels over the last two years.

Locally collated and verified data had identified a difference to the data reported centrally through the census. The Local Authorities data team were currently analysing the data closely to understand the differences reported. It was also recognised that data from academic years 2019-20 and 2020-21 was impacted by periods of national lockdown and should be interpreted with caution.

Fixed term exclusions had remained at a relatively stable level between 2016-2019 for Secondary settings but had subsequently been on an upward trajectory since 2021. In Primary settings numbers of fixed term exclusions had fallen in 2023-24.

Discarding lockdown data, fluctuations had been seen across Primary settings for permanent exclusions with 13 permanent exclusions issued for primary age children in 2023-24.

The borough wide rise in exclusions was due to the increase in Secondary exclusions, which had risen year on year since 2021.

Analysis of Secondary setting suspension data showed a peak at Year 9 for suspensions issued which could be associated to the fact there had been no transitional activities in place for pupils moving from Primary to Secondary settings due to the lockdown period. Analysis of Primary setting suspension data showed peaks at Year 2 and Year 6.

Permanent exclusions were highest in Year 10 at Secondary with 34 exclusions issued. Year 7 exclusions were raised as a concern with 18 exclusions issued for this year group, 13 of which were for a physical assault against an adult or pupil.

In Primary settings it was noted that the highest numbers of exclusions were at Year 2 and 4, with 6 out of the total 7 exclusions for these year groups being related to a physical assault against an adult or pupil. There

was also a higher percentage of SEND pupils excluded from primary settings than seen in secondary settings.

Several key actions were highlighted as set out in Section 3 of the report.

Forum Members acknowledged the significant impact the exposure of social media platforms had had on negative pupil behaviour in educational settings.

Forum Members queried if an upward trend had been seen in the numbers of assaults being reported and if this was reflective in the increase seen in the numbers of exclusions due to assaults. The Head of Service explained that there had been an increase in the numbers of assaults reported and statistics could be analysed to consider any differences in settings in conjunction with how those settings are managed and supported.

**Agreed:-** (1) That the report be received and the contents noted.

(2) That a report on the Exclusions and Suspensions be presented to the Schools Forum on an annual basis.

## 27. **SCHOOLS' FORUM FORWARD PLAN**

The Chair invited Forum Members to review the Forward Plan of agenda items and share any other items for inclusion.

The Clerk noted the following item for future discussion and would liaise with the relevant officer(s) on achievable reporting timescales.

- Childcare Expansion (including Wraparound Programme and uptake)

**Agreed:-** That the updates be received and noted.

**Action: Clerk**

## 28. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There were no other urgent business items to consider.

## 29. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

**Agreed:-** That the next meeting of the Schools' Forum takes place on Friday, 15<sup>th</sup> November, 2024 at 8.30am at Rockingham Professional Development Centre.