

Minutes

Name of meeting	SCHOOLS' FORUM
Date and time	Thursday, 20 March 2025
Venue	Webinar – Virtual Meeting
Present	<p>Beverley Gilbert – Brading CE Primary (Chair)</p> <p>Duncan Mills – The Bay CE School (Vice-Chair)</p> <p>Carl Wake – St Helens Primary</p> <p>Joe Norton-Jones – Bembridge CE Primary</p> <p>Rachel Richards – Cowes Enterprise College</p> <p>Mandy Airey – Northwood Primary Academy</p> <p>Samantha Rooney – Isle of Wight College</p> <p>Sue Bowen – CE Diocese</p>
Officers	<p>Naomi Carter – Service Director, Education, Inclusion and Access</p> <p>Irina Rowan - Senior Finance Business Partner</p> <p>Debra Evans – Senior Accountant</p> <p>Diane Hiscock – Clerk</p>
Apologies	<p>Steff Gleeson – St Georges School</p> <p>Jayne Hill – Niton Pre-School & Brighstone Pre-School</p> <p>Andrew Montrose – Christ the King College</p>

1.	<p><u>WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS</u></p> <p>All members and observers were welcomed to the meeting and introductions were made.</p>
2.	<p><u>PUBLIC QUESTIONS</u></p> <p>Cllr Jarman asked how many schools are being visited by DfE this week.</p> <p>There are 6 CEDC visits scheduled, to check the quality and condition of buildings.</p>
3.	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</u></p> <p>None declared.</p>
4.	<p><u>SCHOOLS FORUM MEMBERSHIP</u> PAPER E</p>
4.1	<p>The LA sets the structure of the Schools Forum, in accordance with the Schools Forum Regulations and Best Practice Guidance. Schools and Academy members must make up at least 2/3 of the overall membership and should be broadly proportionate to the pupil numbers in those sectors. The current structure was explained.</p>
4.2	<p>The structure will be reviewed following the Autumn Census to ensure compliance.</p>
4.3	<p>Following this meeting, there will be 2 vacancies for Academy Representatives and 1 vacancy for a Primary Governor Representative. HTs would like BG to continue in her role as Primary HT Representative, at least until the Autumn Term. JW (HT at Wootton Primary School) will shadow during the summer term.</p>

	<p>Actions –</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information on SF structure to be discussed at HT Forum in the Autumn term and SF meeting on 13 November 2025, to get a view. The LA will review the structure in January 2026 2. Clerk to seek nominations for current vacancies.
5.	<p><u>MINUTES</u></p> <p><u>RESOLVED</u></p> <p>That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 January 2025 be confirmed.</p>
6.	<p><u>MATTERS ARISING</u></p> <p>6.1 (Item 7) It was agreed that it would be useful to receive a report from Judy Mason in the summer term, prior to setting the budget and agreeing distribution of TU funding in the Autumn.</p> <p>Action – JM to be asked to attend the meeting on 17 July 2025</p> <p>6.2 (Item 9.8) Take up of childcare offer since introduction of working parents' entitlement.</p> <p>Action – TW to be asked to provide information for the meeting on 17 July 2025</p>
7.	<p><u>FEEDBACK FROM SUB-GROUP</u></p> <p>7.1 The remit of the SF Sub-Group was amended to focus on the High Needs spend, SEND provision and to seek solutions to address the deficit. Terms of Reference were agreed and membership includes a range of SF members and LA Officers.</p> <p>7.2 Group discussion will feed into the work of the Area SEND Board and the SEN Inclusion Board. Feedback will be provided to Schools Forum and the HT Forum.</p> <p>7.3 The group discussed a possible blended approach, to address the level of children being Educated Other than at School (EOTAS). Additional SEN places have been developed, with a primary focus on anxiety and mental health.</p> <p>7.4 Another areas for discussion included.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over-occupancy at St George's Studio School. • How the 0.5% transfer from the Schools Block may be used. • Recruitment of a new Educational Psychologist (with further recruitment in process). Locums have been used to alleviate the 10% rise in pupils needing support since the end of the partnership with Hampshire. • Expansion of SEND places (20 @ St George's Studio, 34 at Medina House Cottage) • Refurbishment of Greenhaven and 6 additional places (plans to refurbish other resourced provisions) • Government has paused the Safety Valve (SV) (IW has received all agreed funding). Quarterly meetings with DfE continuing, with positive conversations. • Proposed increased efficiencies, accessibility of services through one 'front door' • Development of a Parent/Carer Forum, with IW SEN Support and Connect. 4 events to bring parents together are taking place next week. • SEN Free School – DfE has not delivered. No funding received. • Reducing need for off-Island places. Keeping young people within their local communities. • Internal efficiencies, with better, more-affordable provision. Greater staff expertise. • Engaging with NHS colleagues on development and publication of Area SEND Self-Evaluation. <p style="text-align: right;">SB left the meeting</p>

