

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

SCHOOLS' FORUM

At a meeting of the Schools' Forum held in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday, 21 November 2018 at 9:30 am.

PRESENT

C Pearson (Chair)
Director, Three Rivers Learning Trust

Headteacher Representatives

C Bradshaw
M Deane-Hall
M Hall

F G Hartland
J Kennedy
E Potts (substitute for
C Hodgson)

Governor Representatives

K Faulkner
S Harker
S Heminsley (substitute for
M Pedley)

I Walker
G Wilkins

Academies Representatives

J Roberts

D Wylie

Early Years' Representative

K Morrison

Trades Union Representatives

R E Woolhouse

16 - 19 Provider of Education Representative

J Bell (substitute for J Cooper)

Northumberland County Council Elected Members (Observers)

W Daley

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OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

S Aviston	Head of School Organisation and Resources
S Barron	Head of SEND Strategies
D Jackson	Service Director - Education and Skills
K Norris	Democratic Services Officer
Z Parkin	School funding and Business Relationship Manager
B Parvin	Education and Skills Business Manager
A Russell	Principal Accountant

21. MEMBERSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

- 21.1 Correspondence had been received from Mary Pedley, Governor representative of Newbrough C of E Primary School requesting that Steve Heminsley, who had attended the last three meetings of the School's Forum as her substitute, be appointed as the permanent Governor representative. This was duly agreed by members of the Schools' Forum.
- 21.2 It was reported that DfE guidance indicated that special academies should be represented on the Schools' Forum. As such an approach had been made to NCEA Castle School and Hexham Priory but, as yet, no response had been received.

22. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs M Allan, Mr G Atkins, Mrs S Connolly, Mrs J Cooper, Mrs C Hodgson, Mr K McGrane, Mrs M Pedley, Mr B Watson, Councillor N Oliver, Mr D Cookson and Mr D Street.

23. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

- 23.1 **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on Wednesday, 26 September 2018, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising:

- 23.2 Minute 13.2: Councillor Daley explained that a narrative from the inspector had now been received regarding Bellingham Middle School in which he had acknowledged that the consultation had been carried out correctly but he had made his decision in line with parental choice. Discussion took place about the decision being subjective and the vagueness of the report. Assurance was given that, contrary to media reports, the decision to keep the school open was not linked to issues with Haydon Bridge High School. In response to a question about budget implications it was stated that there was an issue with the impact on pupil numbers and transition. A

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number of parents had not yet decided which school their children would be attending and the situation would be monitored.

- 23.3 Minute 13.3: regarding Bright Tribe, it was noted that Bright Tribe had changed their management structure and dialogue was on-going.
- 23.4 Minute 13.2 (error in numbering, should be Minute 13.4): regarding North of Tyne developments, the official launch had taken place 2 weeks ago and there had been a stakeholder meeting at the Centre of Life. There would be a consultation phase and the North of Tyne Education challenge would be on the agenda of a meeting in two weeks. Officers would know better how to move forward after Christmas.
- 23.5 Minute 13.3 (error in numbering, should be Minute 13.5): regarding Additional Needs Sub Committee and Formula Funding Sub Committee, the Chair of Schools' Forum had not yet held meetings with the Chairs of these Sub Committees.

24. COMMUNICATION

(a) Education Funding Articles

- 24.1 Some articles printed in the media regarding education funding had been circulated to members of the Forum for information (copies filed with the signed minutes of the meeting). The article in the Guardian had referred to special educational needs and the Times Education S article was about the future of education and the potential implications of the NFF going forward.

(b) Correspondence between Headteachers and DfE

- 24.2 Correspondence between the High and Upper School Headteachers and the DfE had been circulated with the agenda for information (copies filed with the signed minutes of the meeting). The Education and Skills Business Manager drew members attention to the letter to Nick Gibb MP which highlighted the anomalies between 2 and 3 tier figures in key stage 3 funding and had advocated adjustments to equalise it. The Director of Education and Skills said he had raised the issue with the Secretary of State recently who had noted concerns about the negative impact on the 3 tier systems.

