

Islington Schools Forum

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

Minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2023 at 2pm at 222, room GA.

Attendees

Present

- Maggie Elliott (ME); Governor, Montem Primary School (Edventure Collaborative Federation with Drayton Park) (Chair)
- Alan Streeter (AS); Headteacher, Beacon High Secondary School (Islington Futures Federation)
- Patrick Mildren (PM); Headteacher, Canonbury Primary School
- Nigel Smith (NS); Headteacher, New River College (Pupil Referral Unit)
- Penny Barratt (PB); Chief Executive Officer, The Bridge MAT
- Susan Service (SS); Headteacher, Arts & Media School Islington (Vice-chair)
- Paul Lasok (PL); Governor, St Aloysius Secondary School (and St Joseph's)
- Diana Valcheva (DV); Headteacher, Kate Greenaway Nursery School
- Joy Odunayo Abegunde (JA); VCS Providers, Islington Play Association
- Joe Simpson (JS); Governor, St Peter and St Paul's Primary
- Cllr Angelo Weekes (AW); Islington Council – non-Executive Member
- Andrew Bosi (AB); Governor, Rotherfield Primary School
- Cerys Normanton (CN), Headteacher, Samuel Rhodes Special School

Other attendees

- Jon Abbey (JA); Corporate Director of Children and Young People
- Tim Partington (TP); Assistant Director Finance, Children's, Schools & Resources
- Jane Wright (JW); Manager Schools and EY Governance (Clerk)
- Debbie Stevenson (DS); Head of Schools & Early Years Finance Services

- Alison Cramer (AC); Assistant Director, School Support and Information Services
- Sarah Callaghan (SC); Director of Learning and Culture
- Agnes Narkotey (AN), Finance Service, Islington Council

Apologies

- Sophie Garalda (SG): Headteacher, Hugh Myddelton Primary
- Francis Gonzalez (FrG); Headteacher, Richard Cloudesley Special School
- Colleen Marshall (CMa); City and Islington College for 14-19 Partnership
- Fiona MacCorquodale (FM); Headteacher, Prior Weston Primary School and Children's Centre (Vice-chair)

Not in attendance

- Ana Sevilla (ASe); Executive Head, New River Green and Packington Children's Centres
- Matthew Hillman (MH); Headteacher, The Pears Family School (AP Academy)
- Jenny Lewis (JL); Headteacher, Thornhill Primary School

Meeting minutes

1. Welcome/Apologies for absence/not in attendance

ME welcomed all to the meeting and invited them to introduce themselves. Apologies were as above.

2. Declaration of Interest

No declarations of interest were declared.

3. Schools Forum composition – for information and discussion (this Item was taken after Item 4 – Minutes)

JW (the clerk) spoke to a report previously circulated.

Update on vacancies / ends of terms of office:

Maintained Primary Headteacher

The clerk emailed the primary headteachers in September to seek nominations to fill the two vacancies and received one nomination from Nathalie Park, Executive Headteacher at The Learning Quarter for Sarah Gill, Head of Hugh Myddelton. There being no other nominations, Sarah was appointed to the Forum with a term of office of **16/10/2023 to 15/10/2027**.

The clerk wrote again to primary heads to inform them of Sarah's appointment and to ask for another nomination by 6 November. By the deadline, the clerk received only one nomination from Anthony David, Interim Headteacher at St Mary's C of E Primary. He was appointed unopposed as Interim Primary Headteacher representative with term of office up to 4 years from 8 November 2023.

Noted

Secondary Academy

The clerk had written four times to the senior leadership teams of the secondary academies asking them to select one, and then two representatives, and had received no reply. The clerk proposed that Schools Forum consider amending the terms of reference at the January Forum meeting to allow for one of the academy places to be offered to primary and secondary academies, not just to secondary academies. The other place would be reserved for secondary academies. In the meantime, the clerk would write again to secondary academies asking for two representatives, and flag up that if there were still no takers, Schools Forum would consider adjusting its terms of reference to allow for one of the places to be offered to primary as well as secondary academies.

