

Minutes - Sheffield Schools Forum

3.00-4.30pm, 27 June 2023, Learn Sheffield, Savile Street
Chair: Keith Crawshaw

Schools Forum Members:

Primary Heads Representatives

Nigel Brooke-Smith (Greystones)
Helen Kenyon (Pipworth)
Chris Holder (Lowfield)

Primary Governors

Alison Warner (Grenoside)

Secondary Head

Linda Gooden (King Edward VII)

Non-school Members

Mo Andrews, Pye Bank CE Primary
Stephen Betts, Learn Sheffield
Karen Simpkin, Early Years providers
Rafia Hussain/Lisa Smith, Trade Unions
James Smythe, Sheffield College 16-19
Sector

Academies

Keith Crawshaw (Sheffield South East Trust)
David Dennis (Tapton School Academy Trust)
Jim Dugmore (Peak Edge Academy Trust)
Chris French (Mercia Learning Trust)
Stacy McKay (Springs Academy)
Morag Somerville (Steel City Schools Partnership)

Special Academies

Joel Hardwick (Nexus Multi-academy Trust)

Special Schools

Aileen Hosty/Laura Rzepinski (Bents Green)
1 x vacant seat

PRU

Alan Richards (Sheffield Inclusion Centre)

Apologies: Mo Andrews, Stephen Betts, Linda Gooden, Stacy McKay, James Smythe

Also in attendance: Cllr Dawn Dale, Chair of the Education, Children and Families Policy Committee; Rhona Dodds, Sheffield Inclusion Centre; Andrew Jones, Director, Education and Skills; Amanda Murray, Education and Skills (notes); Mark Sheikh, Head of Service, Resourcing and Business Planning

Presenters: John Mansergh, Service Manager Inclusion and Attendance Team, Education and Skills; Steve Middleton, Schools Adviser, Education and Skills

Observers: Steve Barnard, Local Authority Stakeholder Engagement Team, Education & Skills Funding Agency; Rob Campbell, Performance and Analysis Team, SCC; Sam Dunker, Learn Sheffield

1. Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest

Introductions were made and new members welcomed. Andrew Jones clarified the role of Council officers – that they are attendees/presenters only, not Forum members.

Apologies were noted as above and no declarations of interest were made.

2. Previous meeting minutes/matters arising

Agreed as a true and accurate record.

Matters arising: the independent placement action regarding costs and breakdown of numbers from the February meeting will be brought back to the September meeting.

3. Learn Sheffield Funding

Further to the February Schools Forum discussion, Steve Middleton provided an update on progress as per Paper 3:

- A report was presented to the Education, Children and Families Policy Committee on 21 June and approved.
- The proposal was that Sheffield City Council (SCC) would continue to meet the statutory school improvement responsibilities, and where there is no existing capacity within SCC, outsource four key areas to Learn Sheffield at a contract value of £97k over two years.

The Chair welcomed agreement of the proposals by the Committee, and the Forum endorsed the recommendations as follows:

- **Agreed** that the Council should continue to directly deliver some statutory school improvement services according to established practices and processes.
- **Agreed** that whilst the current contract for school improvement activities through Learn Sheffield will expire on 31st August 2023, officers will look to move forward a proposal for a new contract for limited school improvement activities from 1 September 2023 for two years at a value of £97k.

4. Pupil Referral (PRU) Commissioning Arrangements

Andrew Jones introduced this item:

- The focus is both on the Sheffield Inclusion Centre and the broader context regarding exclusions and sufficiency. Specifically, there is a significant issue regarding places at the PRU.
- In 2019 The Head of the PRU at the time worked with Joel Hardwick (then at SCC) to develop a funding model as the previous model was considered by schools to be a 'fine' for excluding pupils; and whilst it was approved in agreement with the Forum, it wasn't legally binding, and some academy trusts felt it was unreasonable.
- Joel then worked on a model to fund 250 places and the pandemic led to a down-turn in need for these places. However, we now have reached the maximum number and PRU management cannot increase capacity without receiving funding for additional places.
- The PRU needs to be able to resource staffing in advance and therefore requires certainty in their funding.

John Mansergh highlighted key points from the paper:

- The specific ask is to increase pupil numbers at the PRU to 300 places.

- The intention is to recommission the prevention offer – the alternative provision hubs and outreach with the continued allocation of funding. We are reviewing provision across the city and increasing SEND sufficiency focussing on long-term sustainable solutions. The Forum will be updated on developments.
- There has been a huge increase in the number of exclusions since the decrease seen during the pandemic.
- Inclusions are increasing nationally; however, Sheffield's numbers are increasing faster than our statistical neighbours.
- As per section 1.2 of the paper, the reasons for our exclusion numbers are varied, but many of the children excluded have complex needs. One of the issues is persistent disruptive behaviour and section 1.4 gives further detail.
- Section 1.5 gives more detail on the nature of the cohort in the PRU.

Mark clarified the funding aspect to the PRU proposal:

- When we set the budget in February, we were not clear on numbers.
- We are proposing a provision of £594k (from the High Needs Block) for the temporary increase in numbers. This will increase the PRU's budget to £4.4m.
- The PRU will be able to draw down the funding based on the actual spending up to a maximum of £594k.