(c) Additional Educational Needs (AEN) Subcommittee Minutes - 7 November

- 24.3 Draft minutes from the Additional Educational Needs Sub Committee meeting held on 7 November 2018 had been circulated to members (copy filed with the signed minutes of the meeting). The Chair of the Sub Committee raised concerns about the SEN overspend in Northumberland, the reasons for this and the importance of schools looking to support their SEN pupils. It was noted that the EHCP national average in SEN schools was 25% and in Northumberland it was over 40%.

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- 24.4 Detailed discussion ensued and it was stated that officers had looked at a review of the banding system for mainstream schools but the financial implications of this were considered too expensive to implement in full, given current high needs overspending. Potential implementation in relation to the highest need Band 5 pupils was being looked at for mainstream schools and a report on that would be provided to a future meeting.
- 24.5 It was queried if any work was being done to pressure Local Authorities to support the high needs deficit from general reserves. In response the Director of Education and Skills said there was currently not enough money in the pot but he felt that the Government had recognised the situation and that the pot may be increased. Northumberland would also need to look at its own high needs budget and how it was being spent. Everything possible had to be done to flex the budget.
- 24.6 It was confirmed that officers had links with other Schools' Forums in the North East to compare their approach. A recent survey indicated 9 of the 10 NE authorities which responded were seeking a transfer from the School Block to the High Needs Block, figures ranged from 0.5% to 1.6%. The Chair referred to an email he had received from Schools' North East in which he had been asked to participate in the pulling together of Chairs of Schools' Forums and to which he had given a positive response. Northumberland had also contributed to a recent LGA/ISOS survey.
- 24.7 Discussion took place about special needs schools in Northumberland being full and the lack of provision in the County to deal with the numbers faced. It was felt that there was scope to explore support being given by mainstream schools but it was acknowledged that it was often parental choice for children to attend special schools. It was stated that children being referred to special schools were now much more challenging than before and there needed to be a strategic approach.

(c) Formula Funding Committee Minutes - 6 November 2018

- 24.8 Draft minutes from the Additional Educational Needs Sub Committee meeting held on 7 November 2018 had been circulated to members (copy filed with the signed minutes of the meeting).
- 24.9 The Chair of the Sub Committee said members had discussed school balances data and these balances were now in the public domain. He suggested that schools may wish to check that the figures quoted were correct.
- 24.10 It was stated that 2018/19 Formula Value Information and Initial Modelling for 2018/19 had been discussed at length and, with regard to how the Schools Block funding was going to be distributed, two models had been considered -
Version 1 - increase in MFG at 0.5%
Version 2 - including everything but AWPU and reducing the MFG to 0%.

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Although the Sub Committee had discussed this, it had not reached a conclusion about which was the best way forward, and had asked for various models featuring deductions of 0.5%. 0.75% and 1% to be brought to Schools Forum,

- 24.11 The Sub Committee was suggesting a 1% transfer within the current year's funding to the high needs block.
- 24.12 The Sub Committee had also received a report and information published by the Department for Education highlighting individual maintained school balances. In response to comments that schools should be forewarned that school balances had been published, the Education and Skills Business Manager said it had been agreed in 2017/18 that balances would be published. Members were reminded there had been a report to the September 2018 Schools' Forum highlighting that there had been a downward trend in balances.
- 24.13 There was a final reference to the F40 letter to Philip Hammond, Chancellor of the Exchequer, which had been circulated, in which educational funding for mainstream schools, high needs and early years had been highlighted as key concerns.

25. CHILDREN PERMANENTLY EXCLUDED FROM SCHOOL

- 25.1 The report provided members of the Schools' Forum with an update on the rising numbers of permanent and fixed term exclusions within Northumberland schools and academies (copy filed with the signed Minutes of the meeting). The Director of Education and Skills introduced the report stating it was a modified version of that which had been presented to the Family and Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee two weeks ago. The Scrutiny Committee had agreed to establish a task and finish group to investigate the causes of the substantial increases in both fixed and permanent exclusions and to develop recommendations on working with partners, targeting resources and developing strategies to significantly improve the current situation. They would look at issues such as Fair Access Panels, consistency across the county and early intervention.
- 25.2 Reference was made to a recent meeting which had taken place with most secondary school Headteachers concerning the level of exclusions which had been very productive. After this meeting the Director of Education and Skills would be attending a meeting at Blyth Academy and also meeting with the Ashington and Bedlington Multi Academy Trust in order to address the situation further, as it could not be allowed to continue.
- 25.3 It was stated that excluded children were more likely to be from vulnerable and disadvantaged groups who had been rejected at home and then at school. The situation should be addressed to better meet the needs of those children and all avenues would be explored.

