

Meeting	Schools Forum
Date	18 th March 2025
Time	2pm to 4pm
Venue	Teams

Attendees

Chair	Jo Marsh
Core Group	Becky Biddlecombe (notes) Ray Egbufoama, Richard Morgan, Alun Williams, Kevin Burnett, Jo Marsh, Paul May (Cllr), Julie-Anne Kellaway, Kate Wilson, Laura Donnelly, Chris Thomas-Unsworth, Roz Lambert, Philip Frankland, Louise Malik, Christopher Wilford Hayley Trotman, Jo Stoaling, Olwyn Donnelly
Apologies received	Mary Kearney-Knowles Mandy Bishop Simon Parker

1.	Welcome and Apologies	ACTION
	JM welcomed everyone to the meeting. Addressing apologies from Mandy Bishop, Mary Kearney-Knowles, and Simon Parker.	
2.	Declarations of Interest	
	Members were reminded to complete the declaration of interest forms once per year and to declare anything pertaining to the papers being presented. No declarations of interest were raised.	
3.	Minutes of the last meeting	
	Members reviewed the minutes of the last meeting; minutes were approved as an accurate representation. KB - inquired about updates on National Insurance details. RM – briefing note will be completed and shared round to members explaining that the methodology for mainstream and special schools remains similar to previous years, with a slight change recognizing schools with resource bases. KB - asked if the change would affect schools with the highest staffing ratios. RM - responded that individual schools have different staffing structures, and while some may be slightly hindered or beneficial, the main elements creating additional staffing costs are covered.	
4.	Letter to DFE	
	Members were sent the response letter from the DFE.	

	<p>RM noted that the DfE has issued different guidance on funding elements over the past few months.</p> <p>KB circulated points worth highlighting in the response, emphasizing the importance of not accepting inaccuracies in funding figures. He suggested copying local MPs and councillors to raise awareness.</p> <p>AW agreed with KB, stating that the figures quoted by the DfE are not accurate on the ground. AW highlighted the need to address the discrepancy between anticipated and actual funding increases.</p> <p>AW suggested focusing on the inaccuracy of funding figures and the impact on mainstream schools, which are receiving less funding than anticipated.</p> <p>Next Steps: Jo Marsh proposed that Richard, Philip, and Louise draft a response to the DfE, incorporating the points raised during the discussion. The response will also be shared with local MPs and councillors to amplify the message.</p> <p>Early Years Funding Concerns:</p> <p>PF and KW highlighted the significant impact of recent DfE guidance on early years funding, causing considerable challenges for providers. They stressed the need for continued lobbying and support from the local authority.</p> <p>PF explained that the recent DfE guidance on early years funding has caused significant challenges for providers. The guidance emphasizes that providers cannot mandate charges for accessing entitlements, leading to financial difficulties.</p> <p>PF noted that providers are struggling to maintain a sustainable business model due to the anticipated income being uncertain. This could lead to different tiers of offerings, where some children may not access the same services as their peers.</p> <p>PF mentioned concerns about food policies, with additional guidance expected from the DfE in September. However, the current issues are applicable from April, causing immediate challenges for providers.</p> <p>Highlighted the vast amount of correspondence received from providers, indicating the widespread impact of the guidance. The local authority is working to address these concerns and will reflect them in the response to the DfE.</p> <p>KW and RL emphasized the major impact on the early years sector, with many providers making significant decisions. They appreciated the local authority's efforts to support providers and stressed the need for continued lobbying to address the challenges.</p> <p>All members were in agreement.</p>	
5.	High Needs Budget Allocation	
	LD presented the high needs budget allocation plan, which includes a 2% increase for early years and mainstream, a 3% increase for independent	

	<p>schools, and a 5% increase for resource bases and special schools. The plan was unanimously supported by the high needs working group. The plan aims to address the expected demand and inflationary increases.</p> <p>Special Schools: LD explained that special schools in BANES are substantially underfunded compared to other local authorities. The 5% increase is an interim solution to make special school places more sustainable.</p> <p>Targeted Support: LD proposed allocating around £200,000 to high needs targeted support, increasing the amount received by schools with above-average numbers of EHC plans (1:26 primary & 1:29 secondary) from £3,200 to £4,400 per plan.</p> <p>Vote - The high needs working group unanimously supported the budget allocation plan, LD sought approval from the school's forum, which was granted without objections.</p> <p>LD mentioned that the high needs working group will next focus on exceptional funding and will consider the upcoming White Paper on SEND provision before making further decisions.</p>	
6.	Inclusion Support and Transition Support Funding	
	<p>OD provided an update on the inclusion support funding, emphasizing the importance of early years settings completing Dingley's Promise training. Settings must have at least one practitioner complete the training by the next review to continue receiving funding.</p> <p>Training Requirement: OD explained that early year's settings receiving inclusion support funding must have at least one practitioner complete Dingley's Promise training by the next review. This requirement aims to encourage the use of the free training available until June 2026.</p> <p>If a setting has not completed the training by the review, a short extension will be given. If the training is still not completed after the extension, funding may be placed on hold until the requirement is met.</p> <p>OD highlighted the importance of encouraging settings to complete more courses to achieve the mark of achievement, as demonstrated by Roz's setting, which will be celebrated for its accomplishment</p>	
7.	A.O.B	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CW raised concern that the LA had been targeted as being responsible for the changes and timescales being implemented by the DfE on EY funding. He wanted to thank all the EY officers for their sterling efforts in dealing with a situation caused by the DfE. CW asked and received SF support for their management of the matter and in communicating with Early Years providers. 	
8.	Actions	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RM to share a briefing note on the National Insurance details and changes with the team after the meeting. Draft a response to the DfE letter, incorporating the points discussed, and share it with the forum for review. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft and send a letter to the early years sector to communicate the collective support and the lobbying efforts regarding the recent DfE changes. • LD and RM to communicate the approved high needs budget allocation and the changes in funding methodology to all relevant schools and finance officers. 	
9.	Date of next meeting: 8 th July 2025	