



Surrey Schools Forum Minutes of Meeting

Tuesday 13 May 2025 1pm on Teams

Approved by the Forum at its meeting on 1 July 2025

Present

Chair

Jack Mayhew	Learning Partners MAT	Academy member
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Joint Vice-Chairs

Jo Hastings	Ottershaw Infant and Junior	Academy member
Justin Price	Freemantles School	Special school head

Other school and academy members:

Donna Harwood-Duffy	Dorking Nursery school	Maintained nursery sch rep
Clare McConnell	Bisley Primary School	Maintained primary Head
Zoe Johnson-Walker	The Winston Churchill School	Maintained secondary head
Nick Elliott	NE Secondary short stay sch	PRU representative
Jo Vigar	Charlwood Primary	Maintained primary governor
Matthew Alexander	Greensand MAT	Academy member
Ben Bartlett	Hinchley Wood Learning Partnership	Academy member
Jeanette Cochrane	The Howard Partnership Trust	Academy member
Elaine Cooper	SWAN trust	Academy member
Karyn Hing	Westfield School	Academy member
Sarah Kober	Lumen Learning Trust	Academy member
Gareth Lewis	Elmwey Learning Trust	Academy member
Kerry Oakley	Carrington School	Academy member
John Winter	Weydon MAT	Academy member
David Euridge	Inclusive Education Trust	AP academy member

Non-school members

Matthew Rixson	Guildford Diocese (C of E)
Tamsin Honeybourne	Unions: Education Joint Committee
Folasadi Afolabi	Unions: Education Joint Committee
Sarah Porter	Private, voluntary and independent nurseries

Local Authority Officers

Julia Katherine (JK)	Director–Education and Lifelong Learning
Carol Savedra (CS)	Assistant Director-Commissioning
Mary Burguires (MB)	Assistant Director-Systems
Kay Goodacre (KG)	Strategic Finance Business Partner (CFLL)
Nikki Parsons (NP)	Deputy Strategic Finance Business Partner (ELLC)
David Green (DG)	Senior Finance Business Partner (Schools Funding)

1 Welcome, Introductions and Apologies for Absence

The Chair welcomed members.

Apologies for absence had been received from:

Liam McKeavor	Oatlands School	Maintained primary governor
Chris Hamilton	Portesbery School	Maintained special sch governor
Amanda Merritt	Maybury Primary School	Academy member

2 Declarations of interest for this meeting and register

There were no declarations of interest over and above those in the register. The Chair asked that members review their declarations of interest and update them where required.

3 Minutes of previous meeting (10 January 2025)

Accuracy

DG noted that on page 4, the reference to providing funding for four bulge classes in secondary sector should refer to primary. Otherwise, the minutes were agreed as accurate.

Matters arising (not covered elsewhere on the agenda)

No matters arising were discussed as such, although a few issues from the previous meeting were covered under specific items.

4 Update on final schools and early years budgets for 2025/26, including special schools inflation and national insurance grant funding

Mainstream units of resource had been agreed at the rates previously proposed to Schools Forum. Surrey's application to transfer 1% of schools block funding to support the high needs block had been agreed by DfE before the end of February. Early years funding rates, which were set out in the paper, had been notified to providers before the government's 28 February target. Deprivation supplements in the early years funding formula would now apply to looked after and post looked after children, not just to children entitled to early years pupil premium on deprivation grounds,

Inflation proposals for special schools and PRUs had been discussed with working groups from each sector and then shared with all special schools and PRUs. All had

agreed to the proposed inflation uplift of 3% on top up rates (only) for special schools and PRUs. SEN centres had also had a 3% uplift on top up rates. One member noted that the 3% increase, applied to top up rates only, meant much less than a 3% increase in average funding. Another acknowledged that there had been a full and fair discussion and a collaborative process, even though he would have preferred a greater increase.

The DfE is paying an additional grant to mainstream schools and state maintained early years providers to assist with increased employer national insurance costs. For mainstream schools this will be distributed on a formula basis and the LA has no power to vary the allocation from that calculated by DfE, so some schools are likely to receive more grant than is needed to offset their additional NI costs, whereas other schools may receive less. There was a tool on the DfE website to allow schools to estimate their allocations. The Chair observed that it wasn't clear whether the grant covered the full national insurance increase as a whole nationally. The grant also provides an additional sum per place for schools with SEN centres, again set by DfE, the first time such a grant had provided extra funding for SEN centre places. There is also a grant towards increased national insurance costs for state maintained early years providers, but it is based on historic pupil data whereas funding for this sector is normally based on current takeup. It was likely that the LA would need to distribute the grant on a historic basis. Special schools would receive additional funding towards national insurance increases on a per place basis.