7.5	<p><u>QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS</u></p> <p>It was acknowledged that current staff have a wealth of expertise and experience. Planning and developing new provisions will enable them to adapt and train in additional areas, to support children with different needs and requirements at an earlier stage.</p>
7.6	<p>The area SEND Board is made up of a variety of representatives from across the Island. Their aim is to work with HTs to develop affordable provision that will suit the continuing needs of children.</p>
8.	<p><u>2024/25 BUDGET MONITORING Paper B</u></p>
8.1	<p>The budget forecast at 31 January 2025 shows an estimated overspend of £5.242m, which includes Safety Valve (SV) funding of £970,000 received. The table in para 1 shows that greatest pressure is in the High Needs Block.</p>
8.2	<p><u>EARLY YEARS</u></p> <p>A small underspend of £54,000 is shown, due to a vacancy. SF had previously agreed the appointment of an additional teacher.</p>
8.3	<p>Unexpected grant funding was received to support the centrally employed teachers' pay award.</p>
8.4	<p>Further variances are likely, following confirmation of the January Census. The report is based on provisional data.</p>
8.5	<p><u>SCHOOLS BLOCK</u></p> <p>This funding is mostly passported directly to schools based on the funding formula.</p>
8.6	<p>The Growth Fund for 2024/25 is estimated to be underspent by £43,000. The Bay CE School were asked to admit 30 additional pupils and Christ the King College were asked to admit 25 additional pupils. No further need is expected for 2024/25.</p>
8.7	<p>De-delegated funding for Trade Union Facilities Time is forecast to be fully spent, although there is a potential underspend due to vacancies at NASUWT and VOICE. Funding for 2025/26 will be reduced due to Carisbrooke and Medina Colleges joining the HISP Multi-Academy Trust and their decision not to de-delegate funding.</p> <p>Action – Any underspend in TU Facilities funding to be discussed at HT Forum meeting on 19 June 25.</p>
8.8	<p><u>QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS</u></p> <p>Members asked if the underspend in Growth Fund is due to there being less pupils than anticipated and how it was calculated?</p>
8.9	<p>The amount of Growth Fund set was based on projected need. It is difficult to predict numbers, as changes occur in the months following national offer day and leading up to admission. Predicted numbers for 2025/26 is 60 pupils.</p>
8.10	<p>It was confirmed that underspent Growth Fund will go towards offsetting the overall deficit rather than back into school budgets.</p>
8.11	<p>Noted that it is not possible to determine exact requirements but, members felt it important to support all schools.</p> <p>Action – Request accuracy in predictions of pressure on Growth Fund, as far as possible, to support all schools and perhaps reduce capping and scaling.</p>
8.12	<p>It was also noted that Cowes Enterprise College (OAT) would be open to considering admission of additional pupils into Year 7 regardless of Growth Fund.</p>
8.13	<p><u>HIGH NEEDS BLOCK</u></p> <p>The £5.43m overspend is 23.8% of the High Needs budget and the major contributor to the overall deficit. Pressure is mainly due to IW having one of the highest % of children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), at 7% of 5 – 15 year olds, in comparison to a</p>

	national average of 5.2%. There was an increase of 8% in EHCPs issued since the start of this financial year, although the budget increased by 4% compared to 2023/24.
8.14	Strategies are being developed, focussed on closing the budget gap of £1.7m (including SV allocation of £970,000). These include the expansion of SEND places noted in para 7.4. £1.1m pressure is shown and continuing to rise in EOTAS - an increase of 22% @ £35,000 per child since April 2024. 30% of the support is provided through direct payments. The LA manages 70%, as shown in the table in para 11 in Paper B .
8.15	An overspend of £1.1m is anticipated for Independent Non-Maintained School (INMS) places. Currently 98 children are supported, of which 22 have off-Island placements. The average cost per place is £54,171.
8.16	The Lionheart School (Pupil Referral Unit) is expected to have an overspend of £638,000. Activity increased by 22% between Autumn 2023 (when the primary provision closed) and Autumn 2024. Currently there are 101 Full-time equivalent (FTE) places, 40 of which are for medical support. Further increase is expected.
8.17	An unexpected 22% increase in demand for Post-16 Top-up funding led to an overspend of £401,000 for 2024/25. Further increase is expected.
8.18	Special Schools place and top-up funding has a forecast overspend of £484,000 in light of the expansion of places and more children requiring support at the highest bands.
8.19	Mainstream Top-up funding also has a forecast overspend of £285,000. There was a slight decrease in pupils with EHCPs as places in SEND schools have expanded. However children are coming in with more complex needs. The average cost per child has increased by 11% while number of EHCPs has reduced by 1%.
8.20	Resourced Provision place and top-up funding is expected to have an overspend of £112,000, primarily due to places at Greenhaven being increased from 6 to 12 and higher banding values.
8.21	The overall provision of additional SEND places will contribute to an expected underspend of £41,000 in Discretionary Top-up funding.
8.22	An underspend of £107,000 is also forecast for the Primary Behaviour Service, due to a staff vacancy and other costs that were less than anticipated.
8.23	A further forecast underspend of £183,000 in Central Teams will be due to staff vacancies and the announcement of an additional grant to support the pay award for central teachers.
8.24	16 permanent exclusions (11 of which were from the Lionheart school) is expected to result in an underspend of £42,000 in support for inclusion and education out of school.
8.25	QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS It was confirmed that, without the SV allocation, the actual overall in-year DSG deficit would be £6.212m.
8.26	It was also confirmed that off-Island and INMS placements are far more expensive than provision of suitable placements in maintained schools on the Island.
8.27	It was agreed that the expansion of SEND places on the Island is a positive move. Members asked for a breakdown of the increasing number of EHCPs (i.e 8% increase - what level are these funded at and which type of needs).
8.28	It was commented on there seems to be an increase of social school funding due to extra children attending at higher level, which means mainstream schools have been supporting the high needs budget and their own budgets have been affected as they were not funded at this higher level whilst they had the children.
8.29	A concern is that a 10% continuing growth in EHCPs could lead to all IOW children having an EHCP by 2043. The numbers vary as children develop, needs change and provision is developed to better meet those requirements.

