

SCHOOLS MANAGEMENT FORUM

MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL MICROSOFT TEAMS MEETING HELD ON:

WEDNESDAY 8 NOVEMBER 2023 AT 10:00AM

PRESENT:

Maintained Primary School Representatives	
Julia Rodwell	Park End Primary School
Primary Academy Representative	
Helen Steele (Chair)	Caldicotes Primary Academy
Adam Cooper (Vice-Chair)	Abingdon Primary School (Legacy Learning Trust)
Beverley Hewitt-Best	Newham Bridge Primary School
Jackie Walsh	Green Lane Primary Academy (Legacy Learning Trust)
Joanne Smith	Breckon Hill Primary School
Maintained School Governor Representative	
Maintained Special School Representative	
PRU Representatives	
Leanne Chilton and Sarah Birch	River Tees Multi-Academy Trust
Secondary Academy Representatives	
Andy Rodgers	Trinity College
Helen Dalby	Nicholas Postgate Catholic Academy Trust
Michael Laidler	Acklam Grange
Local Authority Officers	
Rob Brown	Director of Education and Partnerships
Karen Smith	Head of Achievement
Trevor Dunn	Head of Access to Education
James Glover	Trainee Accountant
Dianne Nielsen	Delivering Better Value (DBV) Lead
Caroline Cannon	Strategic Lead for Inclusion and Specialist Support Services
Also Present	
Amy Douglas	Governance Professional (Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council)
Jackie Lowe	Observer
Nicola Flint	Observer
Louise Davies	Observer
Katy Hall	Observer
<p><i>In the temporary absence of the Chair, the Vice-Chair Helen Steele took the Chair for today's meeting. To facilitate discussion, the published agenda was reorganised in the following way.</i></p>	
4.	WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS
	The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting, and a round of introductions took place. Information was shared on maintained schools that had joined academy trusts, and the membership list would be amended accordingly.
1.	MEMBERSHIP UPDATE
1.1	The Chair advised that the term of office for all Schools' Management Forum (SMF) members ran up to 31 August 2023 (three-year membership). It was the responsibility of the Local Authority (LA) to facilitate the appointment of members to the SMF. The LA was required to ensure that the membership reflected the proportions set out in the membership list. Members were to be appointed at the beginning of each term of office via nominations and elections from each contributory group.

1.2	Maintained schools could be represented by Headteachers, senior members of staff or governors. Academy school representation was not limited to staff or governors. As several maintained schools had joined academy trusts since the last meeting of SMF, an election would be required to appoint two new maintained school representatives. ACTION: Local authority.
1.3	The Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) representative had requested that representation and attendance at SMF meetings be shared between the four Headteachers from River Tees Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) schools. All present were in agreement with the proposal which would offer additional flexibility for attendance and representation.
1.4	The clerk would update the membership list, confirming that terms of office had been renewed for a further three-year period.
2.	ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR THE 2023-24, 2024-25 AND 2025-26 ACADEMIC YEARS
2.1	It was noted that the Vice-Chair had deputised in the absence of the substantive Chair of SMF for the last academic year, and on behalf of the whole of SMF, Rob Brown extended thanks to Helen Steele for her dedication to the role.
2.2	SMF members had been invited in advance to express their willingness to serve as Chair of SMF for the 2023-24, 2024-25 and 2025-26 academic years. No names had been put forward for consideration in advance of the meeting. Members were also given an opportunity at the meeting to express their willingness to stand, and as no names were put forward for consideration, Mrs Helen Steele volunteered to Chair for the 2023-24 academic year only, on the condition that another member of SMF take over as Chair from the 2024-25 academic year. Members agreed to consider the nomination in Mrs Steele's presence.
2.3	RESOLVED that Mrs Helen Steele be appointed Chair of Schools' Management Forum for the academic year 2023-24.
3.	ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR FOR THE 2023-24, 2024-25 AND 2025-26 ACADEMIC YEARS
3.1	SMF members had been invited in advance to express their willingness to serve as Vice-Chair of SMF for the 2023-24, 2024-25 and 2025-26 academic years. No names had been put forward for consideration in advance of the meeting. Members were also given an opportunity at the meeting to express their willingness to stand, and Mr Adam Cooper put his name forward for consideration. Members agreed to consider the nomination in Mr Cooper's presence.
3.2	RESOLVED that Mr Adam Cooper be appointed Vice-Chair of Schools' Management Forum for the academic years 2023-24, 2024-25 and 2025-26.
5.	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE
5.1	Apologies had been submitted in advance of the meeting from the following members of SMF: Emma Watson (The Avenue Primary/Lingfield Education Trust) Anita Jeffries (Archibald Primary), Kate Barkley (Viewley Hill Academy), Susan Robinson (Priory Woods), Mary Brindle (Macmillan Academy) and Simon Reader (Kings Academy). Sheila Marley, Early Years and Family Hubs Manager, had also advised that she would be unable to attend on this occasion.
5.2	RESOLVED to consent to the absence of the above-named members of School Management Forum (SMF).
6.	NOTIFICATION OF ANY OTHER BUSINESS
	No items were declared for discussion under Any Other Business.

