

Decisions of the Schools Forum

18 January 2021

1. WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Gilbert Knight welcomed new member Harvey Freeman, Governor at Hasmonean Primary School.

2. ATTENDANCE

Attended	Name	Representing	Type of Member
Members:	Alexander Banks	Wessex Gardens	Primary Maintained – Head
	Anthony Vorou	St Johns CE N11	Primary Maintained - Governor
	John Bowra	Christ's College Finchley	Secondary Academy – Governor
	Ian Kingham	Oak Lodge Special Academy	Deputy Head
	Jo Djora	The Hyde	Primary Academy – Head
	Keith Nason	National Education Union	Trade Union
	Marc Lewis	Wren Academy	Substitute for Gavin Smith
	Lucy Rodgers	Colindale Primary School	Primary Community – Head
	Matthew Stevens	Saracens High School	Secondary Academy – Head
	Sarah Sands	Garden Suburb Infant	Primary Maintained – Head
	Caron Rudge	BEYA	EY Maintained
	Simon Horne	Friern Barnet	Secondary Maintained – Head
	Harvey Freeman	Hasmonean Primary School	Primary Maintained – Governor
	Ziz Chater	Martin Primary	Primary Maintained – Head
	Luke Bridges	All Saints' N20	Primary Maintained – Head
Councillors:	David Longstaff	Chair of the Children, Education & Safeguarding Committee	
LA Officers:	Ian Harrison	Chief Executive and Director of Education and Learning, BELS	
	Ben Thomas	Assistant Director, Education, Strategy & Partnerships	
	Jonathan Castle	Head of Finance, Children & Family Services	
	Gareth Evans	Finance Manager (Schools)	
	Claudette James	Assistant Finance Manager (Schools)	
	Ethan Jacobson	CIPFA Graduate Trainee	

Apologies were received from Jude Stone.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Non-pecuniary interest as a member of the BELS Board was declared by Sarah Sands.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes were unanimously agreed to be a true and accurate record of the last meeting.

5. MATTERS ARISING

Simon Horne had said that it would be useful if the Forum was given an idea of the amount the borough saved by placed pupils in Barnet schools rather than out of borough.

Ian Harrison reported that Barnet spent £8.2m on independent special school places including £2m on residential places.

If these places had been provided in Barnet schools, the cost would have been £4.8m, – a potential saving of £3.4m. There are plans to expand provision in the borough this year and next year.

Gilbert Knight observed that expanded provision was fine so long as the expansion was not about pressurising existing special schools to accept more pupils.

Ian Harrison reported as part of the planning provision, the LA is looking at extra provision on non-special school sites, e.g. Queenswell. An update will be reported to the Forum later in the year.

6. ELECTION OF CHAIR & VICE-CHAIR

Gilbert Knight was nominated as Chair and Simon Horne as Vice Chair. Both were unanimously elected.

7. SCHOOLS' FORUM MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

Gareth Evans presented a table detailing the current school membership and plans to fill the vacancies.

Recommendation

That Members note the current membership and agreed arrangements for dealing with vacancies.

The current membership and agreed arrangements for dealing with vacancies were noted.

8. 20/21 DSG MONITORING

Jonathan Castle presented the DfE revised DSG allocations including the Import/Export adjustments in the High Needs Block.

As a result of the updated DSG allocation, the block expenditure budgets have been realigned to match income. This was also presented with the month 9 forecast, which is forecasting an overall underspend of £1m.

The High Needs Block is the only area forecasting an overspend. The £1.7m overspend is due mainly to an increase in the number of EHCPs – an increase of 24% year on year and increasing number of placements both in and out of borough.

The Early Years Block is forecasting an underspend of £467k, of which £400k is due to the removal of contingency which was no longer necessary as the Early Years allocation increased in year. However, there is significant uncertainty around the Early Years block because of COVID-19.

Simon Horne commented that there were pressures on the High Needs Blocks across London.

Sarah Sands asked if the Early Years contingency could be drawn on next year if needed. Jonathan Castle confirmed that the current plan is for contingency to be included as part of the Early Years budget for next year so should it be required it would be available.

Recommendation:

That the Schools Forum note the contents of the agenda item.

Noted.

9. 2021/22 BUDGET PROPOSALS

Jonathan Castle presented the indicative DSG budget for 2021/22. The indicative DSG income for 2021-22 is £379m; the current 2020/21 income being £352m. The following areas were highlighted.