8.30	Special schools are at full capacity and numbers change every ½ term.
8.31	PBS in-reach service is continuing and HT Reps felt that the support has been exceptional.
8.32	Action – Further information to be included in papers for the next meeting on 17 July 2025.
8.33	An explanation of the £1.7m budget gap and savings noted in para 10 and Appendix A in Paper B was requested.
8.34	At budget-setting the gap between income and spending requirements was identified, which meant that savings were needed. However, this was not possible due to the increasing pressures on the High Needs budget.
8.35	Members asked how EOTAS provision is monitored in relation to EHCPs.
8.36	NC carries out quality assurance visits to providers and they are held to account by officers through annual reviews, in the same way as maintained provisions. Monitoring includes safeguarding of children and assurance is sought that activity is relevant to the needs of the child.
8.37	Schools are responsible for ensuring safeguarding, where they commission places. 2 officers are assigned to monitor each case where places are commissioned by the LA.
8.38	There is no funding from government to support monitoring EOTAS. The total cost of officer monitoring time and activity is not included or separately budgeted for. Officers have heavy caseloads within their work commitments and requirements are variable over time.
8.39	It was asked what the total costs related to funding mainland places including officer time are and which is the greater cost overall - off island and on island.
8.40	If a time and motion study were to be carried out, it would encroach on other important work. Officers are already under pressure and it is felt that this would not be a useful exercise.
8.41	Action – A slight amendment to the date in the heading of the table in para 11 to be made. Cllr Spink was welcomed to the meeting.
8.42	It was confirmed that ‘activity’ at the Lionheart School, refers to number of young people attending. The overspend is due to a rise in demand for places, that was not anticipated, following the closure of primary provision in August 2023. The position will continue to be monitored.
8.43	Members asked if the additional SEND places were for children needing high band support. Action – Further information to be included in papers for the next meeting on 17 July 2025.
8.44	Noted – Thanks from Schools Forum to colleagues in primary schools and they should be commended for supporting children with Special Needs in mainstream schools within budget restrictions.
8.45	It is important to factor in that behaviours change as children develop. Additional places offered at St George’s Studio School reduce the need for off-Island placements. Funding for St George’s will have to be reviewed to ensure the needs of children are met.
8.46	Additional SEND places reduce the pressure on Discretionary Top-up funding. Action – Sub-Group to discuss and feedback to next SF meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • overall impact on school budgets • use of 0.5% transfer for 25/26 and what could look like for 26/27

