

Islington Schools Forum

Meeting documents and minutes published on [Islington Schools Forum webpage](#).

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 25 May 2023, Committee Room 1, Town Hall

Attendees

Present

- Maggie Elliott (ME); Governor, Montem Primary School (Edventure Collaborative Federation with Drayton Park) (Vice-chair and Chair of this meeting)
- Joy (Odunayo) Abegunde (JOA), Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), Islington Play Association
- Jenny Lewis (JL); Head teacher, Thornhill Primary School
- Alan Streeter (AS); Head teacher, Beacon High Secondary School (Islington Futures Federation)
- Fiona MacCorquodale (FM); Head teacher, Prior Weston Primary School and Children's Centre (Interim Vice-chair)
- Andrew Bosi (AB); Governor, Rotherfield Primary School
- Claire Hersey (CHe); Principal Finance Officer, City of London Academy Trust
- Joe Simpson (JS); Governor, St Peter and St Paul's Primary
- Paul Lasok (PL); Governor, St Aloysius Secondary School (and St Joseph's)
- Matthew Hillman (MH), The Pears Family School
- Francis Gonzalez (FG); Head teacher, Richard Cloudesley Special School

Other attendees

- Tim Partington (TP); Assistant Director Finance Children's Schools and Resources
- Debbie Stevenson (DS); Head of Early Years and Schools Finance Services

- Jon Abbey (JA); Corporate Director Children's Services
- Alison Cramer (AC); Assistant Director, School Support and Information Services
- Jane Wright (JW); Manager Schools and EY Governance (Clerk)

Observer

- Local Authority Corporate Finance, Kate Bingham

Apologies

- Abi Misselbrook-Lovejoy (AM-L); Executive Head teacher, Rotherfield and Newington Green Primary Schools (Chair)
- Patrick Mildren (PM); Head teacher, Canonbury Primary School
- Tanya Watson (TW); Head teacher, William Tyndale (Primary Academy)
- Penny Barratt (PB); CEO, The Bridge MAT
- Susan Service (SS); Head teacher, Arts & Media School Islington
- Nigel Smith (NS); Head teacher, New River College (Pupil Referral Unit)
- Cllr Angelo Weekes (AW); Islington Council – non-Executive Member
- Cassie Moss (CM); Head teacher, Yerbury Primary School (Vice-chair)
- Coleen Marshall (CM), 14-19 Partnership, City and Islington College (attempted to access the meeting remotely)
- Sarah Callaghan (SC); Director of Learning and Culture
- Candy Holder (CH), Head of Pupil Services

Not in attendance

- Vicky Linsley (VL); Head teacher, St Mary Magdalene Academy (Secondary)

Meeting minutes

No.	Agenda item	Action
1.	<p>Welcome/Apologies for absence/not in attendance</p> <p>ME welcomed all to the meeting.</p> <p>Apologies as above.</p>	
2.	<p>Declaration of interests</p> <p>The Clerk asked if anyone had a pecuniary or non-pecuniary interest to declare in relation to the agenda items at this meeting. None were declared.</p>	
3.	<p>Schools forum composition – for information and decision</p> <p>The clerk (JW) spoke to a report previously circulated.</p> <p>Update on forthcoming vacancies / end of terms of office</p> <p>3.1. Primary Academy representative</p> <p>To replace Tanya Watson, Headteacher of William Tyndale, as Primary Academy representative from September 2023, the Clerk to the Forum was proposing to write to the Heads of Primary Academies asking them to appoint a new representative. The aim was to have a new representative agreed in time for them to observe the July 2023 meeting to help with their induction and to prepare them for taking up their position from 1 September 2023.</p> <p>3.2. Free School Alternative Provision</p> <p>It was recommended that, as The Pears Family School is the only Free School Alternative Provision in Islington, Matthew Hillman, the Head of Pears, continues in this position up to 31 July 2026, unless another Free School AP is established in the borough before then.</p> <p>3.3. Election of chair in July 2023</p> <p>The Clerk reminded Forum that the current chair, AM-L, was due to step down as chair at the end of the academic year and that an election for chair would therefore be held at the July Forum meeting.</p>	JW