The Schools Block

This includes a proposed minimum funding guarantee increase of +2%. In addition, each primary school is guaranteed a minimum of £4,180 per pupil and each secondary school at least £5,415 per pupil in 2021/22. These per pupil rates now include the Teachers Pay Grant and Teachers Pension Employer Contribution Grant which were previously distributed as separate grants.

Early Years Block

An update to the 2021/22 allocation will be made once the January 2021 Early Years and Schools census numbers are finalised. The allocation will then be finalised after the January 2022 census. Once the LA receives clarification from the Government around Maintained Nursery School supplementary funding, it will return to Schools Forum with the Early Years Funding proposals. The deadline for Schools Forum to review is February 28th. Should the Forum agree, the rates can be agreed via email so that a formal meeting is not required.

Authority Proforma Tool (APT)

The LA is required to submit a completed APT to the DfE annually, which shows all the detailed calculations and assumptions underpinning the proposals for allocating budgets to schools. For Academies and Free Schools, it captures the data required by the Education and Schools Funding Agency (EFSA) to calculate academy budgets and recoupment deductions to the gross DCG.

Jonathan Castle presented a table detailing the proposed Schools Block Funding Factor rates for 2021/22 along with the current factors in the Barnet funding formula for 2020/21. Under the National Funding Formula (NFF), Basic Entitlement Schools Block Factor rates for 2021/22 have increased by 3% from 2020/21. As the Government has announced a public sector pay freeze, this increase represents an increase in school funding in real terms compared to 2020/21.

The APT is due for submission on 21 January 2021.

In addition to the rates submitted in the APT, the authority must also clarify the funding criteria used when allocating growth and split site funding.

The Growth Fund and Split Site Funding criteria were presented to and agreed in principle at the Schools Forum at the October meeting. The only changes made to what was presented at the October meeting was to update the growth rates in line with the new minimum funding rates.

Schools Forum is also required to approve the size of the Growth Fund, which is estimated to be £2.787m

Jonathan Castle outlined Appendix 1 detailing the indicative minimum funding guarantee and school factors funding allocations for each school for the Schools Block. Subject to data correction, over 70% schools had an increase in budget compared to 40% of schools with an increase in pupil numbers.

Sarah Sands asked if the Growth fund is not needed, does it go into contingency?

Jonathan Castle confirmed that whilst it is not forecast to be needed in the current year, provisional workings show it will be needed in full for the next two years.

Ian Kingham asked how much was the increase in the High Needs Block?

Jonathan confirmed that the DfE had applied an 11% increase in allocation across the country because of the pressure on schools.

Recommendations:

That School Forum

- i. Notes the 2021/22 draft budget as shown in table 1
- ii. Agree that the proposed hourly funding rates for early years will be sent to Schools Forum members by email and agree that the rates may be agreed by agreement of majority of members who respond
- iii. Notes and agrees the 2021/22 formula factor rates used in the APT submission (National Funding Formula rates) as shown in Table 2 (all voting members)
- iv. Notes and agrees Growth Fund criteria and amount; and Split Site criteria (all voting members).

All items were unanimously agreed and approved

10. 2021/22 CENTRAL SERVICES SCHOOLS BLOCK

Jonathan Castle explained the historic commitments and ongoing responsibilities comprising of the Central Schools Services Block.

A table was presented detailing figures for 2020/21 and 2021/22. Schools Forum is required to approve central items line by line, except for Copyright Licensing which is centrally negotiated and set by the DfE.

Recommendation:

That Schools Forum is asked to approve expenditure lines that comprise the Central Schools Services Block.

The recommendation was unanimously approved.

11. 2021/22 DE-DELEGATION AND FORMERLY ESG FUNDED SERVICES

De-delegation

In October 2020, Schools Forum agreed to de-delegate the following services:

- Behaviour Support (primary maintained schools)
- Narrowing the Gap (primary and secondary maintained schools)
- Trade Union Duties (primary and secondary maintained schools)
- Additional School Improvement Services (primary and secondary maintained schools)
- Schools Contingency, including redundancy costs for Schools in Financial Difficulty (primary and secondary maintained schools).

The rates reported were calculated based on pupil numbers based on the previous census. The rates have now been adjusted to take account of the updated figures in the October 2020 census.

Jonathan Castle presented a table detailing the revised de-delegation rates.

