

ROTHERHAM SCHOOLS' FORUM
FRIDAY 5 DECEMBER 2025

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)
Simon Currie – School Governor Representative (Primary Maintained)
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
Steve Scott – Happy Kids (PVI Nursery)
Karen Smith - Nexus MAT (Special Academy)
Nathan Williams – Roughwood Primary (Primary Academy)
Paula Williams – Special School Governor Representative (Special Academy)
Joel Wirth – Principal TRC and Deputy CEO Inspire Trust (Secondary Academy)

Joshua Amahwe – Head of Finance (CYPS)
Niall Devlin – Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion
Kerry Hurst - Service Lead – Early Years and Childcare Funding, Sufficiency and Information
Louise Keith – Principal Finance Officer (CYPS)
Liz Nicholson – Early Years & Childcare Sufficiency & Information Co-ordinator
Lindsay Wootton-Ashforth – Education Safeguarding Lead
Pam Ward – Head of Service, Education

Apologies were received from:-

Councillor Victoria Cusworth – Cabinet Member for Children and Young People
Dr Sipra Deb – Wickesley Nursery (PVI Nursery)
Mehdi Najefi - School Governor Representative (Primary Maintained)
Sarah Philips – School Governor Representative (Primary Maintained)
Colin Price – NEU Representative
Nevine Towers - Head of Business and Operations (Primary Academy)

24. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

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

25. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

26. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous meeting held on

Friday 12th September 2025.

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 12th September 2025 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

27. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

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

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

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

Resolved:

1. That the resignation of Sacha Schofield, representing Special Academy Governors be received.
2. That the appointment of Paula Williams as a Special Academy Governor, replacing Sacha Schofield, be agreed.

29. SCHOOL FUNDING FORMULA CONSULTATION 2026/27 - PART A

The Principal Finance Officer (Schools Finance) presented a report informing Schools Forum of the outcomes from Part A of the consultation on Rotherham's local schools funding formula for 2026/27 and outlined proposed changes prior to submission to the Department for Education (DfE) by January 2026.

The consultation was conducted in November 2025, with 55 responses received (43 primary schools, 11 secondary schools, and 1 all-through school), representing an overall response rate of 49%.

The key proposals consulted on were:

- The continued inclusion of existing funding factors aligned to the National Funding Formula (NFF).
- Setting the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) at 0%.
- The continued use of capping and scaling to ensure affordability.
- Deducting £100,000 from the Schools Block to establish a Pupil Growth Fund.
- Deducting £50,000 from the Schools Block to maintain a Falling Rolls Fund.

It was noted that Rotherham's existing local funding formula already closely mirrored the NFF.

Details of the responses of the school's consultation was outlined in the report provided and summarised as follows:

Formula Funding Factors

Question 1 : Do you support the continued inclusion of the above funding factors in Rotherham's 2026/27 schools funding formula and the intention to mirror, or align as closely as possible, to the National Funding Formula (NFF) values?

Consultation Response:

Of the total responses representing 55 schools, 100% supported the proposal.

Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG)

Question 2 : Do you support the proposal to set the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) within the local funding formula at 0% for 2026-27?

Consultation Response:

Of the total responses representing 55 schools, 100% supported the proposal.

It was also noted that since the consultation had closed, the Department for Education (DfE) had confirmed that the allowable range for the Minimum Funding Guarantee would remain the same

Capping and Scaling

Question 3 : Do you support the continued use of capping and scaling in Rotherham's 2026/27 schools funding formula to ensure fairness in resource and distribution and overall affordability of the funding formula?

Consultation Response:

Of the total responses representing 55 schools, 46 schools (84%) supported the proposal, whilst 9 schools (16%) were opposed. No additional comments were provided to explain the reasons for opposition.

Pupil Growth

Question 4 : Do you support the proposal to deduct £100,000 from the 2026/27 Schools Block to establish a Growth Fund, which will be used to support schools providing additional places to meet basic need? This represents a £50,000 reduction compared to 2025/26.

Consultation Response:

Of the total responses representing 55 schools, 46 schools (84%) supported the proposal, whilst 9 schools (16%) were opposed.

Falling Pupil Rolls Fund**Question 5 : Do you agree that the Local Authority should continue to provide for falling rolls fund of £50,000 to schools with surplus capacity from falling pupil numbers – to be deducted from the schools block funding?****Consultation Response:**

Of the total responses representing 5 schools, 46 schools (84%) supported the proposal, whilst 9 schools (16%) were opposed.

It was noted that the Local Authority was awaiting confirmation of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocations and would report back to the Schools Forum on this early in the new year.

Discussions focused on understanding why nine schools opposed certain proposals and whether these were the same schools across different questions or varied by maintained or academy status. It was noted that no reasons were provided in their responses, and that responses from Multi Academy Trusts were recorded for each individual school rather than as a single combined response.