7.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN ITEMS ON THE AGENDA
7.1	SMF 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.
7.2	No such declarations were made on this occasion.
8.	MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 1 MARCH 2023
8.1	Minutes of the SMF meeting held on 14 June 2023 had been circulated in advance of the meeting, to be approved and signed as a true record. SMF members also had an opportunity to question progress with any matter discussed at that meeting which would not arise during the present meeting.
8.2	<u>Point of Accuracy</u> Julia Rodwell had been incorrectly recorded as a maintained school governor. Anita Jefferies represented an academy but had been incorrectly recorded as representing a maintained school.
8.3	<u>Outcome</u> RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the previous meeting as a true record, pending amendments recorded at item 8.2 above.
9.	HIGH NEEDS UPDATE
9.1	<u>Purpose</u> To seek the views from maintained schools, academies and free schools on the proposal to request a transfer of 0.5% from the Schools' Block to the High Needs Block (HNB). SMF had a range of responsibilities relating to the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), and a consultation paper had been shared accordingly with members in advance of the meeting. The consultation had ended on 27 October 2023, and 24% of schools had responded to the consultation.
9.2	<u>Discussion/Challenge</u>
9.2.1	Caroline Cannon and Rob Brown began by thanking colleagues for their support during the recent local area inspection. An event would be arranged for December 2023 to review the findings, and the initial feedback had been very positive.
9.2.2	To support discussion and decision making, the following documents had been circulated in advance of the meeting: Consultation paper on 0.5% transfer from Schools' Block to HNB, DSG Management Plan July 2023, 2024-25 School National Funding Formula Rates, Illustrative Individual School Allocations, Questionnaire return document. <u>Delivering Better Value</u>
9.2.3	Owing to financial pressures in the High Needs budget, the Department for Education (DfE) had invited the LA to participate in the Delivering Better Value (DBV) in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) programme, with a clear focus on improving outcomes for children and young people. Over an 8-month period, significant work had been conducted, including data review and analysis, deep dives on case studies, engagement events, and issuing surveys to gather feedback on provision in the local area. The outcomes had been used to inform key areas of focus, which then formulated the bid to the DfE for £1m funding. A final engagement event had been held in July 2023.