Services previously funded from the Education Services Grant (ESG)

In October 2020, Schools Forum also agreed to approve the proposal for 2021/22 to continue charging the cost of services formerly funded from the ESG to the budgets of maintained schools, at the current year (2020/21) level of £0.700m. It was reported that this would mean a deduction from budgets of approximately £23.08 for maintained primary and secondary schools and that the final figure would be available once 2021/22 pupil numbers are known.

Based on the October 2020 census numbers the final per pupil amount is £23.61 per pupil in maintained primary and secondary schools.

Keith Nason expressed concern that the trade union money was dropping for primary schools by approximately 5% but Jonathan Castle clarified that the table showed an increase in the rate per pupil from £1.59 to £1.64. Jonathan Castle confirmed that the amount delegated will be the same as last year but as pupil numbers were dropping this led to an increase in the rate per pupil.

Recommendation:

That Schools Forum note the revised rates per pupil based on adjustments relating to the October 2020 pupil census.

This was duly noted.

12. EARLY YEARS UPDATE

The Early Years Block is formulated to cover the cost of funding early years pupils (2-,3 & 4-year olds) in maintained nursery schools, primary schools with nursery provision and early years settings in the Private, Voluntary and Independent sector (PVI's).

2020-21 Update

Jonathan Castle explained how the DfE funded the Early Years Block before COVID-19 and the new basis for 2020/21 funding in response to the pandemic (9/12th of the January 2020 census and 3/12th of the January 2021 census).

The result of this is that the LA has been funded for April 2020 to December 2020 based on census data taken pre-COVID. Settings have received funding in line with this, thus funding has been maintained at a level as if COVID-19 had not happened.

However, according to information provided by the DfE in December and confirmed in early January, for the rest of the financial year, January to March 2021, the LA will

receive funding based on the January 2021 census, which is taking place whilst the country is locked down, and as such is expected to be significantly lower than the January 2020 census.

The DfE also announced that the LA should return to the normal funding approach (i.e. funding follows the child) for all providers from Jan 1st, 2021. Should the January 2021 census indeed be lower than the January 2020 census, this will result in a cut to the funding to both the LA and the settings.

The DfE has put in provision for LAs where attendance is below 85% of their January 2020 census level and the local authority can provide evidence for increased attendance during the spring term.

Under these circumstances, the DfE will provide a top-up to the January 2021 census. The top-up would only fund the additional places taken-up after the January 2021 census week count and would be limited to a cap equivalent to 85% of their January 2020 census. This ensures that settings will receive funding for EY pupils who start after the census date, from the date that they start, as is normal.

Following objections to these arrangements from several organisations nationally, including concerns expressed by Barnet council), and taking account of the impact of lockdown, it is understood the DfE is reviewing these arrangements and may shortly announce changes.

2021-22 Update

The DfE has announced that funding to the LA for the EY block will return to the same method used pre-COVID for the financial year 2021-22. That is, April to August 2021 (5/12ths of the year) will be funded based on the January 2021 census, and September 2021 to March 2022 (7/12ths of the year) will be funded on the January 2022 census. Settings will continue to receive allocations based on their actual number of pupils as in the Spring term. This may result in a fall in the 2021-22 indicative EY block allocation (as reported in item 9 Budget Proposals) which is currently based on the January 2020 pre-COVID census.

Ziz Chater thanked Ian Harrison for communicating the concerns of Early Years providers to the DfE. She noted the significant impact on schools. Guidance was received late and the requirement for providers to open is potentially putting staff in a difficult position. She asked if an objection could be raised on behalf of schools.

Ian Harrison reported that the DfE guidance has now been updated. The DfE has now acknowledged that it is unfair to penalise settings by reducing funding as a result of parents deciding not to send their child in or if settings are forced to close for operational reasons linked to covid. The DfE will now provide funding provided the nursery is open in cases where it is the parental choice to keep a child at home or children cannot attend because there are staffing shortages due to covid.

Ian Harrison advised that nursery settings should open and be available to children subject to risk assessment and staff availability.

Jo Djora agreed with Ziz Chater's comments and thanked Ian Harrison.

She asked for clarity of the codes that should be put in registers and that guidance to schools would be much appreciated. Ian Harrison said schools should use code X if children could not attend because of testing positive or self-isolating but otherwise should use code C for non-attendance to indicate an authorised non-attendance.

Recommendation:

That the Schools Forum is asked to note the latest updates regarding the Early Years Block funding.

This was duly noted.

13. AOB

None

The meeting finished at 5.00 pm