

**REDCAR & CLEVELAND SCHOOLS' FORUM****MINUTES OF A VIRTUAL MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 1 OCTOBER 2024 AT 3:00PM THROUGH MICROSOFT TEAMS****MEMBERS PRESENT:**

<b>SCHOOL REPRESENTATIVES</b>	
Maintained Special School Representative	Mr P McLean, Kirkleatham Hall School, Chair
<b>ACADEMY REPRESENTATIVES</b>	
Ironstone Academy Trust	Mrs A O'Gara, Nunthorpe Primary Academy/Zetland Primary School
Nicholas Postgate Catholic Academy Trust	Miss S Williams
Tees Valley Collaborative Trust	Mr S Glover
Saltburn Primary School	Mrs C Chadwick
Special Academies: Mo Mowlam Academy	Miss R Glover, Vice Chair
<b>TRADE UNIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS REPRESENTATIVE</b>	
NEU	Mr J Myers
<b>NON-SCHOOL REPRESENTATIVES</b>	
PVI Sector (Early Years)	Dr J Hawthorne
<b>NON-MEMBERS/OFFICERS</b>	
Assistant Director for Education and Skills	Ms C Mahoney
Directorate Accountant	Mrs E Laird
Accountant	Mr A Robson
Lead for Achievement	Mrs J Ratcliffe
Lead for Inclusion	Mr G Smith
<b>ALSO PRESENT:</b>	
Clerk to Schools' Forum	Mrs A Douglas, Governance Support Service

*The meeting started at 3pm. The required quorum was met at all times.*

		<b>ACTION</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR OF SCHOOLS' FORUM FOR THE 2024-25 ACADEMIC YEAR</b>	
1.1	Members had been invited in advance to express their willingness to serve as Chair of Schools' Forum for the 2024-25 academic year. No names had been submitted in advance of the meeting. Members were also given an opportunity at the meeting to express their willingness to stand. Mr Paul McLean put his name forward for consideration, and no further names were forthcoming.	
1.2	RESOLVED that Mr Paul McLean be appointed Chair of Schools' Forum for the academic year 2024-25.	Clerk

		<b>ACTION</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR OF SCHOOLS' FORUM FOR THE 2024-25 ACADEMIC YEAR</b>	
2.1	Members had been invited in advance to express their willingness to serve as Vice-Chair of Schools' Forum for the 2024-25 academic year. No names had been submitted in advance of the meeting. Members were also given an opportunity at the meeting to express their willingness to stand. Ms Rachel Glover put her name forward for consideration, and no further names were forthcoming.	
2.2	RESOLVED that Ms Rachel Glover be appointed Vice-Chair of Schools' Forum for the academic year 2024-25.	Clerk
<b>3.</b>	<b>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b>	
3.1	Apologies had been submitted in advance of the meeting from Mr L Beaumont (Archway), Ms D Swainston (Executive Director, Children and Families), Mr J Faulkner (Redcar College), Mr M Bloomfield (maintained school governor) and Ms S Walker (Skelton Primary School).	
3.2	RESOLVED to consent to the absence of the above-named members.	Clerk
<b>4.</b>	<b>NOTIFICATION OF ANY OTHER BUSINESS</b>	
	No items were declared for consideration under Any Other Business.	
<b>5.</b>	<b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b>	
5.1	Schools' Forum members were given the opportunity to declare any pecuniary interests or other conflicts of interest relating to items on the agenda for the current meeting.	
5.2	Although not formally identified as a conflict of interest, the special school representative noted the potential positive impact on special schools from the recommendation to transfer 0.5% to the High Needs Block.	
<b>6.</b>	<b>MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING</b>	
6.1	Minutes of the meetings held on Monday 22 January 2024 and Monday 24 June 2024 had been circulated prior to the meeting. Having given members an opportunity to highlight any inaccuracies, the minutes were accepted as a true record of proceedings. All action points were confirmed as having been completed.	
6.2	<b>Outcome</b>  The minutes of the meetings held on Monday 22 January 2024 and Monday 24 June 2024 were approved as a true record of proceedings.	

