

MILTON KEYNES' SCHOOLS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 10 DECEMBER 2020 AT 3.00 PM
VIA MS TEAMS

PRESENT:

Primary School Representatives

Kirk Hopkins – Oldbrook School

Primary School Governors

Francis Grant – Great Linford Primary School

Paul Hussey – Inclusive Learning Federation (**Chair**)

Antony Moore – Giles Brook School

Jake Yeo – Bushfield School

Secondary School Representatives

Paul Herbert – St Paul's Catholic School Governor

Kate Warren – St Paul's Catholic School SBM

Academy Representatives

Neil Barrett – Stephenson Academy

Jane Edwards – Heronsgate School

David Gibson - MKET

Sharon Lynch - Stantonbury International School

Andy Squires – Denbigh School

Robert Tite – IFtL

Academy Governors

Dave Moulson – Ousedale School

Nursery School Representative

Natalie Fowler – Knowles Nursery School

Deb Spinks – Moorlands Centre Nursery School

Shared Vote

Early Years Providers Representative

Helen Middleton – Early Years Alliance

Diocesan Authority

Michael Manley – Northampton Catholic Diocese

14-19 Partnership

Lindsay Styles – Milton Keynes College

CLERK: Sue Puddifoot – Governor Support – Children’s Services

LA OFFICERS: Marie Denny – Group Head, Learning and Inclusion
Sonia Hattle – Senior Finance Business Partner
Michelle Hibbert – Schools Strategy and Corporate Accountant
Jordan Mcdougall – Finance Business Partner
Simon Sims – Head of Service Education Sufficiency, Access and Attendance
Caroline Marriott – Head of Service - Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

SF 768 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE *Item 1.1*

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting, especially new member Sharon Lynch, Deputy Headteacher, Stantonbury International School.

Apologies for absence had been received by the clerk from:

Elisabeth Morrison – Brooklands Farm School
Finlay Douglas – White Spire School
Charlie Deycon – Wavendon Gate School
Anita Richards – National Education Union District Secretary

It was noted that Norman Miles – MK Primary PRU and Tony Wilson - Oxford C of E Diocese were absent. John Howe had resigned since the last meeting, creating an academy member vacancy.

SF 769 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST *Item 1.2*

There were no disclosures of interest.

SF 770 MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING *Item 1.3*

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2020 were agreed as an accurate record. There were no matters arising.

SF 771 FORECAST OUTTURN 2020/21 (Sonia Hattle) *Item 2.1*

The purpose of this report was to inform Schools Forum of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funding allocation and the period eight forecast outturn position for 2020/21.

Sonia Hattle drew attention to the report which indicated there had been no changes to the funding allocations from those reported to the last Schools Forum meeting.

The period eight forecast position estimated a surplus carry forward of £3.028m into 2021/22 against the relevant blocks. This was an improvement of £0.464m from the last report to Schools Forum at period six and was due to a reduction of spend in the High Needs Block of £0.457 across all areas of the service, as detailed in section 4 of the report.

It was also noted that whilst regular updates are reported to Schools Forum, the budget forecast positions were reported to Cabinet on a quarterly basis.

Schools Block – the predicted surplus carry forward into 2021/22 was £0.432m (0.2% of the DSG allocation). The increased underspend of £0.405m against budget was due to a reduction of in-year growth costs and rates reductions.

Early Years Block – the predicted surplus carry forward into 2021/22 was £0.427m (2.0% of the DSG allocation). The underspend against budget of £0.183m was due to a reduction in the carry forward from 2019/20 and an underspend on three and four year olds as the increase in grant in 2020/21 was not fully passed on to providers in order to build up a small contingency due to the volatility in this block as a result of Covid-19. An overspend on the two year olds was forecast as take up was expected to be higher than the January 2020 census numbers on which the funding was based.

High Needs Block – the predicted carry forward into 2021/22 was £2.163m (4.9% of the DSG allocation). This projected underspend had increased from £0.042m to £0.499m. The reasons were partially due to Covid-19 and detailed in the report.

Schools Forum noted the latest DSG funding allocations for 2020/21 and the latest outturn position.

SF 772 ANNUAL REPORT ON ALTERNATIVE PROVISION (Simon Sims)

Item 2.2

The purpose of this report was to update Schools Forum on the use of alternative education provision in the primary and secondary sectors in 2019/20 and 2020/21 to date and based on that use, confirm the number of places to be commissioned for 2021/22.

Local authorities and schools had statutory duties in relation to the provision of alternative education as follows:

- a. Education arranged by local authorities for pupils who, because of permanent exclusion, illness or other reasons, would not otherwise receive suitable education
- b. Education arranged by schools for pupils who have been excluded on a fixed term basis
- c. Pupils being directed by schools to off-site provision to improve their behaviour.