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- 25.4 The Director of Education and Skills said that the Post 16 service should be used more and should possibly be a “Post 14” service. Reference was made to the Sunderland and Northumberland College merger and it was suggested that the opportunities for joint working between the College and Local Authority should be explored drawing on any relevant experience in Sunderland.
- 25.5 The funding required for the Local Authority to provide alternative provision could be made available to schools if it was not required to be used to fund alternative provision for excluded pupils.
- 25.6 No specific engagement had taken place with Primary or First Schools but this was not solely a High School problem. Data had been provided to show where the highest numbers of exclusions had occurred.
- 25.7 Discussion ensued and questions were raised about the criteria used to exclude pupils permanently. In response the Director of Education said there were 7 or 8 specific categories for exclusion but there was one box for ‘other reasons’ which made it very difficult to analyse and address issues.
- 25.8 It would be part of the Task and Finish Group investigation to look at why some schools had less tolerance than others. It was about relationship and management of particular schools and the culture of the school.
- 25.9 In response to comments about sickness levels in the Pupil Referral Unit due to children who were difficult to manage, the Director of Education and Skills said he was not aware of that but would look into it. The Head of SEND Strategies stated that a statutory process was being started for children who had been identified in mainstream school as having special needs.
- 25.10 The Trade Union representative raised concerns that if schools were faced with pressures not to exclude, it could result in more children being educated at home. The Director of Education and Skills said, although he had not included that within the report, he acknowledged the concerns raised.
- 25.11 Concerns were raised about mental health support and difficult decisions regarding disadvantaged children. A number of difficult children were managed well but sometimes when violence occurred this led to exclusion. It was felt that more support strategies were needed from SIPs. In response the Head of SEND Strategies referred to a piece of work done on SIPs waiting times and a graduated approach to make it clear where to go with concerns. The system was not being used in a smart way and a systems solution would be launched next summer.
- 25.12 A member said the Forum should be aware that figures showed that 91 permanent exclusions were from academies.

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25.13 The Director of Education and Skills said the Local Authority had been approached for support for mental health issues in schools and all avenues would be explored including capital funding being diverted if the right solutions were found.

25.14 There was a whole range of issues to consider and it was hoped that the Task and Finish Group would produce its first report by 31 January.

26. DSG MONITORING 2018/19

26.1 Abigail Russell, Principal Accountant, introduced the above report which was based on September 2018 data. There had been a £2 million deficit brought forward from 2017-18 and as at October 2018 there was an overall forecast overspend of £1.9 million, reasons for which were provided in the report (copy filed with the signed Minutes of the meeting).

26.2 She summarised the overspends and underspends relating to the Schools Block, Central Schools Block, High Needs Block and Early Years Block as set out in the report.

26.3 With regard to queries raised about the forecast overspend on the High Needs Block, it was stated that alternative provision for excluded pupils had risen as the number of permanent exclusions at the beginning of September had almost doubled. An increase of 28 placements from last year to independent special schools had also put pressure on the budget and there had been a growth in 19 - 25 year olds needing special education provision. Top up figures were currently the same as last year and were based on pupil numbers.

26.4 There were new terms of reference for the SEN Panel and robust discussions had taken place to ensure correct decisions were made.

26.7 Jen Bell, Assistant Principal of Student Services, Northumberland College (substitute for Jo Cooper), said that Northumberland College had seen a great difference in funding and requested involvement regarding pupils without SIPs. It was agreed that Sam Barron would contact her in that regard.

26.8 Early years clawback for funded nursery hours in 2017-18 had been less than expected and additional grant received was being held to offset pressures elsewhere.