		<b>ACTION</b>
<b>7.</b>	<b>CONSULTATION REGARDING HIGH NEEDS BLOCK FUNDING TRANSFER</b>	
7.1	<b>Purpose</b>	
7.1.1	To seek the views of all schools within the borough on a proposal to transfer 0.5% of the Schools Block allocation to the High Needs Block for the 2025-26 financial year. This transfer was intended to address ongoing financial pressures within the High Needs Block, which was administered by the Council. A similar consultation had been conducted for the 2024-25 financial year and presented to the Schools' Forum on 2 October 2023.	
7.1.2	A report had been distributed to all mainstream schools to facilitate communication between schools and their Schools' Forum representatives. This would enable informed voting on the proposal at the current meeting. Mrs Laird guided members through the key features of the report.	
7.2	<b>Discussion/Challenge</b>	
7.2.1	The local authority (LA) had requested a 0.5% transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block in the last six financial years. The LA had focused on understanding the underlying issues which related to both capacity and to the complexity of education, health and care plans (EHCPs). There had been a significant increase in both the number of children in independent non-maintained special schools (INMSS), and in the total cost of those placements in recent years. The forecasted spend on INMSS as per the LA's quarter one position was £8.4m. A graph which showed the number of children in INMSS, and the associated costs from 2021 to 2024, had been included in the report.	
	<u>Resource Bases</u>	
7.2.2	The LA had commissioned additional places in special schools in 2022, but over time, this had not been in line with demand. Resource Bases were the most cost-effective form of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provision, typically offering specialised support for children with SEND within mainstream schools. These provisions could help prevent children from transitioning to special schools, thereby freeing up space for those who might otherwise require placement in an INMSS. The number of places in Resource Bases had increased in recent years but had not been sufficient to meet demand. The difference in cost between a child attending a Resource Base or attending an INMSS was £58.8k per year on average.	
7.2.3	In response to an inquiry, the LA confirmed that there was one secondary Resource Base in the borough, located at Freebrough Academy, offering 10 places. Members raised concerns that if additional Resource Bases were not established in secondary schools, the High Needs Block would face increasing financial pressure in the future to accommodate the growing needs of pupils currently attending Resource Bases in primary schools.	

	<b>ACTION</b>
<p><u>Current Spending in Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council (RCBC)</u></p>	
<p>7.2.4 In the financial year 2023-24, the cumulative deficit for the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) was £6m in total. £7.5m was attributable to high needs funding and had been offset by some surpluses in the other blocks. A further projected overspend in the High Needs Block of £4.1m in the current financial year would result in a forecast cumulative total deficit of £10.3m by March 2025. The overspend in the High Needs Block was mainly a result of increased places in INMSS, and the costs associated with permanent exclusions.</p>	
<p>7.2.5 If the 0.5% transfer was agreed, the LA would continue to use the National Funding Formula to ensure schools were not negatively impacted. It was anticipated that the transfer would be funded by capping gains to schools in receipt of higher per pupil increases in funding. However, the LA noted that at the time of the meeting, no guidance had been issued from the Department of Education (DfE) on the DSG for next year.</p>	
<p><u>2023-24 Actuals, 2024-25 High Needs Forecast Plus Estimated Budget</u></p>	
<p>7.2.6 Appendix 1 of the report provided a breakdown of funding requirements and available funding. The LA expected to spend £32.4m, with a budget of £28.3m after the block transfer in the previous year. This would leave an estimated deficit of £4.1m in the current financial year. When added to last year's £6m deficit, this would amount to a £10.1m deficit. The LA anticipated spending in £33.4m in 2025-26, with anticipated funding of £28.6m, resulting in a gap in the next financial year of £4.8m. By moving the 0.5%, the budget would increase to £29.2m, resulting in a deficit of £4.2m in that financial year. This would leave a projected carried forward total DSG deficit of £14.3m in 2025-26. The additional 0.5% in the High Needs Block would be used to provide additional school places and would not be used to reduce the deficit.</p>	
<p>7.2.7 Members inquired how the deficit would be reduced. The LA advised a statutory override was used to enable the deficit to sit outside of council reserves. The override was due to be removed next year. RCBC was not the only LA in this position and many councils would face bankruptcy if the statutory override was removed. As part of the Building Confidence, Thriving Children programme, projects were underway that would support more children to remain in schools.</p>	
<p>7.2.8 Members noted that the government imposed VAT on the independent sector and inquired whether that cost had been included in the figures that had been provided. The LA advised that this was a different matter, and the council could recover VAT so this would not be an issue.</p>	