Final allocations of each grant would be published in May but would not be paid to LAs until September.

Members noted other unresolved cost uncertainties, mainly teacher and support staff pay increases.

5 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) outturn 2024/25

DG summarised the DSG outturn for 2024/25, a net deficit of £60.8m against expected DSG income for the year, compared to a planned deficit of £26.3m. Schools block had been underspent by £1.459m, central schools block underspent by £285,000 and early years by £1.292m, whereas there was an overspend of £63.903m against the high needs block. The cumulative DSG deficit at 31 March 2025 was £141.870m. More detail was provided in the paper.

Members noted that DfE had now specifically stated that all underspends on individual DSG blocks must be offset against the £63m high needs block overspend. The maintained nursery rep noted that this meant that the £1.3m underspend on early years would not remain within that sector, and sought ways of mitigating such underspends going forward,

CS commented that the combination of huge growth in funded early years provision in 2024/25 and the uncertainty over levels of takeup in the year, including termly variation, had meant that total funding was uncertain until late in the year. 48% of two year olds of working parents and 22% of eligible children aged 9 months to two years had taken up the entitlement. The new EYES system had meant increased

levels of overpayments (£843,000), which needed to be recovered, and a margin had had to be left for uncertainty in this, although she saw this as a one-off effect of implementation. Much of the underspend had been in centrally managed budgets and 2024/25 was the last year in which 5% of funding could be centrally managed. £677,000 from centrally managed funds had been distributed to providers through “Brighter Beginnings” funding, aimed at increasing uptake and quality of provision. Some centrally managed funding had been distributed to providers as sufficiency and sustainability allocations, which counted as centrally managed even though it was distributed to providers. A total of over £1m of centrally managed funds had been passed through to providers.

KG commented that the underspend was less than 1% of the Early Years block and that some contingency had been necessary, because unlike the schools block, expenditure was based on a termly (in year) count.

Members asked whether the surplus could have been distributed to early years providers at year end.

KG commented that almost all of the high needs block was spent on schools and so using underspends on other blocks to offset the high needs block overspend was still supporting schools even if not mainstream schools. Some of the high needs block supported early years children.

Members suggested that the impact of using the early years underspend to support the high needs block deficit was significant to the early years sector but made little difference to the high needs block deficit. One member saw this as increasing the transfer from other blocks above the 1% in the safety valve agreement and as an incentive to build extra contingencies into school and early years block budgets to support the high needs block. KG asserted that Surrey contingencies were small relative to other LAs. There were early years pupils with SEN supported by the high needs block.

The Chair agreed that the underspend was relatively small but also recognised the concerns of the early years sector. While noting that the accounts for 2024/25 were now closed, he asked whether a year end redistribution could be considered in future,

CS advised that she had met with Early Years Phase Council to consider how the likely surplus could be spent or committed, and that she planned to continue to work with the sector to avoid an underspend in 2025/26. Much of the underspend had been on central funds, which were unlikely to remain at current levels., Centrally retained funds would be reduced from 5% of total funding to 4% in 2025/26 and could be further reduced to 3% in 2026/27, a potential drop of £1m in central funds between 2024/25 and 2026/27.

Another member noted that the movement of funds from early years to high needs predated the safety valve. She also expressed concern that schools with nursery classes needed to run classes for the full academic year when they were only paid for three year olds for the terms following their third birthday, and thus some pupils were not funded for the whole of the academic year. KG noted that this was a

national issue. CS noted that the LA recommended that schools didn't admit nursery children until they were eligible for funding. The Chair suggested that CS might provide some training to Primary Council around this issue. **Action for CS to discuss with Donna Harwood-Duffy and Chair of Primary Council how to support primary schools with early years funding.**

The maintained nursery school representative noted that school based nurseries were important in delivering the necessary expansion in nursery places and asked whether part of the underspend could be used to support primary schools to expand nursery provision.

The Chair noted the difficulties of managing the early years budget.