Given the importance of secondary academies attending with the drop in school rolls coming through to secondary schools in a few years, it was **agreed** instead that the chair would take action.

Action: ME to contact Mark Emmerson at COLAT.

Terms of office next due to end:

- Joe Simpson (JS), Governor at St Peter and St Paul's Primary – 5.3.24. JS was willing to complete a second term of office.
- Penny Barrett, Director of Bridge Academy – 31.3.24. PB indicated her willingness to complete another term of office.

Actions:

- JW to write to primary governors in December advising them of the forthcoming vacancy and that JS was willing to carry out a second term of office – governors to express any concerns about this and/or to nominate themselves by a deadline in January, with elections to follow if necessary.
- JW to write in January to the senior leadership teams of the Bridge Academy and St Mary Magdalene Academy (SMMA): The Courtyard, the other special academy in the borough,

to advise that a vacancy was arising on Forum at the end of March, that PB was willing to complete another term, and for the two academies to decide about their representative by the beginning of March.

4. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 13 July 2023

Accuracy

The minutes were agreed as a true record subject to one correction – under Item 5 Scheme for Financing Schools, on page 6 of the minutes, in last paragraph of the item, to replace ‘the procurement document’ with ‘the procedure document’.

Matters arising

- **Item 5. Scheme for Financing Schools:** at the last meeting it had been proposed that Forum look at the procedure for applying for licensed deficits.
- **Action** - DS and TP to look at the LA’s financial processes and bring it to January Forum.
- DS also clarified in response to a question from NS about transparency and whether financial data about schools in deficit was being shared with councillors, that councillors do receive information about the overall financial situation of all schools, but they do not receive deficit recovery plans of individual schools, unless they are governors of these schools. SC added that Chairs of Governors on project groups may be councillors. ME concluded that the discussion about the procedure in January would be an opportunity to discuss transparency.
- **Item 10. Forward Planning:** ME confirmed that the Chairs’ Subgroup had met in October to discuss the process for the quality assurance of services and the role of the Forum subgroups. She urged members on subgroups to ensure they attended their meetings.
- Points were raised in relation to School Organisation which are included in the item on the agenda (12) below.

5. School Funding Arrangements (2024-25)

DS spoke to a report that had been circulated prior to the meeting. Decisions in principle were needed from this meeting, with final decisions at the January forum.

The consultation of maintained primary and secondary schools on the funding forum had elicited only eight responses. The proposed formula mirrored the national funding formula which the Government is now due to implement in 2027/28. We will receive the data to determine the base rate and to be applied to the formula in December.

Proposal 1 – varying Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) with a maximum of +0.5%, with a cap on gaining schools. This was to protect schools. In the consultation, 6 in favour, 2 against.

Proposal 2 - retain funding for growth (previously agreed additional/bulge classes). In the consultation, 8 in favour. DS suggested that, rather than the current £300K, £150K was needed for the remaining schools still entitled.

Proposal 3 – use of about £39k growth funding on repurposing and removing surplus places – school organisation. In the consultation, 7 in favour, 1 against.

Proposal 4 – de-delegation of current services. In the consultation, 7 in favour, 1 against. There would be further discussion on that under item (13) below on QA.

Proposal 5 – not proposing to offer Behaviour Support, Library and Premises Insurance services as de-delegated services. In consultation, 5 in favour, 3 against – while this was more split, DS commented that to set up such services would involve a lot of resources and would require all maintained schools to agree to de-delegate funds, at a significant cost to schools, therefore, there was no proposal to do so at this stage.

In response to a question, DS clarified that if the primary and secondary schools still entitled to growth funding (bulge classes) did not achieve the places, they would not receive that growth funding.

In relation to the low level of responses from schools, compared to a few years ago, a reason suggested was that there were fewer proposals for schools to respond to as our formula now mirrored that of the DfE. It was suggested in future to ask for responses from people in person in meetings, for example headteachers at the Headteachers' Briefing.