	<p>The Clerk will invite nominations ahead of the meeting. It will need to be a head teacher as there is already a governor holding one of the vice-chair positions.</p> <p>Updates agreed and noted</p>	JW
4.	<p>Minutes of the previous meetings:</p> <p>4.1. Forum meeting held on 19 January 2023</p> <p>Accuracy – the minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting, subject to amendment of the word ‘oddities’ to ‘deviations’ in Item 5, page 6.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matters arising (not covered on the agenda) <p>Item 4 – in relation to circulating secondary roll projections, AC clarified that the GLA data had just been received and work was due to commence on updating the roll projections, which would be shared with Forum, at potentially the July meeting.</p> <p>Item 10 – Capital Subgroup - plan for use of premises managers’ houses in May – ME said she would report back from the last Capital Subgroup later in the meeting. The plan was not available yet.</p> <p>4.2. Extraordinary meeting held on 23 March 2023</p> <p>Accuracy – the minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matters arising (not covered on the agenda) – AC confirmed that all Quality Assurance (QA) processes were in train, with surveys of heads and chairs to take place after half-term. 	
5.	<p>Scheme for Financing Schools (DfE)</p> <p>DS spoke to a report previously circulated. The item was for noting.</p> <p>There were no major changes for 2023-24 in the DfE document setting out the financial relationship between the LA and its maintained schools. Islington are proposing some minor amendments set out in appendix A (with tracked changes) and will be consulting with schools on</p>	Action

	<p>these during June. The document will then come back to Forum on 13 July for approval.</p> <p>The main changes were in the escalation process when schools are in deficit/projected to be in deficit, and the titles of posts dealing with Notices of Concern. One proposal is for involvement of an extra tier of senior management in addition to the Corporate Director of Children's Services, and the Corporate Director of Finance – in dealing with schools in deficit. The extra tier will be the Director of Learning and Culture and the Assistant Director of Finance, Children, Schools and Resources.</p> <p>There is the possibility of a slimmed down approach to the scheme in 2024-25.</p> <p>Noted</p>	
<p>6.</p>	<p>Draft School Balances 2022-23</p> <p>DS spoke to a report that had been circulated in advance.</p> <p>The figures, reported annually to the DfE, were draft. The report to Forum in July will include the final balances including schools' planned uses of revenue for capital spend.</p> <p>The school balances for year ending March 2023 totalled £6.291m, compared to a balance of £8.313m in 2021-22. This represented a net decrease of 24% (£2.022m).</p> <p>There were currently 15 schools in deficit, compared to 10 at March 2022, while 65% of maintained schools who have submitted their budgets for 2023/24 are showing an in-year deficit, with a total value of about £1.5m.</p> <p>The LA was working with the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) on this matter. ESFA were providing School Resource Management Advisors to support schools with how to deal with their situations.</p> <p>CH queried how much of the deficits related to running costs (in-year expenditure) as opposed to one-off projects. Also, what the LA was expecting to be factored in for pay increases. DS replied that originally a 3% increase was factored in, and that is the rate within the budgets that schools are signing off by end of May 2023. The DfE has since said it was funding a 4.5% increase. Latest news was suggesting 6.5%.</p>	