It was highlighted that there was concern within the sector that deprivation related factors continue to increase whilst the minimum funding per-pupil level remained unchanged, leaving some schools at the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) level. The Head of Finance explained there was little flexibility to redirect funding due to DfE rules, but efforts continue to be made to try to reduce the number of schools at MFG level where possible.

Discussion continued to focus on demographic trends, birth rates, and new housing developments impacting pupil numbers and place planning, including how housing growth was reflected in current modelling. It was confirmed that the Access to Education Team would be able to provide more detailed analysis on school capacity and place planning for discussion at a future Forum meeting.

Forum Members raised concerns about pressures on Growth and Falling Rolls Funds and asked whether eligibility criteria considers if a school or trust had reserves and how prioritisation to access funding was managed. The Head of Finance confirmed that policies set out criteria for accessing funding and required schools to demonstrate strategic planning before requesting support. Financial position and use of reserves would be considered as part of the assessment.

Only one request for Falling Rolls funding had been received so far and

was still being assessed. It was confirmed that any unused funding would be recycled back into the DSG reserves and would form part of the following year's Schools Block budget.

Resolved:

- 1. That Schools Forum note the contents of the report.**
- 2. That a detailed analysis of School Capacity and Place Planning be presented at a future Schools Forum meeting.**

30. SCHOOL FUNDING FORMULA CONSULTATION 2026/27 - PART B

The Head of Finance presented a report which focused on Part B of the Schools Funding Formula consultation outcome and specifically the proposed percentage transfer of funding from the school's block to the high needs block of the Dedicated Schools Grant for 2026/27.

Consultation was undertaken in November 2025, and 62 responses were received, representing a 49% response rate. Of those responses, 53% of schools supported the transfer, while 47% opposed it. No contextual comments were provided by schools to explain the reasons for opposing the proposal.

It was acknowledged that the consultation outcome reflected an improvement compared to last year's 38% support. The increased support was considered a positive reflection of the work undertaken over the past year to raise awareness of SEND challenges through discussions at the Rotherham Schools Forum.

The rationale for the transfer was based on significant High Needs funding pressures caused by rising SEND demand, an increase in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), and costly out-of-authority placements.

The impact on schools was expected to be minimal as the transfer represented a small proportion of the £270m Schools Block. A Minimum Funding Guarantee of 0% would ensure that no school experiences a reduction in per-pupil funding compared to 2025/26. The local funding formula would also align with the National Funding Formula to provide transparency and stability.

It was noted that 2025/26 was the final year of DfE Safety Valve support, with no further government funding expected.

The SEND Sufficiency Strategy continued to address challenges through actions such as expanding specialist provision and resource bases, reducing reliance on independent placements, improving governance, and collaborating with schools to maintain pupils in mainstream settings wherever possible.

Concerns about pressures on SEND and SENCO funding in particularly for smaller primary schools were discussed and clarification was sought on whether the 0.5% transfer would offset existing challenges or impact current school operations. The Head of Finance explained that the transfer had been applied for several years and was embedded within the funding formula, representing a deduction from the overall DSG position rather than an additional burden.

The Forum noted that a number of primary schools had responded opposing the proposal, which prompted discussion on whether this was due to budgetary concerns or other underlying issues. The Assistant Director for Education and Inclusion confirmed that they had written to the CEO of one Multi-Academy Trust in an attempt to understand their position.

Forum Members highlighted pressures across the system, including assessment demands, Ofsted frameworks, and the increasing complexity of SEND needs.

The Head of Finance explained that the proposed transfer represented a contribution towards managing High Needs funding pressures rather than a solution to the cumulative DSG deficit. Uncertainty remained around central government plans post-2028, reinforcing the need for a prudent approach to continue mitigating deficits locally.

Discussions also acknowledged wider societal challenges, including the impact of child poverty and the central government plans to address these issues. It was highlighted that increasing levels of need in Reception and Key Stage 1 reflected broader social challenges and the importance of early support for young children.

Having considered the outcome of Part B of the consultation the Schools Forum were required to undertake a vote to establish whether the Forum supported the proposal to transfer 0.5% of schools block funding to the high needs budget.

Of the school members eligible to vote on this matter, 13 voted in favour of the proposal, one voted against the proposal and there were no abstentions. Therefore, the proposal was agreed.

Resolved:

- 1. That Schools Forum note the outcomes of the recent consultation with schools regarding the proposed transfer of funding to the High Needs Block.**
- 2. That Schools Forum approve the Council's proposal to transfer 0.5% of the schools block funding in 2026/27 to the High Needs Budget to help address ongoing cost pressures.**

31. FALLING ROLLS FUND POLICY

The Principal Finance Officer presented a report outlining the Department for Education (DfE) guidance on Falling Rolls and the adoption of a proposed local policy for Rotherham.