Another member suggested that the underspend on the schools budget over the last five years had averaged £1.5m, which meant that the effective transfer of funds from schools to high needs block was higher than provided in the safety valve agreement. He asked whether the block transfer could be calculated at year end so that the end value matched the agreement. KG advised that the transfer had to be calculated and agreed by a specific date at the start of the year, when funding for individual schools was determined. She noted a £5m overspend on additional support in mainstream schools within HNB and thus the funding was reaching mainstream schools by a different route.

Members suggest that the rolling trends suggested that the LA had budgeted too cautiously and asked whether budgets within the schools block could be set less prudently. DG advised that the growth fund allocation had been reduced in 2025/26, e.g. there had been no contingency for primary bulge classes, as none had been needed in 2024/25, but four such classes had now been identified as needed for 2025/26.

The Chair suggested that the LA should look at budgeting for lower levels of contingency in the schools block in future years.

JK noted that some of the transferred funds had supported preventative work, see item 8.

A member acknowledged the efforts which had been made to create additional specialist places in the state-maintained sector, but noted the reported 100% overspend on post 16 non-maintained and independent sector (NMI) places and suggested that creating more post 16 places should be a focus of future work. He suggested that he had not seen much evidence of state sector post 16 providers being asked to expand.

JK noted that Surrey was still a significant outlier for NMI usage both pre and post 16, despite a large capital programme to create more state-maintained places. Decisions were still awaited on three DFE funded special free schools (500 places). When pupils were placed and settled in schools outside the Surrey state sector it was often inappropriate to move them back.

Members noted that despite significant achievements in increasing local provision the increased overall demand meant that the number of NMI placements had not changed much.

The Chair noted that there would be a major item on the high needs block at the July meeting. Members asked that this should include information on trends in NMI places and on the variety of places used and costs and needs involved. **Action for KG to provide the data**

One member expressed disappointment at the underspend on therapies and Access to Education, when schools could not secure the therapy support they needed. JK replied that capacity in the services was an issue.

KG noted that DfE was not entering any new safety valve agreements or extending existing agreements. The majority of LAs had high needs deficits and many (not Surrey) would be insolvent if the current “statutory override” arrangements for the deficit ended. Surrey had set aside reserves to cover the residual deficit. DfE was expected to provide some direction later in the year.

The Chair suggested that either a response at council level or a new (national?) approach to SEND was required,

6 Growing schools fund 2025/26 Proposed variation for schools admitting pupils from closing schools

DG explained that closure of a primary school was being proposed and that some of the children would be accommodated in a bulge class at another school (i.e. above PAN) which was covered by existing growing schools criteria). However, some pupils were being admitted to other local schools with vacancies, which were not covered by existing funding arrangements. The paper proposed that:

- Where pupils from the closed school (or who would have entered the closed school in September 2025) were admitted to other local schools with vacancies in September 2025 they would be funded from September 2025
- Where pupils from the closed school moved before September 2025 but applied after publication of the closure consultation they would be funded from September 2025 (but not before, as the closing school would be funded until then)

Both subject to any school only receiving funding if five or more pupils were admitted under the two categories taken together.

The Diocesan representative commented that the LA and Diocese were working closely with the closing school and destination school to ensure that all pupils from the closing school were settled in other schools. Some nearby small schools were receiving up to nine extra pupils, which was significant for a small school.

DG agreed that while the proposal was for one year only, approval of the proposals could be seen as setting a precedent for future closures. All growth fund criteria were reviewed annually, and the Forum could make a different decision in future. The

Chair suggested that it was fair for funding from a closing school to follow pupils where possible.

The Forum agreed the proposed funding arrangements for pupils moving from the closing school (if the consultation proposal is implemented).

7 Initial suggestions for 2026/27 school and early years funding consultation

DG asked the Forum if they wished officers to work up any proposals for change to be considered at the July meeting for inclusion in the autumn funding consultation.

Minimum per pupil funding level (MPPL)

Officers proposed to review whether to seek DfE permission to reduce the Minimum per pupil level funding (MPPL) for schools receiving it, as a contribution to the safety valve block transfer. Currently MPPL schools contributed nothing, and thus many other schools contributed 1.7% of budget towards the 1% transfer.