	<p>In relation to support staff, in 2022-23, there had been a flat rate of £2,355, for Inner London and the offer was the same for 2023-24. Unions were currently consulting members about strike action.</p> <p>DS confirmed that governing boards should sign off budgets now, even with some details of pay increases yet to be factored in. In the autumn, budgets were to be reforecast with up-to-date information.</p> <p>JS queried what mechanism there was for coherent conversations about bottom lines across the borough. JA, who leads on Admissions in the London Directors of Children’s Services group, updated on the Islington position relative to other boroughs. Islington was in the process of amalgamating two schools and in the informal stage of other arrangements.</p> <p>JS asked for a conversation about the School Organisation Plan with Chairs at their forthcoming meeting on 21 June. In relation to a query from ME as to whether we were waiting for the situation to be so bad that the DfE would step in, JA replied that the LA has a statutory duty to plan school places and was implementing a strategic plan in stages.</p> <p>In response to a challenge from AB that we hadn’t shared details/figures in the School Organisation Plan with Schools Forum, AC clarified these had been shared with Headteachers and will be shared with Chairs in due course.</p> <p>AS asked what the plan was for supporting schools unable to fund the projected extra 1.5% staff pay. DS acknowledged this would add to schools’ deficits if left unchecked; schools would need to consider alternative models for operating by using scenario planning. Schools would be required to consider this further in the autumn once updated information from DfE is available and build into re-forecasted budget plans for submission to the LA. The LA has a responsibility to report how it will support its schools in deficit.</p> <p>ME asked what rate of inflation had been built into the models – DS replied that the LA does not build in a blanket rate as schools manage their own contracts. Income in 2024-25 – added 1% factor, this was on top of the Mainstream Schools Additional Grant which will be rolled into the Schools Block funding formula from 2024-25.</p> <p>JS felt there was a psychological change when many schools are in deficit – carrot and stick approach only works when there are a few schools not managing their budget well. There had been a big shift in the situation since 2018.</p>	
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	<p>DS clarified that final balances would be reported at the July Forum.</p> <p>Noted</p>	
7.	<p>DSG Budget Monitor (2022-23)</p> <p>TP spoke to a report that had been circulated in advance.</p> <p>The provisional year end DSG balance was £5.083m surplus, but there was an in-year overspend of £135K.</p> <p>Schools Block - contributing to the overall overspend was a spend of £0.5m to partially resolve the holiday pay issue of term-time only staff for maintained schools buying into the Council's payroll service.</p> <p>De-delegated services - there was a balance of £0.156m against de-delegated services – Forum will discuss how to best use this funding in autumn 2023.</p> <p>Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) – funding for central services being phased out over five years by the Government. Balance of £53K being used to smooth out future funding reductions, eg £59K in 2023-24.</p> <p>High Needs Block - there was a provisional in-year underspend of £646K, bringing the balance to £3.284m. Forum was reminded of the huge cost pressures on high needs. In the past few years, funding had increased by 2% to 3% each year – the increases were now ending. The High Needs budget would be sufficient up to 2024-25, then there would be the danger of deficit.</p> <p>Early Years Block – a provisional in-year overspend of £591K, bringing the balance to £867K. This would be held in a planned way to offset retrospectively reductions from the January 2023 Census.</p> <p>In relation to the holiday back pay for TTO staff, academies and maintained schools not using the payroll service will be reimbursed for this back pay. Forum was advised that there may be more costs to come in relation to this issue, as liable to pay back the last two years. More information would come to headteachers about this. TP commented that Islington had gained from legal issues being ironed out by other LAs. DS said there was the possibility of the LA supporting schools with the back pay, but once changes are fully</p>	Action:

	<p>implemented, this would represent an additional cost pressure to schools' budgets.</p> <p>JS noted that given surplus of physical space (with reduced school rolls), now was the time to make sure to use the surplus HN money before it ran out – get on with the SEND strategy in the next year. Possibly expand the Additionally Resourced Provisions (ARPs),</p> <p>JA acknowledged the importance of aligning the School Organisation Plan, SEND Strategy and the Capital plan – the challenge was building works taking place sequentially.</p> <p>AC said that consideration was being given to the long term plan for the Vittoria School buildings.</p> <p>ME (Chair of Capital Subgroup) reported that progress had been made in the past six months in relation to disposal of the premises managers' houses on some school sites.</p> <p>JL referred to various models of funding potential Alternative Provision – some could be in vacated spaces in schools. MH, a provider of AP, commented that schools hosting ARPs with SEND children (middle level needs) receive funding. MH offered to join the High Needs Subgroup.</p> <p>Recommendations</p> <p>That Schools Forum notes:</p> <p>a) The provisional in-year outturn overspend of £0.135m against the Dedicated Schools Grant.</p> <p>b) That DSG balances provisionally stand at £5.083m at the end of 2022/23.</p> <p>c) That these balances are earmarked for in future years to manage increasing pressures on the high needs block and early years block, and to meet cost pressures within schools.</p> <p>d) The back-pay adjustments in relation to partial resolution of the term-time only staff holiday pay issue for maintained schools that buy into the Council's payroll service. Academies and the remaining maintained schools will receive funding on an equivalent basis.</p> <p>Noted</p>	<p>MH</p>
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<p>8.</p>	<p>Forward planning – for information</p> <p>DS spoke to a report that had been circulated in advance. She pointed out that Quality Assurance (QA) was now a standing item.</p> <p>Noted</p>	
<p>9.</p>	<p>Subgroup Updates – for information</p> <p>FM reported on the Early Years Subgroup. She commented that there was not much representation from Schools Forum on the group. Joy (Odunayo) Abegunde (JOA) volunteered to join the group.</p> <p>The group had discussed the DSG budget outturn. Also, the Government’s proposal to change the ratios for 2 year olds from 1 to 4 to 1 to 5, which was of concern given the high levels of needs of Islington 2-year-olds.</p> <p>FG reported on the High Needs Subgroup. It had looked at information from Candy Holder on projections – assessments for EHCPs going through the roof. Also Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs. There was increasing pressure on the special schools.</p> <p>There will be a workshop on HN Block usage – the HN Subgroup and the Forum were to be invited.</p> <p>ME reported on the Capital Subgroup. They had discussed the Capital programme for this year and the proposed one for next. Much work had been done to speed up the processing of this money given shrinking budgets. There was a review of the match-funding with fewer applications this year despite asking schools to provide only 25% of the funding. The money left in the budget was for emergency match funding. For 2023-24, the priority will be Health and Safety. AB queried that priority given whole or parts of schools will be moth-balled, but JL informed the meeting that Scrutiny required H&S to be the priority (NB no boilers in match funding).</p> <p>Noted</p>	<p>JOA</p>
<p>10.</p>	<p>Quality Assurance</p> <p>AC gave a verbal update. In line with the revised QA Framework agreed at March Schools Forum, a survey about the quality of services would be distributed to Heads, School Business Managers</p>	<p>AC</p>