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • impact of PBS support/data/survey as this has been allocated from 0.5% transfer
8.47	Members noted that EHCPs have been continually increasing over the past 10 – 15 years and asked how this might be addressed.
8.48	The LA has a duty to support children and this is a National issue, although IOW has a higher percentage of children with EHCPs. The development of ordinarily available provision and the Educational Psychology Service is focussed on early support, to reduce the demand for EHCPs. Nationally, the government are looking at how to address the problem. It is hoped that the SEND paper, due in the spring, will provide a way forward.
8.49	Agreed – it is important to address why children's needs are not being met in mainstream school and the high number of children being educated at home (EHE). Also important to work together on inclusion.
8.50	<p><u>CENTRAL SCHOOL SERVICES BLOCK</u></p> <p>A small underspend of £3,000 is expected due to confirmation of copyright licences.</p>
8.51	<p><u>OTHER GRANTS</u></p> <p>These are mostly passed directly to schools within 7 days. The grant to support the National Insurance increase has recently been received and will be notified to schools asap.</p>
8.52	<p><u>CUMULATIVE DEFICIT AND CARRY FORWARD</u></p> <p>The brought forward deficit of £6.593m will add to the expected deficit of £5.242m resulting in a cumulative deficit of £11.835m. LAs are not able to fund the deficit and this will be added to the DSG balance sheet.</p>
8.53	<p><u>QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS</u></p> <p>Cllrs should take up with the Council and discuss cost of officers' time in monitoring provision.</p>
8.54	As confirmed, the deficit without Safety Valve funding would have been £6.212m.
8.55	Members were concerned about the broader risk of the deficit to the Council.
8.56	It was noted that deficits could lead to bankruptcy and this is included in the IWC Risk Register.
8.57	It is vital to support schools with early identification and meeting the needs of children.
8.58	It is not clear what the government will do to resolve the national issue.
8.59	Whilst the measures being put in place are to reduce pressure, there is still likely to be a budget gap for 2025/26. It has been mentioned before at school forum but, a 3-year projected plan should be shared with all school forum members.
8.60	<p>The High Needs Block funds services for schools and difficult decisions are required as costs vs services.</p> <p>Action – 3-year budget plan for all aspects to be included in the papers for the next meeting on 17 July 2025.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Cllr Spink left the meeting</p> <p><u>RESOLVED</u></p> <p>That the 2024/25 position be noted.</p>
9.	<p><u>2025/25 SCHOOL FUNDING UPDATES PAPER C</u></p> <p>Final details of school funding for 2025/26 were confirmed.</p>

9.1	<p><u>SCHOOL FUNDING FORMULA 2025/26</u></p> <p>The funding final funding formula was reported at the last SF meeting on 16 January 2025 followed by submission to DfE. Schools were notified of their allocations on 17 February 2025.</p>
9.2	Officers met with School Business Managers to finalise individual budget arrangements and final balances for 2024/25 will be reported at the meeting on 17 July 2025.
9.3	Other grants will continue to be passed on to schools within 7 days of receipt. Schools will continue to receive termly funding schedules.
9.4	<p><u>EARLY YEARS</u></p> <p>SF endorsed the EY funding rates outlined in para 8 of PAPER C and providers were notified before 28 February 2025.</p>
9.5	A further adjustment is expected following the outcome of the January Census, in relation to uptake of working families entitlement.
9.6	An expansion grant is expected in July 25, to support providers with the final phase of implementing the working families' entitlement. Method of distribution will be agreed and funding sent to providers in August 25.
9.7	<p><u>SPECIAL SCHOOL, PUPIL REFERRAL UNIT, RESOURCED PROVISIONS AND MAINSTREAM EHCP TOP UP FUNDING</u></p> <p>A breakdown of LA commissioned places is shown in the table at para 11 of PAPER C. Funding rates will remain the same for 2025/26 and budget shares were received before 28 February 2025.</p>
9.8	<p><u>QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS</u></p> <p>Members asked when information on further expansion of SEN specialist provision would be available.</p>
9.9	A paper is expected to go to cabinet on 9 April 2025 but, the plan may be affected by the outcome of the School Place Planning decisions made this evening.
9.10	Members asked how Capital Funding is used to support expansion of SEN specialist provision.
9.11	Capital funding will be detailed in the paper to Cabinet.
	Action – Information on Capital Funding to be included in papers for next meeting on 17 July 2025.
9.12	<p>It was confirmed that SEND places are not commissioned in private schools, which are funded through fees charged, rather than through government. Children with an EHCP who attend a private school may be supported.</p> <p><u>RESOLVED</u></p> <p>1, That the general updates in relation to 2025/26 schools and early years related funding be noted.</p> <p>2. That the 2025/26 top up funding rates for special schools, pupil referral units, resourced provisions and mainstream EHCP be endorsed. (5 for 0 against)</p>
10.	<u>SCHOOL FUNDING POLICIES</u>
10.1	Feedback taken from the HT Forum held on 13 March 2025 was that it was felt inappropriate to confirm the policies and in particular, criteria for the Growth Fund until after the Cabinet decision on School Place Planning has been made.
10.2	Members thought it would be helpful to know how many schools are likely to be affected through receiving additional pupils.

Action – Extra meeting of the SF to be arranged for 31 March 2025 at 8.30am. This will be a brief meeting with a single item to approve the policies.
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The meeting closed at 10.35am

DATE OF NEXT MEETING – All meetings will be virtual through Teams.

Monday 31 March 2025 - 8.30am

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS All at 8.30am

17 July 2025

13 November 2025

15 January 2026