Some members argued that as an MPPL was nationally deemed necessary, any proposed variation would need careful consideration, and that schools on MPPL found it most difficult to set balanced budgets and had least flexibility. One described it as a “very controversial proposal” and that he would “use all the energy he had” to ensure that it was not implemented, including legal challenges, and that schools in low deprivation areas were in difficulties irrespective of size. He suggested that there were not economies of scale in curriculum delivery and that a full analysis should be undertaken of the impact of any reduction in MPPL on the 20% of schools receiving it.

KG noted that if there was a consensus in favour of a reduction in MPPL, the LA would still need to apply to the Secretary of State for approval to vary it. She was aware of a neighbouring LA which had recently had such an application approved, after rejections in previous years, on the basis that a reduction in MPPL was now a fairer distribution. A reduction in MPPL would not increase the value of the block transfer but would only change its distribution between schools. She confirmed that schools on MPPL were usually large schools with low levels of additional need.

Other points made included:

- with current financial pressures, the majority of schools would vote for a reduction in MPPL because they would benefit.
- MPPL schools were benefiting less from any transfer to the high needs block as they had low levels of additional need/SEN
- it was legitimate to consult on such a proposal even though the proposal was likely to be divisive
- the proportion of pupils in MPPL schools should be taken into account when considering impact, not just the number of MPPL schools.

The Chair asked whether the Forum had the right to decide on any reduction in MPPL (it is consulted, but Secretary of State would make any decision).

The Chair agreed that it would be wrong not to consider a change in MPPL, but that it was important to emphasise that MPPL schools were the lowest funded.

Falling rolls

Officers proposed to review the basis of allocation of falling rolls funding.

De-delegation

No changes were proposed to services to be de-delegated.

Early years

CS noted that 2026/27 would be the first year in which the 30 hr working parent entitlement for children aged 9 months-3 years would apply throughout, and so no trend data was available. Therefore she proposed to maintain current funding principles unless strong evidence emerged to justify change. Hourly rates would be set to pass through the maximum possible funding while taking into account any potential risk of deficit. Early intervention fund (EIF) would be retained at 3% for three year olds, 2% for two year olds and 1% for under twos. The need for EIF was lower for younger children, because needs had not yet been identified in the youngest children. In 2024/25 EIF had been overspent for 3-4 year olds, but underspent for younger children. However, as 3-4 year olds had the lowest basic funding rate, she did not want to divert a higher proportion of 3-4 year old funding into EIF.

CS proposed that centrally retained funding should be retained at the highest permissible rate. In 2025/26 that was 4%, and in 2026/27 she expected DfE to reduce the maximum to 3% (albeit of a larger total). That suggested a £1m reduction in central funds, which was being taken into account when making commitments against the current budget.

One member again asked for exploration of how underspends could be avoided and whether in-year underspends could be divided among providers.

CS commented that underspends arose because the number of hours taken up varied during the year, as takeup was not compulsory. DfE funding counts did not take into account pupils starting after the termly census date.

Consultation process

Members noted that there had been a low response to the autumn 2024 schools consultation.

JK recalled that information sessions had been held. She was keen to identify other ways in which schools could be given information.

The Chair asked that phase councils should be more effectively linked into the consultation process.

8 Early intervention and inclusion funding (EIIF) pilot: mid year review

JK recalled that EIIF funding had been a response to concerns over the number of year R pupils with high levels of need. Often it was too early to know whether an EHCP was justified or whether focused short term support would avoid the need for

an EHCP. Schools had suggested that, if other support was available, they might not need to seek EHCPs for some of these pupils.

EIIF funding was available to schools with at least three pupils in year R who had needed additional support in early years but whose needs might not require an EHCP if additional support was required initially. The paper was an interim report and a full impact assessment would be provided in the autumn.

40 schools had requested support. There had been a 42% reduction in statutory assessments from those schools, and where EHCPs had been requested they had been more likely to be granted.

One member described EIIF as “transformational” for children, in particular the link between early years and year R, She suggested that funding should be extended to year 1. However, she suggested that the three pupil threshold disadvantaged smaller schools, which had less budget flexibility already.

Another member noted the importance of parents seeing that there was an alternative to EHCPs, and sought similar arrangements for other key stages.

One member asked for data on the number of children benefiting.