The Falling Rolls Policy has been developed in response to a decline in birth rates in Rotherham, which had led to surplus places in primary schools. This trend was expected to continue for several years, and the policy aimed to ensure the viability of schools until numbers recovered.

The Forum noted the proposed policy eligibility criteria for funding, as outlined in the report, which was:

- **Minimum Reduction Threshold:** Schools must show a reduction of at least 10% in pupil numbers between two consecutive October census dates.
- **Demographic Justification:** The reduction must be due to demographic or structural changes, supported by SCAP projections showing recovery within 3 to 5 years.
- **Surplus Capacity:** The school must have surplus capacity that exceeds a minimum number of pupils or a percentage of its Published Admission Number (PAN) e.g. minimum 15% of PAN.
- **Exclusions:** The reduction cannot result from bulge classes or planned PAN reductions agreed with the local authority.
- **Curriculum Impact:** Funding must address risks to curriculum delivery caused by reduced funding.

Resolved:

1. **That Schools Forum note the DfE guidance on Falling Rolls.**
2. **That Schools Forum approve the adoption of the proposed Falling Rolls Policy for Rotherham.**

32. EARLY YEARS AND WRAPAROUND EXPANSION UPDATE

The Forum received an update on developments over the past 12 months relating to the DfE Early Years Expansion, Wraparound Childcare Programme, and the School-Based Nurseries Programme with particular reference made to the following:-

Early Years Expansion

- Following the Spring Budget 2023 announcement, the 30 hours childcare entitlement was to be extended to children aged nine

months and above by September 2025.

- A total of £538k in capital funding supported the expansion, resulting in 963 new places being created against a projected need of 1,031.
- Recruitment of qualified staff continues to be challenging, with initiatives such as an Early Years Job Shop and targeted campaigns underway to address this.

School-Based Nurseries Programme

- Four Rotherham schools secured funding to create nursery places: Todwick (80 places), Greasbrough (32), Rockingham (60), and Thorpe Hesley (54).
- Additional Foundation 1 classes commenced in September 2025 at Aston All Saints (50 places) and Sitwell Infant (52 places).
- Phase 2 applications would close on 11 December 2025, focusing on provision for two-year-olds and under-twentwo.

Wraparound Childcare Programme

- The programme aimed to provide universal access to childcare from 8am to 6pm by September 2026.
- £2.3m in funding had been allocated, creating 1,575 new places across 59 schools, with 76 schools now offering a full 10-hour wraparound service.
- All schools now provide breakfast clubs, and 18 schools offer after-school activities.

Breakfast Clubs Early Adopter Programme

- Two Rotherham schools, (Coleridge and East Dene), were participating in the national test phase.
- An additional £80m in funding was announced for the national rollout from April 2026.

It was noted that strong progress had been made in expanding provision, whilst recruitment and sufficiency remained priority areas of work with partners.

Forum Members welcomed the report and the ongoing positive developments in the Early Years sector. Officers confirmed that a spending and delivery plan would be submitted to the Department for Education in February and assured the Forum that all allocated funding would be utilised.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the content of the report.

33. SAFEGUARDING IN SCHOOLS

The Forum received a briefing from the Head of Service – Education and the Education Safeguarding Lead (ESL) on recent safeguarding developments and the role of the ESL. The ESL, who was appointed in January 2023 and jointly funded by RSCP and DSG, had provided both strategic and operational leadership on safeguarding. Key responsibilities included delivering audits, supporting Ofsted preparation, coordinating termly Education Safeguarding Forum meetings, developing training for DSLs and governors, and ensuring compliance with national and local guidance.

The ESL also represented education on key panels and responded to safeguarding complaints and Ofsted concerns.

The Education Safeguarding Forum held termly meetings with over 95% school attendance and involved multi-agency partners. Focus areas included statutory guidance, child exploitation, vaping and illicit substances, contextual safeguarding, online risks, hate crime, knife crime, modern slavery, Prevent updates, and emerging threats.

The Forum welcomed the update and recorded their appreciation to the Education Safeguarding Lead for their positive impact.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum receive and note the content of the report.

34. SCHOOLS FORUM FORWARD PLAN

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

Resolved:

- That School Capacity and Place Planning Analysis be included as a future item on the Forward Plan.**
- That any additions to the Forward Plan be submitted to the Secretary of the Forum for consideration and inclusion.**

35. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

A Forum Member raised that very little information was currently shared on exam access arrangements for students transitioning into post-16

provision, primarily due to GDPR issues. A suggestion was made that this matter could initially be addressed through the NEET Reduction Group.

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