

Schools Forum Briefing

From the meeting held on 26 March 2025



This Briefing provides a summary of key discussions and decisions taken by Forum at their most recent meeting. If you want to find more detail, the minutes and papers from all meetings are in the public domain and can be found on the [Norfolk Schools Forum website](#) along with contact details for Forum representatives.

Strategic Planning (including Local First Inclusion)

Schools Forum Members received an update on the Local First Inclusion (LFI) programme, focusing on the projects being delivered, their impact, and the governance supporting these initiatives. Communication from the Department for Education (DfE) regarding the Safety Valve programme indicated potential funding releases based on value for money demonstrated.

Positive trends were noted in reducing permanent exclusions and Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP) requests, however, ongoing challenges remain, particularly in reducing waiting lists for neurodiverse assessments and the uncertainty pending upcoming national SEND reform.

Schools Forum Members asked for clarity on the statement within OFSTED's inspection framework from January 2023, which mentioned that "the local area partnership must work jointly to make improvements." Officers explained that OFSTED expects various elements of the system to work collaboratively to improve matters. The Vice-Chair highlighted the need for a robust mechanism to report LFI improvements to communities and the wider system. Officers acknowledged this and mentioned ongoing work to enhance communication layers. A Schools Forum member suggested providing a summary of each Key Performance Indicator (KPI) in future reports to aid understanding of trends and performance, which officers agreed to do.

Final Pupil Variations

Officers presented final amendments to pupil variations applied in the Authority Proforma Tool (APT) submission for 2025-26. A correction to the rates figure for Silfield School was made, and minor adjustments were applied to all schools due to pupil variations.

DSG Modelling

The Forum reviewed the latest financial modelling for the High Needs Block, including forecasts for the 2024-25 financial year and the budget for 2025-26. Discussions highlighted the significant High Needs Block deficit and the challenges in achieving an in-year balanced position.

The impact of independent school placements on the budget and the need for strategic planning to manage costs were also discussed. Projections for the 2026-27 and 2027-28 financial years included the anticipated opening of new state special schools.

Schools Forum Members queried the reason behind 80% occupancy of Specialist Resource Base (SRB) places being the optimum figure. Officers explained that 100% occupancy is not ideal as it leaves no capacity for ensuring children are in the right placement.

The Chair asked if the maximum number of SRB places in the budget would ever be reached due to the practicalities of the turnaround model. Officers clarified that the figure given of 524 was a snapshot of expected places at the end of the financial year.

Non-DSG Consultations

The Forum reviewed the approaches taken by the local authority for consulting on the distribution of four grants received outside of the DSG during the 2024-25 financial year. The planned combination of several grants into a new Core Schools Budget Grant was discussed. Schools Forum Members suggested that a technical paper on National Insurance Contributions (NICs) could be useful for future consultations.