9 Local government reorganisation

JK advised that Surrey had submitted a proposal to government for two unitary authorities (East and West Surrey) to replace the existing county and 11 districts. This would allow the creation of a mayoral strategic authority for Surrey (such an authority had to cover more than one unitary LA) and unlock devolution of new powers. A detailed proposal had been submitted on 9 May, supported by the council and 2 districts. The majority of districts had supported an alternative proposal for three unitary authorities. Details of the county council’s proposal are on the Surrey website.

The county council view was that two unitary authorities would maximise efficiencies and savings and facilitate a smoother transition, compared to three authorities. One unitary authority would not meet the government criteria for devolution that a mayoral authority had to cover more than one LA. The government planned to make a decision in the autumn on proposals for Surrey. If approved, there would be elections to shadow authorities in May 2026 and Surrey County Council and the districts would all cease to exist on 1 April 2027.

Further information would be provided at a later meeting.

The Chair emphasised the need for colleagues to recognise the scale of the proposed changes

10 Children’s Well-being and schools Bill (taken before items 7-9)

Mary Burguières presented this item, The Bill contained 21 school related measures, of which seven specifically concerned independent schools, seven were new responsibilities on schools, two extended government powers over academies, four extended current LA powers and one was a new duty in respect of children not in school.

New school duties included provision of free breakfast clubs (which some Surrey schools were piloting) and limits on the number of branded school uniform items. Teachers would have to be qualified or working towards qualified status (including teachers in academies)

Academies would have to teach the national curriculum.

Statutory powers to direct that children should be educated offsite would be extended to academies.

Academies would be required to pay teachers at least the minimum rate specified for teachers in maintained schools.

New LA duties included a compulsory register of children not in school, something which the LA had supported for a long time.

There were also changes to school attendance orders and strengthened responsibilities in respect of elective home education,

The LA was preparing for these, including a functional leadership model as part of the recent ELL restructure.

The Chair commented that schools were supportive of the proposals in respect of children not in school.

There were new duties for schools and LAs to co-operate on school place planning and admissions, plus extended powers for LAs to direct academies to admit a child, not an action that the LA would normally choose but a possibility.

LAs would have greater roles in the setting of PANs by academies.

LAs would be able to propose to open new maintained schools, although this was unlikely to be of immediate relevance in the current context of falling rolls.

The Bill also contained a number of children's social care measures, which were welcomed but which would require some changes in the family resilience service. There was increased focus on multi agency working.

Members noted the absence of references to the health service and that schools were not seeing nearly as much support from health as used to be provided.

Officers noted that directors of Adult Social Care had been calling for improvements in health provision and that the Bill need to be seen in the context of the need for wider system changes.

Members noted that trials of breakfast clubs had shown that funding levels were inadequate; staffing was a significant cost.

CS commented that Surrey was not alone in challenging DFE on the safety of their staffing assumptions on wraparound and breakfast club provision and on the level of funding available.

One member commented that she would prefer the breakfast club funding to support the school's core purpose of learning.

Another member was happy to share interesting recent experience of consulting on changes in admission arrangements.

The Chair commented on the need for schools to better understand the shared responsibilities for admissions. Some aspects had not been effective and there was a need to join up in response to shifting demographics.

JK would follow up the issue. **(Action for JK)**

11 Support staff pay

Surrey has decided to adopt the National Joint Council increases for 2025/26 and thus pay settlements would be nationally determined. The current NJC offer is a 3.2% increase. Surrey had also agreed an increase of one day's annual leave for staff with more than five years' service, which would incur additional costs to schools, because of the impact on term time only staff.

The Chair suggested that the move to NJC increases might smooth the impact of moving to a national school support staff negotiating body, if that was implemented.

12 Schools Forum business

Election of Chair and Vice-Chairs: DG would send out nomination forms, to be returned before the next meeting. If any position was contested there would be an election at the July meeting. New Chair and Vice-Chairs would take up office after the July meeting. Existing Chair and Vice-Chairs were allowed to stand again.

Changes to membership: maintained primary heads to be reduced by 1, primary academy reps to be increased by 1.

Training sessions for new members will be arranged. We will try to do this prior to the next meeting. (NB normally on Teams).

Next meeting (Tuesday 1 July at Woodhatch Place) to include a substantial item on high needs block and safety valve.

13 Any other business

None

Meeting ended 3.10pm

Date of next meeting, Tuesday 1 July 2025, 1pm start, in person at Woodhatch Place.