Forum discussion, with input from Alan Richards and Rhona Dodds can be summarised as follows:

- The PRU is looking to recruit immediately.
- It was highlighted that there may be staff available to recruit from Holgate Meadows.
- The PRU is receiving children with special needs that shouldn't be in the PRU. The aim is to turn it into a learning centre, rather than simply looking after the children and young people.
- The funding can be made available via a provision for growth, but it should be noted that we still have a shortfall in the High Needs Block funding of £4.5m.
- It was suggested that the paper doesn't note the increased challenge across the sector regarding school hubs trying to meet needs and that there is a danger of splitting into camps.
- Early intervention is needed and increased re-integration, not just increased funding for the PRU which will only solve short to medium-term issues. There are complex family issues and problems with dysregulation, and the relationship between parents and schools is broken.
- The issue is the same in early years settings and they need to be included in discussions. Need to consider developments in family support as part of this.
- Elective home education has increased (to 600) and has been included in the figures.
- The issues will get worse unless we deliver on the alternative provision (AP).
- We currently have bids for AP free schools, and this is part of a broad range of provision, but it's a slow process.
- We need a city-wide strategy and to be confident that we are excluding for the right reasons. Conversations should look at impact rather than provision.
- We need to use our data to get to the heart of the problem and to identify what resource we need where. To also ensure that transport links be considered when planning services.
- We do have mapping data of areas that are impacted and this links in to where we offer services and this needs to be shared.

- Nationally we are not clear on understanding the increase in need for special school places and there is no long-term plan.
- Our numbers of children on Education, Health and Care Plans have increased from 3000 – 4000 since last year and we do not know what drives this increase.
- Persistent absence and the social climate are bigger issues since the pandemic.
- We should not expect to see primary pupils in the PRU.
- Cllr Dale is committed to ensuring a holistic approach is taken, beginning in early years, and that we need a long-term strategy for Sheffield which she will work on with senior officers. However, we also need to tackle the short-term issues in the PRU.
- Rhona concluded by thanking colleagues for their contributions and re-iterated that we want to see a long-term impact.

The Forum:

- **Agreed** to the additional funding to enable growth of the PRU from 250 to 300 places between September until the end of the financial year initially.
- **Agreed** to make a funding provision of £594k from High Needs Block, for additional places to cover the actual delivery costs at PRU.
- **Noted** that the LA will continue to commission the prevention alternative provision hubs and outreach and seek to develop this as outlined in the paper.

5. Growth Policy/Falling Rolls Update

Growth Policy

Mark Sheikh highlighted key points from Paper 5a:

- The growth funding to Sheffield has increased to £2.9m in 2023/24 and relates to planned and ad-hoc funding for mainstream only.
- The rates of funding received per pupil is detailed in section 1.2 of the paper.
- Minor amendments have been made to the Growth Policy for 2023/24.

The Forum noted the increase in growth funding and:

- **Agreed** to continue to use the updated Growth Funding Policy for 2023/24.
- **Agreed** the planned growth funding payments of £2.04m to be paid to Sheffield schools as detailed in (Appendix 1).

Falling Rolls Policy

Mark summarised the contents of Paper 5b:

- The December Schools Forum agreed the Falling Rolls Policy funding for 2023/24 as being £250k.
- No eligible applications were received in 2022/23 and none to date have been received in 2023/24.
- Minor changes have been made to the policy for 2023/24.

Forum discussion is summarised as follows:

- It is important that the fund continues.
- It was clarified that the funding is available for academies as well as maintained schools, but not for special schools. Falling rolls fund was established by transferring funding from mainstream growth allocation.

- It was suggested that it was not clear where the responsibility lies for the Published Admission Number (PAN) and that we need to share experience across the sector.
- It was clarified that any underspend will roll forward and will be allocated to growth – the Forum will be updated.
- It was acknowledged that there are bigger issues regarding how schools sustain themselves.
- We are expecting a peak drop in numbers in 2027/28, and our primary numbers start to recover from 2026/27.

The Forum noted the minor changes to, and **approved**, the Falling Rolls Policy for 2023/24.

6. Forum Membership/Constitution Review

Mark Sheikh presented Paper 6:

- Section 2.1 of the paper shows an update on pupil numbers and proportional representation of members on the Forum. It was noted that there was a calculation error in the total number of Forum school members – to be amended to 15. However, there is one vacant special school seat included in this total that is yet to be recruited to.
- The Constitution is based on national guidance and has been updated for 2023/23 with minor revisions.

Additional Forum comments included:

- Discussion around section 3.6 - 3.8 of the Constitution document. Alison Warner thought there was a contradiction in some of this and she sought clarification on the ratio of head teachers to governors. It was acknowledged that there should in principle be a balance of representation between heads and governor/trustee representation, the election process is reliant on the relevant sectors and the guidance for those sectors; and also the willingness of individuals to put themselves forward.

The Forum noted the updates as set out in the paper.

7. AOB

Fostering

Mark highlighted the papers for information, in particular the request for foster carers – for schools to help us engage with parents.

Early Years

- Karen Simpkin raised the issue of increasing costs for early years providers, in particular the increase in business rates. Local and national settings are looking to reduce their 15-hour provision in both affluent and deprived areas and 2-year-old FEL will be the first to be impacted. She emphasised the need for further discussion around the 15-hour offer.
- Mark acknowledged that a significant uplift in funding is required, and added that as per the February Forum, Sheffield is passing through 100% of funding received for 2-year-old FEL. We also wrote to the Secretary of State as per the action but haven't yet received a response.
- Cllr Dale added that it would be beneficial to involve the school sector in supporting the early years providers.

- The Early Years Working Group has not been able to map coverage regarding places.

Action: this matter to be picked up for further discussion at the next Chairs' de-brief.

Date of next meeting: 26 September 2023, 3.00-5.00pm, Learn Sheffield, Albion House, Savile Street