		<b>ACTION</b>
7.3	<u>Recommendation</u>	
7.3.1	To approve the request to transfer 0.5%, if required, from Schools Block funding to High Needs funding.	
7.3.2	Should approval not be granted, the council could consider following the disapplication process. This would involve submitting an application to the Secretary of State. As part of the Building Confidence, Thriving Children programme, the LA had provided a deficit management plan which included a presumed 0.5% block transfer as directed by the DfE.	
7.4	<b>Outcome</b>  Voting members of the Schools' Forum unanimously approved the transfer of 0.5% from Schools Block funding to High Needs funding.	
<b>8.</b>	<b>OVERVIEW OF CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION PERTAINING TO EXCLUDED STUDENTS</b>	
8.1	<b>Purpose</b>  At the previous meeting of Schools' Forum, members had requested an overview of contextual information pertaining to excluded students, to identify patterns and to help understand further what actions could be taken to reduce the number of suspensions and exclusions.	
8.2	<b>Presentation (Lead for Inclusion)</b>  <u>Suspensions</u>	
8.2.1	There had been a rise in suspensions from the previous year, particularly in vulnerable groups. Suspensions of pupils eligible for pupil premium (PP) funding had increased by 930 pupils. Suspensions of children who had child protection plans had increased by 263, suspensions of children who were being supported at child in need level had increased by 34 children, and suspensions of children in our care had increased by 20 pupils. The year groups with the highest number of suspensions were Year 8 and Year 9, but all secondary year groups had seen an increase in the last year. There had been a slight increase in primary schools issuing suspensions. The only year groups where suspensions had reduced from the previous year were Year 3 and Year 5. Suspensions from special schools had increased by 52, yet there had been a reduction in suspensions for pupils with SEND, particularly for pupils with EHCPs. However, suspensions of pupils with SEN K needs had increased by 529.	

	<b>ACTION</b>
<p>8.2.2 Persistent disruptive behaviour remained the primary reason cited for suspensions, followed by verbal abuse directed at staff. Notably, suspensions related to the use of offensive weapons had risen by 29 incidents. There had been a significant reduction in suspensions for physical assaults on other pupils, as well as for drug and alcohol-related offences. Increased interventions targeting drug and alcohol issues had achieved a positive impact. Inclusion Officers would focus on addressing persistent disruptive behaviour with schools, aiming to implement interventions that reduced suspensions and prevented situations from escalating to the point of permanent exclusion.</p>	
<p>8.2.3 The total days of suspension in the last academic year had resulted in 61.6 academic years of lost learning in Redcar and Cleveland schools. The Inclusion Team had asked schools to consider the length of suspensions issued, and Inclusion Officers would continue to discuss the appropriateness of the length of suspensions issued with schools. Some academy trusts automatically increased the length of suspension each time a child was suspended, and that practice would be discussed directly with those schools.</p> <p><u>Permanent Exclusion (PEX)</u></p>	
<p>8.2.4 In the 2023-24 academic year, 122 PEXs had been issued in Redcar and Cleveland. 97 had been upheld by governing bodies, 3 had been overturned and 22 had been prevented through collaboration between schools and the LA. 21 of those were managed placements, which had successfully saved approximately £480,000 (based on the cost of an Archway placement plus home tuition).</p>	
<p>8.2.5 PEXs by vulnerable categories had been as follows: two children in our care had been permanently excluded, PEXs of children who were eligible for PP funding had increased by 17, PEXs of children who were supported at child in need level had increased by five, and PEXs of children with child protection plans had increased by two. Four pupils with EHCPs had been issued with PEXs. PEXs of pupils with SEND K had increased by 14 since the previous year.</p>	
<p>8.2.6 The highest number of PEXs had been issued to pupils in Year 8 and Year 9, although there had been a sharp increase in PEXs of Year 7 pupils. Numbers of pupils issued with PEXs in Years 10 and 11 had reduced since the previous year. Figures of vulnerable categories by year group were shared.</p>	
<p>8.2.7 Persistent, disruptive behaviour had been the primary reason cited for issuing PEXs. The Inclusion Team had asked schools to identify what the most consistent or persistent of those behaviours had been, to identify what interventions could be used sooner. The second highest reason for PEX had been physical assault against an adult. Two thirds of those assaults had occurred at one school, and the Inclusion Team was working closely with that school to offer support.</p>	