Schools Forum noted the primary and secondary arrangements detailed in the report:

The Primary PRU had experienced a number of changes over the last year with the Local Authority SEND teams providing interim leadership support to the Primary PRU between November 2019 and October 2020. Following

a recruitment process Dr Neil Barrett was appointed the interim Executive Headteacher this academic year with Chris Wragg as interim Head of Centre.

There had been no permanent exclusions so far this year and, as at the end of November 2020, five children were accessing a place at the Primary PRU as a result of proactive dual placements.

As part of the work through the Primary Inclusion Partnership there was also an agreement that pupils requiring a Year 6 place would be supported through the Bridge Academy rather than through the Primary PRU, therefore there was considered to be sufficiency of places across alternative provision in Milton Keynes.

The council and schools fulfilled the same responsibilities towards children who required alternative education within the secondary sector via the commissioning of 195 places across three sites of Bridge Academy. One site offered placements for Key Stage 3 behaviour support, one for Key Stage 4 and the third was a medical provision.

Schools Forum asked if provision was at the right capacity as there was concern there were insufficient places but this was not seen in the report. It was explained that due to the number of places currently in use there was no pressure on provision at present but this would be kept under review.

Schools Forum noted the annual report and that 18 places would continue to be commissioned at the Primary PRU and that 195 places would continue to be commissioned at Bridge Academy.

SF 773 ANNUAL REPORT ON HIGH NEEDS (Caroline Marriott) *Item 2.3*

The purpose of this report was to provide Schools Forum with an update on the delivery of SEND support in Milton Keynes and provide an understanding of current pressures and actions to address those pressures.

The High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) became ring fenced in April 2018. This, combined with continued demand for provision in relation to SEND, meant that it remained a highly pressured and potentially volatile element of the DSG.

The strategy was being refreshed in light of Covid-19 and the impact was starting to be seen due to increasing demand, as detailed in the report. There had been significant increases in EHCP access and team caseload and the pressure across the system had not yet transferred into financial pressure. Therefore, there was only partial impact for funding the support required.

There had been a low tribunal rate but these had now seen an increase due to many different reasons and the current unusual circumstances also raised concerns of families.

Those with needs and the vulnerable were the most affected.

Pressure on places and place planning was being addressed using a range of data sources to provide a comprehensive analysis. Increased special school places would be made available in September 2021.

Schools Forum asked why there was an increased underspend of c£500k on mainstream top-ups? This had been due to money not being used because of lockdown. It was also asked why this did not include time invested to provide support at home. It was explained that top-up funding had been significantly increased and support had been given to those without EHCPs. During lockdown, the support provided was looked at, as no new requests were made or processed during this period but support was still given by schools, however the funding had not been committed. Cases already funded were maintained if previously agreed and contact was continued. Support was provided on a case by case basis.

Schools Forum also asked how these most vulnerable pupils were going to catch up? Support and processes already in place would be used to address this rather than providing anything extra. In doing more there would be a real financial pressure in coming years if the amount of EHCPs continued to rise. This had to be balanced out.

The number of places still available (Annex A) were queried. It was explained that although there were spare places across the whole system there must be flexibility in order to place pupils as required. There always needed to be spaces, which were not always in the settings required. Special Schools also needed to have a balance in age groups and location. This would be reviewed once the final paper on data was available.

Other comments referred to the perception that places were available with many children in need of them.

Schools Forum asked why there were no places shown for Early Years as day nurseries had early intervention places and it was important to address needs at the beginning of children's education and these numbers were rising? It was explained that Early Years places were available at The Redway but support was also provided for children in local settings. However, Schools Forum would appreciate clearer data in this area.

Schools Forum noted the annual report.

SF 774 ANNUAL REPORT ON EARLY YEARS (Simon Sims)

Item 2.4

The purpose of this report was to provide members of Schools Forum with an update on the latest participation rates in early years education in Milton Keynes as compared to the wider local and national picture and make recommendations for next steps in that context.

Schools Forum would be asked to note the report and agree the funding request as included in item 2.6 Government Updates and 2021/22 Budget Setting report.

The background given in section 3 of the report was noted, particularly that the funding received was based on participation rates collected in the annual January census data.

The key issues included, for two year olds, the participation project and promotional campaign had stopped following the expiration of the initial trajectory funding, and Milton Keynes subsequently experienced a decrease in participation rates during 2018/19. In recognition of this, a participation project and promotional campaign had been re-instated in 2019 supported by a £45,000 budget agreed by Schools Forum. Consequently, there was a marked increase in take up (6%) in January 2020. A significant element of the planned promotional campaign was due to be launched in March to further increase take up but this had to be paused due to Covid-19.