26.9 Transport was also highlighted as a key pressures for Northumberland though largely funded from outside of the DSG.

26.10 Work had started on next year's grants with figures for inflation etc. being built in.

26.11 The Chair thanked the Principal Accountant for her clear and comprehensive report.

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27. UPDATE ON SCHOOLS' FUNDING 2019/20

- 27.1 The Education and Skills Business Manager introduced the above report which provided information to the Schools' Forum regarding the local formula for funding schools and academies as influenced by NFF changes and available funding (copy attached to the signed minutes of the meeting as Agenda Item 7).
- 27.2 There would be a limited window of opportunity to finalise figures between December and January when final overall Dedicated Schools Grant figures were received from the DfE. Last year there was a significant change from provisional figures which were driven by pupil numbers.
- 27.3 The current provisional figure was lower than last year's figure as 3 schools had been closed in the interim period which would impact on the overall settlement. National funding values had been used which would have negative financial implications and it was about how allocations would be made to schools.
- 27.4 Following discussions with the Formula Funding Committee it had been requested that the Schools' Forum look at three models demonstrating:-
- a) The impact of mirroring NNF values and adjusting Minimum Funding Guarantee level.
 - b) The impact of mirroring NFF values, keeping MFG at 0% and adjusting AWPU.
 - c) The impacts of transferring 1%, 0.75% or 0.5% of funding into the High Needs Block.
- 27.5 At this stage a 1% transfer was recommended to leave both schools and the Local Authority in the same financial position as last year, though this would be dependent on the final 2019/20 DSG figure being higher than the provisional figure. Schools would also be consulted on this proposed transfer.
- 27.6 The proposal was to maintain formula funding values which were in excess of the NFF.
- 27.7 It was acknowledged that it was a very complicated issue and discussion took place about the benefits of working with high needs children in mainstream schools so that money was not taken away from those schools. It was pointed out, however, that the majority of high needs funding was around complex cases and funding for special needs schools had not increased since 2013. They received top up funding but there were still on-going pressures. Unless special schools could grow and expand they would not receive any extra money per pupil.
- 27.8 The decision was about what to do with the funding available. It was not felt that the Authority would be in a position to support Free School Meals at higher rates

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that had been paid in 2018/19 and it was looking to move back to national funding rates. Funding increased between the provisional and final figures for 2018/19, but the provisional 2019/20 figure was £900,000 less than the final 2018/19 figure. Changes in pupil numbers were a factor in this.

27.9 Figures attached in the appendices showed the impact on schools at different levels. At the 1% level schools lost out generally across the board and that applied proportionately. It was hoped that the final settlement would see additional funding to mitigate this.

27.10 The Chair stated that the Forum's decision would impact on how quickly the schools that were going to be more challenged under the NFF would feel that challenge. Detailed discussion took place about specifics and putting figures into context. Generally members were advocating to maintain stability and it was:

RESOLVED that

- (1) the information be noted;
- (2) The local formula be developed taking into account the comments received once final figures were confirmed in December; and
- (3) The Forum support a request to transfer up to 1% of the final Schools Block Figure (up to £1,789,640.00 based on the current provisional figure).

28. EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES 2017/18

28.1 Due to time constraints, it was agreed that the Director of Education and Skills presentation on Educational Outcomes 2017/18 be circulated to members after the meeting for information (copy filed with the papers of the meeting).

RESOLVED that a copy of the presentation be circulated to members of the Schools' Forum for information.

29. TEACHERS' PAY GRANT AND PENSION SCHEME UPDATE

29.1 The Education and Skills Business Manager introduced the above report regarding the publication of individual school allocations in relation to Teachers' Pay Grant, including details of individual school allocations for 2018/19 (copy filed with signed Minutes as agenda item 10).

29.2 It was noted that the key element was to consider the 7% increase in teachers' pension contributions that came into effect from September 2019. The DfE had stated that schools would be supported with these additional costs but the details of that were outstanding.

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29.3 In response to queries it was stated that the ongoing impact of increases in supporting staff pension contributions should be considered and an update provided to a future meeting.

RESOLVED that

- (1) the information be noted; and
- (2) further information about pension deficits be provided at a future meeting.

30. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Schools' Forum would take place on Wednesday, 16 January 2018 at 9.30 am in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____

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