	<b>ACTION</b>
<p>8.2.8 All secondary schools had issued PEXs in the last academic year, although three schools had issued fewer exclusions than they had in the previous year. Outwood Academy Bydales had issued one PEX in the last academic year, which was the same number as they had done in the year prior to that. Outwood Academy Normaby had the highest rate of PEXs in 2023-24, with a total of 34 exclusions. This was 21 more than they had issued in the previous academic year. Despite that, the overall increase across the borough was only 14. Schools were urged to consider seeking alternatives with the Inclusion Team before resorting to issuing a PEX. At the point of excluding, there were 15 days before a pupil discipline committee would be convened which allowed time to seek alternatives. Schools were aware that they should not immediately issue PEXs for children in our care or for pupils with EHCPs.</p>	
<p>8.2.9 Since the start of the current academic year, 6 PEXs had been issued, four of which were being reviewed for managed places and two of which had been confirmed.</p>	
<p>8.3 <b>Discussion/Challenge</b></p>	
<p>8.3.1 In response to a query from Schools' Forum, the LA confirmed that trends were regularly analysed, with data compared each half term and published on a termly basis. The rates of PEX and suspensions would be included in the figures before being shared with the Schools' Forum. It was noted that PEXs were recorded by the LA in which the child resided. Therefore, if a child living in Redcar and Cleveland received a PEX from a Middlesbrough school, the exclusion would be recorded in Redcar and Cleveland's data.</p>	
<p>8.3.2 Schools' Forum raised questions regarding the implementation of the Fair Access Protocol, noting complications with pupils residing outside the borough but attending schools in Redcar and Cleveland. The LA confirmed it had shared its procedures with Middlesbrough, which operated a slightly different system, and both authorities were working together to ensure the process was equitable for all pupils.</p>	
<p>8.3.3 In response to a query, the LA confirmed that Outwood Alternative Provision Eston was the provision used by Outwood academies with 50 places for Outwood pupils.</p>	
<p>8.3.4 Schools' Forum members discussed the data presented and noted an interesting trend: whilst the number of suspensions had increased, the total number of days lost had decreased. It was acknowledged that strategic changes, such as the appointment of a new Headteacher, could lead to a temporary rise in suspensions or exclusions as new policies were implemented, but this should be expected to stabilise and decrease over time. The Schools' Forum recommended that the LA review the data to ensure that, where exclusions were rising year-on-year, appropriate support and accountability measures were in place. The LA emphasised that changes in personnel should not lead to increases in suspensions or exclusions, as schools were expected to follow established behaviour policies.</p>	

		<b>ACTION</b>
8.3.5	The Assistant Director for Education and Skills reported that an initiative was underway in the north east, aimed at reducing suspensions and permanent exclusions for pupils with SEND particularly, with support from the DfE. Relevant information would be shared with schools in due course.	
8.4	<p><b>Outcome</b></p> <p>Schools' Forum noted the information shared.</p>	
<b>9.</b>	<b>BUILDING CONFIDENCE, THRIVING CHILDREN</b>	
9.1	<p><b>Purpose</b></p> <p>To inform Schools' Forum of the full costings of the project, as requested by members at the previous meeting.</p>	
9.2	<b>Presentation (Lead for Achievement)</b>	
9.2.1	In recognition of the challenges around SEND, the LA had been in receipt of the government's Delivering Better Value programme, which aimed to support LAs to review their practices around SEND. In Redcar and Cleveland, the programme had been renamed 'Building Confidence, Thriving Children' (BCTC) to ensure the focus was primarily on children.	
9.2.2	<p>The LA had been engaged in the programme for just under a year. Three broad workstreams, and three sub-workstreams had been established. Of the £1m allocated, a quarter had been spent already. The most significant spending had been on staffing, and on establishing workstream one.</p> <p><u>Workstream One: Developing Inclusive Practice</u></p>	
9.2.3	The first of two sub-workstreams was to support mainstream schools to be as inclusive as possible. The LA had engaged an organisation called Whole Education to work alongside the LA to deliver a project to grow the capacity and skills of SENCOs as strategic leaders. Eight out of the 10 secondary schools in the borough had engaged. It was hoped that all primary schools in the borough would be involved this year.	
9.2.4	The second sub-workstream was a transition project to minimise the impact of critical points in a child's journey. Transitioning between schools presented a significant challenge for children with SEND. The increased rates of suspensions in Year 7 indicated that the critical move from Year 6 to Year 7 had not been successful for many. The goal was to ensure a smooth journey for all children from cradle to career readiness. Efforts were underway to engage stakeholders and assess the current transition process, supported by three task-and-finish groups. Each group would develop minimum standards for effective	