Forum was asked to agree in principle to these recommendations:

- Vary MFG within allowable range of +0.0% to +0.5% and cap budget gains as necessary to ensure school budget allocation remain within funding envelope.
- Continue to retain Growth Funding to include an element for repurposing and removal of surplus places in accordance with the School Organisation Plan.
- Repurpose a portion of unused growth funding to support the removal of surplus places in accordance with the School Organisation Plan.
- To continue de-delegated current services.

Agreed in principle

6. Central School Services Block (CSSB) – Central Retention (2024-25) - for information/discussion

TP spoke to a report previously circulated.

The provisional funding envelope for CSSB in 2024-25 was £1.328m, but this would change with the outcome of the October Census. The proposal was to maintain services and their funding at the same level as in 2023-24, despite the reduction of £50K as the DfE continues to

reduce funding for historic commitments by 20 percent per annum. The top-slicing of £136K by the DfE for copyright licences was automatic.

Recommendations

That Schools Forum note:

- a) The current cost of CSSB services
- b) That Schools Forum will be required to agree allocations for 2024/25 in January following the quality assurance reviews before Christmas.

Noted

7. DSG Budget Monitor (2023-24) – for information

TP spoke to a report previously circulated. Overall, there was a projected in-year overspend of £0.077m as of Q2. The DSG balance was projected to reduce from £5.083m at end 2022/23 to £5.006m at the end of 2023/24. These balances were earmarked to manage increasing pressures on the high needs and early years block and on schools.

Schools Block - with the assumption that all of the £300K Growth Fund was allocated, there was likely to be an underspend of £150K.

Early Years - the DfE had clawed back £860K in-year based on take up of the free offer for 2s, 3s and 4s. The LA had been careful not to fund settings too much up front to minimise the impact on settings of the clawback.

Recommendations:

That Schools Forum notes:

- a) The forecast in-year overspend of £0.077m against the Dedicated Schools Grant at quarter 2.
- b) That DSG balances are forecast to be £5.006m at the end of the year.
- 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.

Noted

8. DSG Allocations (2023-24) - for information

DS spoke to a spreadsheet that had been previously circulated. The figures indicated a reduction of £860K in the Early Years Block; this reduction was anticipated and was built in to

budget projections. This reduction will not impact on funding already allocated to Early Years providers.

Noted

9. DSG estimated funding allocations (2024-25) – for information

DS spoke to a spreadsheet that had been previously circulated.

The October Census 2023 was not finalised, so DS had estimated the pupil numbers. The sheet compared the illustrative figures in July 2023 for 2024/25 with the DSG 2023/24 Settlement. A reduction of 390 pupils was projected across primary (259) and secondary (131).

The Maintained Schools Additional Grant is to be subsumed into SB, and with an inflation increase as part of the Government's spending review settlement represents a net increase of £4.5m into the DSG was projected. It was noted that the impact of falling rolls resulted in a funding reduction of £2.8m when compared to 2023-24 Schools Block Funding.

Early Years Block – the hourly rates have yet to be announced but will increase compared to 2023-24, but again falling rolls will impact on funding, bringing the increase in funding down to an estimated £490K.

DS agreed to check the age profiles of children leaving and bring back to the next meeting. JA added that there is a 13% reduction in school rolls nationally, with 11% in North Central London. DV felt it would be helpful to know where families are and the work they do to anticipate need for extended day provision. SC flagged up the recent review of childcare by Hemsalls. It was agreed that DV would join the EY Subgroup where there would be further discussions about childcare/extended services.

Noted

10. DfE Additional support for schools in financial difficulty - for information

DS spoke to a report that had been circulated previously.

The DfE announced in July 2023 a one-off grant nationally of up to £40m to support individual schools in particular financial difficulty. £20m was for academies, £20m for maintained schools with the funding being allocated by LAs. Islington, one of 35 LAs to receive it, was allocated £364,816. There is significant flexibility in how LAs can use the funding and they are to report to their schools forum. The expectation is that funding will be allocated on a case-by-case basis prioritising schools in greatest need. DS thanked schools for having all submitted their re-forecasted budgets.