The universal three and four year old entitlement had also shown an increase, although it remained under national levels. The last extended provision data from the DfE had been released in summer 2019. The impact of Covid-19 on participation and the pausing of all promotion in this area due to the immediate closure of settings had made it necessary to ensure that Early Years providers were not significantly disadvantaged.

New two year olds were not receiving provision and when these settings had re-opened, they were not available to everybody. Therefore the funding was being requested to support promotion for next year. With higher participation rates in January 2021, the scheme would be self-funding as more children attracted more funding.

Schools Forum noted the annual report.

SF 775 SCHOOLS INSURANCE 2021/22 (Sonia Hattle)

Item 2.5

The purpose of this report was to inform Schools Forum of the MKC insurance offer for 2021/22.

At the beginning of the year, the DfE announced that the Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA) previously only offered to academy schools, was to be extended to include maintained schools from 1 April 2020. At that point maintained schools were advised to remain with the Local Authority's insurance provider for 2020/21, delivered through LGSS, due to uncertainty about what the RPA would cover and to what extent. Insurance arrangements had been reviewed and the offer for 2021/22 was detailed in the report. Attention was drawn to the price comparison in section 4.7 and the differences in offers explained.

The recommendation was that all MK maintained schools delegate funding to cover the cost of the insurance services to be provided from 1 April 2021 for a three-year term as this offered an appropriate and secure level of cover at a competitive price. It was also proposed that a survey be

undertaken with all maintained schools to seek their feedback on the proposals and that a vote would then be taken by Schools Forum members in January on whether to de-delegate from 2021/22. A decision must be made on this date in order for the contract to be in place in time for April 2021.

If a Schools Forum majority did not agree, then the MKC insurance would be offered as a traded service. If schools did not arrange their insurance through MKC either via de-delegation or a traded service, then they would need to source their own insurance arrangements from 1 April 2021.

Questions and comments from Schools Forum included:

- Did this apply to maintained nursery schools? **Action - Sonia Hattle to enquire**
- Some academies used RPA and had been nervous at first but they had been very good and accessible and were working to bring in items not covered.
- Why was there such a reduction from £31.86 to £17.75 per pupil. Had schools been overcharged? The retendering exercise had enabled the Local Authority to seek competitive quotes and secure value for money. The impact on diocesan schools was required.
- The timescale was questioned. There had been no information sent to schools so far and a decision by January was not fair or appropriate as staff were overworked. This should have been done in September. It was explained that as this was a traded service the current contract ended on 31 March 2021. The recommendation would require 80% of pupils to take up the offer to achieve the price quoted.
- What were the alternative arrangements as not all contract periods may be the same? A traded service would be offered if de-delegation was not agreed.

Maintained members of Schools Forum noted the options for insurance for 2021/22 and would engage with their sectors ahead of the de-delegated budget proposal being brought forward to the 14 January 2021 Schools Forum meeting for a decision.

SF 776 GOVERNMENT UPDATES AND 2021/22 BUDGET SETTING

(Sonia Hattle)

Item 2.6

The purpose of this report was to provide Schools Forum with an update on Government announcements relating to the National Funding Formula (NFF) and the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

Since the last meeting, draft October 2020 census numbers for maintained and academy schools had been received and the provisional allocations had been revised to reflect the changes, as included in the table on page 2 of the report.

Schools Block

The 2020/21 school funding formula consultation results were included in item 2.6.2 of the report.

It was expected that the growth funding allocation would be £2.167m compared to the provisional allocation of £2.299m, a reduction of £0.131m. This would take the 2021/22 pressure on the growth fund to £2.580m. Confirmation had been provided that the planned 90 contingency places were expected to be required and would therefore be included in the budget.

Following a request from the last meeting, it was clarified that the current agreed growth criteria stated that classes were funded for 30 pupils in the first year, reducing to 25 pupils in the second year. If the first year were also reduced to fund class sizes of 25 then this would have saved £0.585m on the 2021/22 growth funding based on the current projects. However it was noted that any changes would not be applied to current projects and this modelling was for illustrative purposes only.

There were also an increasing number of schools which were facing financial difficulties for several reasons, partly as a result of Covid-19 but also other budget pressures. Consideration could be given to creating a contingency to support those schools in financial difficulty, however this would need to be a further top slice from the school's block.

Central School Services Block (CSSB)

A total budget of £1.596m was required and the funding allocation of £1.549m would leave a shortfall in funding of £0.047m. This shortfall would be funded from a re-charge to the high needs block to reflect their use of these services (as was the case in 2020/21).

High Needs Block

The draft 2021/22 high needs budget was included separately in Annex 2.6.1 of the report.

Early Years Block

There had been no notification of any changes and the funding allocation was expected to be based on the January 2021 census, although this was being monitored by the DfE. Therefore, the total central funding request for 2021/22 was £0.514m as detailed in the table in item 7.2 of the report. Early Years operational guidance was awaited.