	<p>and Chairs of Governors shortly after June half term. ME volunteered to encourage chairs to respond.</p> <p>Noted</p>	ME
11.	<p>AOB: Mayor of London's Fund – Universal Free School Meals (UFSM) for Key Stage 2 Pupils</p> <p>LBI pay £2 per meal, while Mayor Sadiq Khan's funding will be £2.65 in September 2023. The price per meal allocation for 2023-24 is currently being reviewed and will be confirmed in due course.</p> <p>FG asked for clarity of message, given some schools had apparently had to contribute to some costs. DS clarified that the gap between charges to parents and the cost was actually within the base rate – so schools were being fully funded but they won't be able to see it within that rate.</p> <p>Noted</p>	
12.	<p>AOB – there were none.</p>	
	<p>Meeting close and dates of future meetings</p> <p>ME thanked all for their participation in the meeting. The meeting closed at 3.38pm</p>	
	<p>Dates of next meetings</p> <p>(Virtual meetings on MS Teams unless otherwise indicated)</p> <p>Schools Forum – Thursday 13 July 2023, 2-4pm, Committee Room 4, Town Hall</p> <p>Autumn Term 2023</p> <p>High Needs Subgroup - 16/10/2023, 11-12.30pm</p> <p>Chairs Subgroup - 01/11/2023, 2-3pm</p> <p>Schools Forum - 09/11/2023, 2-4pm, in person</p> <p>Capital Subgroup - 10/11/2023, 12.30-2pm</p>	

	<p>Early Years Subgroup - 17/11/2023, 1pm – 2.30pm</p> <p>Spring Term 2024</p> <p>Chairs Subgroup - 10/01/2024, 2-3pm</p> <p>Early Years Subgroup - 12/01/2024, 1pm – 2.30pm</p> <p>High Needs Subgroup – 15/01/2024, 11am – 12.30pm</p> <p>Schools Forum - Thursday 18 January 2024, 2-4pm, in person</p> <p>Capital Subgroup – 9/2/2024, 12.30pm – 2pm</p> <p>Summer Term 2024</p> <p>Chairs Subgroup - 15/05/2024, 2 – 3pm</p> <p>Capital Subgroup - 17/05/2024, 12.30pm – 2pm</p> <p>Early Years Subgroup - 17/05/2024, 1pm – 2.30pm</p> <p>High Needs Subgroup - 20/05/2024, 11am – 12.30pm</p> <p>Schools Forum - Thursday 23 May 2-4pm, in person</p> <p>Chairs Subgroup - 03/07/2024, 2 – 3pm</p> <p>Schools Forum – Thursday 11 July, 2-4pm, in person</p>	
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