Noted

11. Forward planning and Subgroup updates – for information

High Needs Subgroup – PB reported verbally. It was noted that the HN budget was just positive but would not be in the future. The budget was being analysed with a view to possible changes.

Capital Subgroup – the Estate Plan would be published in January 2024. There were not yet sufficient lessons learned from the Additionally Resourced Projects (ARPs) pilots to share – this would happen next year. Many projects had been completed during summer 2023, partly helped by improved access to project management support with the restructure of the Capital Team in Community Wealth. Work was commencing on the next round of match-funding capital projects on the assumption that the council would again make £200K available – schools to find 25 percent of funding.

It was confirmed that the DfE had no further concerns about RAAC in Islington schools.

Noted

12. Roll Projections – for information

AC gave a verbal presentation.

The number of reception children in the October 2023 Census was slightly lower than the September offer. In relation to secondary schools, it is projected there will be a reduction of one form of entry each year over the next three to four years, with the reduction increasing to nearer two forms per year after that. AS asked if secondary PAN reductions fitted in with the projections – AC said that it was being reviewed.

Points raised about school organisation during Item 4 – Minutes of Last Meeting

AB queried why the LA was not sharing more data with Forum and being more open about decision making. JA questioned the Forum being the place where such decisions were scrutinised and he stated that there had been lots of visibility with members, headteachers and governors around the School Organisation Plan and its three phases and there was much documentation available. He suggested there could be more information for Forum – ME asked Forum how they felt about the level of information shared to date. JA referred to the joint meeting of headteachers and chairs of governors on 19 October, information shared there, circulated to all schools, in Schools Bulletin, and advised that senior managers were meeting with schools with sustainability challenges.

Action: AC to bring a written presentation on roll projections to the next Forum meeting.

13. Quality Assurance – for information and request for volunteers

AC gave a presentation to summarise progress, alongside some slides that had been previously circulated.

The Annual Service Satisfaction Survey had been completed. While there were only 15 responses, these provided many useful comments and feedback. The responses came from headteachers (9), governors (3) and SBMs (3).

Most service leads had completed their self-assessment reports – a sample (Safeguarding) was included on the slides.

The next stage was for chairs of governors, headteachers and SBMs to sit on QA review panels before Christmas to review the survey and self-assessments to inform decisions at January Forum around services funded through central retention funding.

The following Forum members volunteered to take part in the Review panels:

- Andrew Bosi
- Nigel Smith
- Joe Simpson
- Alan Streeter
- Cerys Normanton
- Maggie Elliott as a reserve

Noted

14.AOB

There being no further business, ME thanked all for attending the meeting and for their contributions.

Dates of future meetings

(Virtual meetings on MS Teams unless otherwise indicated)

Schools Forum

- Thursday 18 January 2024, 2 to 4pm (Town Hall, Committee Room 4)
- Thursday 24 May 2024, 2 to 4pm (Town Hall, Committee Room 4)
- Thursday 11 July 2024, 2 to 4pm (222, Room GA)

Chairs Subgroup

- Wednesday 10 January 2024, 2 to 3pm
- Wednesday 15 May 2024, 2 to 3pm
- Wednesday 3 July 2024, 2 to 3pm

Early Years Subgroup

- Friday 17 November 2023, 1 to 2.30pm – meeting postponed to December
- Friday 12 January 2024, 1 to 2.30pm
- Friday 17 May 2024, 1 to 2.30pm

Capital Subgroup

- Friday 9 February 2024, 12.30 to 2pm
- Thursday 16 May 2024, 12.30 to 2pm

High Needs Subgroup

- Monday 15 January 2024, to 11am to 12.30pm
- Monday 20 May 2024, to 11am to 12.30pm

DRAFT