9.2.4	The first priority area had been identified as inclusion. SEND and Inclusion Clinics. These will be established in mainstream settings to provide support and challenge, to ensure that the needs of children and young people are being identified accurately. In the DBV analysis there had been little evidence of a graduated response and some children could have their needs met within a mainstream setting. This issue had been reflected nationally since COVID. SEND and Inclusion Clinics will also review staff training and identify how best schools could be supported.
9.2.5	The second area of focus will be transition. There will be a review of current placements to ensure children and young people are in the right provision to meet their needs, with a view to supporting reintegration to mainstream settings where appropriate.
9.2.6	The third focus area centred on workforce development and improving understanding of the graduated response and the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) process. SENDCos would be supported to develop the SENDCo handbook, and dedicated SENDCo training would be provided. The Digital EHCP process will be implemented. Information will be developed and provided to families regarding local services and opportunities.
9.2.7	The grant application has been approved and the LA have been awarded £1m funding, which will fund the programme as outlined until March 2025. The workstreams have commenced.
<u>DSG Management Plan</u>	
9.2.8	The grant did not constitute approval of the LA's projected financial position as detailed in the DSG Management Plan that had been shared with SMF members. The DBV in SEND grant was subject to satisfactory progress towards achieving targets outlined in the DSG Management Plan. Any LA with an overall deficit on its DSG account at the end of the financial year was required to submit a plan to the DfE. The LA was, therefore, subject to a DSG Management Plan with the DfE and partners to ensure deficit recovery.
9.2.9	In recent years, the DSG deficit had grown owing to an increase in demand in special schools, resource bases and increased numbers of permanent exclusions from secondary settings. There also continued to be an increase in the number of EHCPs issued. The DSG Management Plan indicated that the deficit was expected to grow to £10.2m in 2023-24 and future projections showed a similar increase in 2024-25.
<u>Request to Transfer 0.5% from DSG Schools' Block to the High Needs Block</u>	
9.2.10	The consultation had asked schools whether they agreed to support a 0.5% transfer from the School's Block to the High Needs Block in 2024-25, to assist with high needs pressures and support the DBV programme. If schools did not support the 0.5% transfer, they were asked to indicate what level of transfer they would be willing to support. If in the event SMF do not agree, we have an opportunity to submit a disapplication request.
9.2.11	24% of schools had responded to the consultation. Of those that responded, 8.3% agreed to the proposal to transfer 0.5%. Of those that did not agree with a 0.5% transfer, 9% agreed to a transfer of some value.
9.2.12	<p>Recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SMF to note the update on the DBV programme. • SMF to note the update on the DSG Management Plan. • SMF to agree to the transfer of 0.5% from the DSG Schools' Block to the High Needs Block (HNB) for 2024-25.

9.2.13	SMF members noted that the modelling, based on the 2023 census figures, indicated falling school rolls and increased pressures on school budgets. Schools employed a wide range of strategies to support pupils internally, to avoid requesting central funding from the LA. There was a concern that the current level of support, such as pastoral care, could be at risk if school budgets were restricted further.
9.2.14	Information was shared on protections for schools within the National Funding Formula. The modelling in the report had been for illustrative purposes. Three main protections were as follows: The funding floor was set at 0.5% which guaranteed a minimum gain per pupil; The minimum 'per pupil' level for primary, KS3 & KS4; The minimum funding guarantee. Parameters were set annually by the DfE.
9.2.15	SMF members discussed concerns regarding the minimum funding guarantee, which would negatively impact school budgets if it reduced to zero. SMF members were advised that the minimum funding guarantee protected schools from major changes from one year to another and did not affect all schools equally.
9.2.16	SMF members reflected on the wider pressures on school budgets, which were so significant that SMF did not feel able to support the request to transfer 0.5% to the High Needs Block. There was also caution noted on the wording used in the High Needs Update report at paragraph 4.8 which stated that, "...the DSG management plan includes an assumption to transfer 0.5% from the DSG schools block to the high needs block from 2024-25 onwards..." SMF members noted the significant implications for school budgets if the transfer, as requested, would be an assumption in future years.
9.2.17	The decision would affect all schools in the borough. There was a concern that the current levels of provision in schools would not be sustainable in the longer term owing to further budgetary constraints. Many schools in the borough had excellent provision, attendance and results and there was a concern that schools with poorer outcomes were not being held accountable. SMF noted their collective responsibility for management of budgets.
	<u>Voting on the Recommendation to Transfer 0.5% from the DSG Schools Block to the HNB for 2024-25</u>
9.2.18	As the meeting was held virtually, SMF members were asked to indicate, via the 'chat' function, their approval of the recommendation. No members of SMF were in favour of the recommendation.
9.3	<u>Outcomes</u>
9.3.1	RESOLVED SMF did not approve the recommendation to transfer 0.5% (c £0.700m) from the Schools' Block to the High Needs Block in 2024-25.
9.3.2	SMF noted the update on the DBV programme.
9.3.3	SMT noted the update on the DSG Management Plan.
10.	APPRENTICESHIPS: NEW STARTS AND STAFF CPD VIA APPRENTICESHIP ROUTE
	Deferred.
11.	ANY OTHER BUSINESS
	No items had been declared for consideration under Any Other Business.
12.	ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS
	The following matter was declared for discussion at the next meeting: - The response to the decision not to support the 0.5% transfer from the DSG block to the HNB.

13.	DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS
13.1	The dates of the future meetings of the Schools' Management Forum were as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Wednesday 17 January 2024- Wednesday 6 March 2024- Wednesday 12 June 2024
13.2	All meetings would be held via Microsoft Teams and would start at 9:15am.

Meeting closed at 10:50am.