	<b>ACTION</b>
<p>transitions, identifying what worked and what required improvement. Additionally, a multi-agency approach was being taken to address school readiness.</p>	
<p><u>Workstream Two: Early System Intervention</u></p>	
<p>9.2.5 The local offer had been updated to ensure it was a fit for purpose single point of access for SEND and all the associated services. The Parent Carer Forum (PCF) had been involved to ensure the content was fit for purpose and accessible, and this collaborative work had strengthened the relationship between the PCF and the LA. The next stage would be to conduct evaluation to understand the impact. The outcome of the evaluation would inform whether an 'in-person' front door into SEND was required. The use of bots had been considered but had not met requirements.</p>	
<p><u>Workstream Three: Data Visibility and Digital Improvement</u></p>	
<p>9.2.6 The appointment of a new data lead had progressed this workstream considerably and there was now real confidence that internal processes could be sustained once the full dashboard was in place. It was hoped that school level dashboards would be produced by phase three of this workstream.</p>	
<p><u>Additional Workstreams</u></p>	
<p><u>Workstream Four: Bring Back Project</u></p>	
<p>9.2.7 This project focused on ensuring that children were placed in the right provision at the right time to meet their needs effectively. The LA was promoting the expansion of Additional Resource Provisions (ARPs) within mainstream schools. Currently, there was one secondary school and several primary schools with ARPs, but the goal was to increase the number of ARPs in secondary schools. To support this effort, the LA had enlisted the expertise of a national SEND consultant.</p>	
<p>9.2.8 An update on the River Tees Multi-Academy Trust Hospital School had been included in the report for reference.</p>	
<p>9.2.9 Workstream five, Review of High Needs Funding and Workstream six: Development of a Traded Service Offer had been temporarily paused whilst alternative models were explored.</p>	
<p>9.3 <b>Discussion/Challenge</b></p>	
<p>9.3.1 Schools' Forum questioned whether the LA's special schools, if spaces were available, could accommodate all children and young people currently being educated outside the borough, or if their needs were so complex that they required highly</p>	

		<b>ACTION</b>
	specialised provision not available in Redcar and Cleveland. The LA clarified that while around 100 children were in INMSS, not all were outside the borough. Aside from a small number of children with highly specific needs related to autism, the special schools in Redcar and Cleveland could meet the needs of those in INMSS if sufficient places were available.	
9.3.2	Colleagues highlighted that a key challenge in special schools was the availability of physical space. While many children's needs could theoretically be met at local special schools, space was limited. In some cases, a single child may require an entire classroom along with three staff members to support them. Accommodating one child with such needs could displace a class of 12 pupils, necessitating even more alternative provision. This issue extended beyond Redcar and Cleveland, as demonstrated by Mo Mowlam School, which had received 67 consultations, many from neighbouring boroughs, since the start of the academic year.	
9.3.3	Colleagues reflected on the increasing complexity of needs which was changing every year. For many pupils with social, emotional and mental health issues, their cognition and learning abilities were sufficient that they would not meet the threshold for a special school, but their moderate learning difficulties meant they were unable to access the curriculum in a mainstream secondary school.	
9.4	<b>Outcomes</b>	
9.4.1	Schools' Forum agreed that upon completion of the workstreams, the LA would be in a position to make a real difference. Good transition involved replicating what was working well in a child's current setting. Empowering SENCOs to enact any necessary changes would be crucial to the success.	
9.4.2	The Self-Evaluation Form and strategic plan were in the process of being finalised and would be presented to a future meeting of Schools' Forum for information.	CM
<b>10.</b>	<b>MEMBERSHIP UPDATE</b>	
10.1	<b>Purpose</b>  Members to approve appointments and re-appointments to Schools' Forum.	
10.2	<b>Discussion/Challenge</b>	
10.2.1	Members were informed that Alison Hill had left her post at Tees Valley Education and a new representative had been elected to the forum.	

		<b>ACTION</b>
10.2.2	There were two vacancies for academy representatives following the resignations of the Northern Education Trust representative and the Steel River Academy Trust representative.	
10.2.3	The clerk advised that the Schools' Forum Operational and Good Practice Guide stated that it was good practice to regularly review the structure of Schools' Forum. Membership should reflect the profile of education provision across the LA to ensure that there was not an in-built bias towards any one phase or group. Primary schools, secondary schools and academies must be broadly proportionately represented on Schools' Forum, based on the total number of pupils registered at them.	
10.2.4	It was common practice in neighbouring LA's for school business managers to attend Schools' Forum, either as participants or as observers, owing to the high level of information presented and discussed pertaining to school finances.	
10.3	<b>Outcomes</b>	
10.3.1	Schools' Forum noted the appointment of Antje Kell as the representative for Tees Valley Education.	Clerk
10.3.2	When seeking to recruit to the vacant posts, consideration would be given to ensuring proportional representation.	LA
10.3.3	Schools' Forum members were invited to consider inviting their school business managers to future meetings.	Schools' Forum
<b>11.</b>	<b>ANY OTHER BUSINESS</b>	
	No matters had been declared for consideration under Any Other Business.	
<b>12.</b>	<b>ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS</b>	
	The Children and Families Strategy would be shared at a future meeting, to discuss the wider implications of education and social care working together. The Education Strategy and the SEND Strategy would also be shared.	CM
<b>13.</b>	<b>DATE OF THE FUTURE MEETING</b>	
	The next meeting would be held on Monday 25 November 2024 at 3:00pm. The meeting would be held virtually.	

Meeting closed at 4:25pm.