Other schools funding updates included those for the School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant, Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, Covid-19 Exceptional Costs, Teachers' Pay Grant, Teachers' Pension Grant and PE and Sports Grant.

Key points from regional meetings were also included. It was noted that there had been a rise nationally in the number of pupils being home educated and therefore would not be included in the October census. If those pupils choose to return to school, then there would be no funding for them as the funding was provided on a lagged basis. This year's total amounted to £2.487m.

Schools Forum noted the latest updates on the national funding formula and the DSG.

SF 777 HIGH NEEDS DRAFT BUDGET 2021/22 (Jordan Mcdougall) *Item 2.6.1*

The purpose of this report was to advise the Schools Forum of the draft high needs budget for the financial year 2021/22.

Attention was drawn to the table in item 3.5 of the report detailing this draft budget and the subsequent explanations.

The 2020/21 underspend of £0.941m would mean a carry forward amount of £2.163m into 2021/22. Whilst this had increased from the previous year it represented 4.44% of the provisional allocation to be received in 2021/22. As future funding beyond 2021/22 still remained uncertain, it was critical that the block had sufficient flexibility to manage the volatility in the nature of expenditure now that the blocks were ring-fenced.

Schools Forum noted the draft budget proposals and place numbers for special schools, special units/departments and alternative provision for 2021/22 and the central expenditure for high needs pupils and students in 2021/22.

SF778 2021/22 SCHOOLS FUNDING CONSULTATION RESPONSES
(Michelle Hibbert) *Item 2.6.2*

The purpose of this paper was to advise the Schools Forum of the responses to the 2021/22 School Funding Consultation.

A consultation had been issued to all schools regarding the schools funding formula for 2021/22, and in total there were 35 responses. It was requested that only one response was provided from each school, however, there seemed to be some duplicated comments which may or may not represent the same school.

Responses to the comments given in the consultation had been provided in the report.

Schools Forum noted the responses to the 2021/22 School Funding Consultation.

SF 779 DISCUSSION

Schools Forum then returned to question, comment and vote on the report under item 2.6:

Growth funding – it was requested that the planned 90 contingency places were reviewed before finalising the 201/22 budget. The saving quoted in section 4.3 was based on current schemes as an indication but future numbers would vary dependant on new projects.

Early Years – Maintained nursery schools were not included separately in this section and it was requested if this could be addressed in future. Early Years had been impacted by Covid-19 and were not eligible to claim for the extra costs. Contact had been made with the DfE regarding this omission and only the free school meals vouchers had been received, which was not school money. The feedback so far had been that settings were funded largely by private money but this was not necessarily true. It was **agreed** that Early Years members would work with officers to present a paper in January to request a contribution from the early years contingency budget. It was acknowledged that maintained nursery schools did sit in two camps and missed out on many things. Careful thought was needed especially as the blocks were now ring fenced. Officers confirmed that the DfE were aware of the issue and they would continue to lobby for a resolution.

The Chair then requested votes:

RESOLVED

2.2 Schools Forum voted on whether to consider any further changes to the growth fund criteria for 2021/22 (para 4.3 – reducing from 30 places to 25 in the first year):

In favour	1
Against	10
Abstentions	2

RESOLVED

2.3 Schools Forum voted on whether to create a contingency budget for Schools in Financial Difficulty (para 4.4):

Maintained Secondary

In favour	0
Against	2
Abstentions	0

Maintained Primary

In favour	0
Against	2
Abstentions	0

RESOLVED

2.4 To **agree** the 2021/22 central school services block request based on provisional allocations (section 5):

In favour	14
Against	0
Abstentions	0

RESOLVED

2.5 To **agree** the 2021/22 early years central spend request based on provisional allocations (section 7):

Speech and Language Therapy £0.023m

In favour	15
Against	0
Abstentions	0

Early Years Quality and Participation Officer £0.033m

In favour	15
Against	0
Abstentions	1

Early Years Quality Improvement Practitioners (EQUIP) £0.012m

In favour	12
Against	0
Abstentions	1

Marketing, Communications and Professional Engagement £0.045m

In favour	15
Against	0
Abstentions	0

SF 780 UPDATE FROM SUB-GROUPS OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM *Item 3.1*

None of the reference groups had met.

SF 781 MEMBERSHIP AND CONSTITUTION *Item 3.2*

The constitution and new membership was noted.

SF 782 FORWARD PLANNING *Item 4.1*

For the foreseeable future, Schools Forum meetings would be held virtually and take place via MS Teams.

- **14 January 2021**
2020/21 Forecast Outturn
Government Updates and 2021/22 Budget Setting
Scheme for Financing Schools
- **18 March 2021**
Forecast Outturn 2020/21
Government Updates and 2021/22 Budget Setting
2021/22 Schools Forum Planning

The meeting closed at 4.30pm