

Schools Forum Briefing – July 2023

This 'Briefing' is intended to provide a summary of the 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 website at <https://www.schools.norfolk.gov.uk/school-finance/norfolk-schools-forum>, along with contact details for Forum representatives. This briefing can be found on Governor Hub and as an MI Sheet.

Local First Inclusion

See [Local first inclusion improvement programme - Norfolk County Council](#)

Progress within the programme:

- First Tri-Annual Report was sent to DfE on 16 June - on track across all workstreams with 7 green and 2 amber. No feedback has been received from DfE.
- There has been a high level of interest in the primary Specialist Resource Base (SRB) delivery – the first SRB's planned for September 2023 will now open in February 2024, with more SRBs than originally planned in the first wave.
- We will be re-setting the High Needs Block (HNB) within the Designated Schools Grant (DSG)
- EHCP referral rates continue to rise – the percentage of school pupils with an EHCP (4.7%) is now above the national average (4.3%).
- Permanent exclusion rates have also risen in primary and secondary schools
- The vision for Alternative Provision in Secondary Schools was shared – for young people to access high quality alternative provision which enables them to re-engage with education in a mainstream school or transition to an appropriate setting.

Forum members questioned the apparent lack of focus on primary alternative provision. Officers responded that the new AP provision is targeted at secondary as the data shows significant pressure in this age range, but also stated that the new provision mirrors SEMH SRB provision in primary schools – school run unit provision for children who would be at risk of exclusion. Forum members supported the ambitions of the new workstream, but stated that these issues have been present for many years.

DSG Management Plan

It was noted the forecast deficit for 28/29 has increased but the overall plan remains on track to achieve a balanced budget within timescales and further work is underway to review all assumptions and consider additional mitigations.

Colleagues had concerns around underestimating worse case scenarios in the past impacting on people's confidence of success, they were also concerned about change in costs and slippage of timelines. Colleagues supported the way the plan is communicated and acknowledged that it may take many years to feel the impact and suggested there should be a buffer until that point is reached.

Learning Strategy

We have been undertaking a programme of engagement, inviting colleagues in the education system to share their views on the co-creation of a shared learning ambition for Norfolk. Communications have gone out to schools and other stakeholders. We will continue engagement in September and beyond.

Early Years Funding from September

Forum were given an update on the increases to Early Years Funding and expansion of childcare from September for working parents announced in the Government Spring budget. Early Years Finance will send out a newsletter containing the new rates -

earlyyearsfinance@norfolk.gov.uk

Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Autumn Consultation Preparation

Forum discussed how to raise the profile and increase participation in meaningful engagement and consultation about how DSG should be spent - to better inform the recommendations Schools Forum makes to the local authority.

Schools Forum discussed particular issues and highlighted the following that will form part of an Autumn consultation process.

Early Years Funding –

- Distribution of funding previously distributed as the Teachers Pay and Pension Grant.
- Increasing the value of Special Educational Needs Inclusion Funding
- Considering top-slicing funding across all age ranges to pay for the central services that support all funded settings (currently only 3- and 4-year-old funding contribute)

Special Schools Funding

The local authority is undertaking a review of the costs of GCSE and residential provision. If this results in a recommendation to increase or redistribute funding then this will be consulted on.

Gains and Capping

The LA proposes to consult schools and Schools Forum in the autumn on the options for a funding cap on gains where a school receives a factor (for example receiving sparsity funding for the first time) within the 2024-25 mainstream funding formula through the Fair Funding Consultation. Schools Forum noted that the response rate was low last year and that it is important that all mainstream schools engage in the consultation as any changes to the formula could impact upon all mainstream schools.

Funding for Falling Rolls

Data was shared showing the expected sharp fall off in rolls coming into reception classes in the next few years, on the back of several years of falling rolls. Forum members highlighted the need for transparency about options to fund falling rolls in schools and the impact on all schools. As a system, we must consider the implications falling rolls will have on schools' ability to operate coherent education priorities.

Block Transfer of funding required under DfE Safety Valve

The LA proposes to consult schools and Schools Forum in the autumn on options for a Schools Block to High Needs Block transfer for the 2024-25 financial year in line with expectations under the DfE's Safety Valve programme for LA's with very high DSG deficits. This was discussed at previous Schools Forum meetings but noted here for a full view of the areas for consultation.

De-delegation of funding for maintained school audits

Schools Forum members have requested that the LA consult schools on the de-delegation of funding in 2024-25 financial year for maintained school audits. Options will be included in the autumn consultation. This was discussed at previous Schools Forum meetings but noted here for a full view of the areas for consultation.

Notional SEN

As part of our benchmarking through Local First Inclusion the LA have identified that the notional SEN level (7%) is below the national rate (11%), and below what many Norfolk schools spend before accessing Element 3 funding. The LA expect that DfE will move to a hard national formula, so questioned should we move now in stages. Schools Forum decided that we should consult on options with full transparency on impact on schools.

DfE Risk Protection Arrangement

Forum discussed if the RPA is now a viable option for maintained schools to consider. Forum agreed that the authority should investigate further the options for schools.

Catering Contract

A Catering Commissioning group will be set up and several Forum members volunteered to join this to inform the nature of any future Norfolk catering contract. The initial meeting of the group will be before the end of term.

Present

Adrian Ball	Diocese of Ely Multi Academy
Helen Bates	Roman Catholic Diocese
Lacey Douglass	The Heather Nursery
Mike Grimble	Avenue Junior School
Glyn Hambling	Unity Education Trust
David Hicks	Synergy Multi Academy Trust
Georgie Howell (sub)	West Norfolk Academy Trust
Carol Jacques	Earlham Nursery School
Karen McIntosh (sub)	City College
Joanne Philpott	City of Norwich School
Sarah Porter	The Heart Education Trust
Tom Snowdon (sub)	Blakeney School
Daniel Thrower	The Wensum Trust
Joanna Tuttle	Aylsham High School
Martin White (Chair)	Nebula Federation

Representing

Roman Catholic Diocese
Early Years Representative
Maintained Primary Governors
Alternative Provision
Academies
Academies
Maintained Nursery Schools
16 – 19 Representative
Academies
Academies
Maintained Primary Schools
Academies
Maintained Secondary Schools
Maintained Primary Governors

John Baldwin	Head of Finance Exchequer services (for item 9)
Martin Brock	Accountant (Schools, SEND & EY)
John Crowley	Assistant Director, Learning & Achievement
Marilyn Edgeley	Admin Officer
Dawn Filtness	Finance Business Partner
Victoria Groom	Senior Advisor Strategy and Partnership
Paul Harker	Place Planning Manager (for item 6 (Falling Rolls))
Simon Paylor	Strategic Commissioner, Health & Disability (for item 8)
Nicki Rider	Assistant Director High Needs SEND
James Wilson	

Apologies:

Martin Colbourne	City College	16 – 19 Representative
Bob Groome		Joint Consultative Committee
Clare Jones	Boudica Schools Trust	Academies
Rachel Quick	The Wherry School	Special School Academy
Hayley Porter-Aslet	Church of England Diocese	Church of England Diocese
Hayley Ross	Bure Park Academy	Special School Academy
Sarah Shirras	St Williams Primary	Maintained Primary Schools
Rebecca Wicks	The Clare School	Maintained Special School
Vicky Warnes		Joint Consultative Committee

Michael Bateman	Assistant Director, SEND Strategic Improvement & Early Effectiveness
Sara Tough	Executive Director Childrens Services
Sam Fletcher	Assistant Director, Education Strategy & Infrastructure