

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

DERBYSHIRE SCHOOLS' FORUM

Minutes of the Meeting Held on 10 December 2025

At County Hall, Matlock at 4.45pm

Present

Members

- John Payne - Edale Primary School
- Richard Bull - Dronfield Junior School
- Matt Stretton - Coton in the Elms Primary School
- Nadeem Shah - Park Schools Federation
- Cassie Hurt - Eureka Primary School
- Peter Johnston - The Village Federation
- Heather Watts - New Mills Secondary School
- Grant Worthington - Flying High Trust
- Matt Morris - Team Education
- Alex Breedon – St Marys, Chesterfield
- Paul Scaife - Embark Trust
- Liz Seymour - Church of England Diocese - Derby
- Deborah Turner - NEU
- Peter Munk - ASCL

Substitutes

- Cilla Hollman – Hadfield Infant School
- Matilde Warden – Belper School

Observers

- Cllr Alex Dale - DCC

DCC Officers/others

- Alison Noble – Temporary Executive Director/DCS
- Rachel Moore – Interim Assistant Director, Schools and Learning
- Joe Wilson – DCC - Director of Education and Inclusion
- Kevin Smith – DCC – Finance CST
- Elena Beard - DCC – Finance CST
- Andy Walker – DCC Head of School Support Finance
- Ruth Lane – DCC – School Support Finance

Peter Johnston chaired the meeting.

25/27 – Welcome and Apologies for Absence

- Emma Haywood - Alfreton Nursery School
- Julian Scholefield - Esteem MAT
- Karen Hayes - Esteem MAT
- Donna Hain - Redhill Academy Trust
- Melanie Lawson - Embark Trust

- Keith Hirst - Redhill Academy Trust
- Emma Howard – Swanwick Hall School
- Simon Redfern - Catholic Diocese Academy Trust
- Andy Kelly – Embark Trust
- Cllr Simon Mabbott - DCC
- Cllr Lewis Whitbread – DCC
- Sarah Bryan – Assistant Director, Children’s Services
- Jenny Webster – DCC – Head of Development
- Phil Burrows – DCC – Finance CST

25/28- Minutes of The Schools Forum 15 October 2025 and actions arising

The minutes were agreed for accuracy.

The following matters arising were discussed;

Action point: members not attending for two or more consecutive meetings to receive an e-mail from the Chair to see whether they wish to remain members of the Forum. – Completed.

Action point: Pen portraits for the four Academy Representative applicants to be requested and sent to existing Academy representatives to decide who would fill the vacancy. Primary Headteacher vacancy to be advertised. Early Years team to find a new representative for the Early Years vacancy.- Completed, see agenda item 25/29

Action point: Request copy of the Slough LA Case Study for Forum members. – To be submitted at next meeting.

Action point: Seek the views of Secondary and Special representatives on the de-delegation of funding for 2026-27 for their individual sectors.- Secondary Schools confirmed de-delegation. Special Schools to be e-mailed.

Action point: If the NFF is structurally substantially different to previous years to report again at the next meeting. – see agenda item 25/30

Action point: Education Sufficiency report be included at the next meeting.- delayed until the January meeting.

25/29 – School Forum vacancies and changes

Verbal report from Elena Beard to confirm new members on the Forum;

- Alex Breedon – St Marys, Chesterfield
- Emma Howard – Swanwick Hall School
- Aaron Denton - Derby College Group
- Lynsey Holehouse – Killamarsh Village Day Nursery
- Cllr Simon Mabbott - DCC
- Cllr Paul Maginnis - DCC
- Matilde Warden – Belper School

The following members have now left the Forum;

- Adele France – Minerva Learning Trust
- Canon Caroline Shoyer – Church of England Diocese – Derby
- Kate Martin – Derby College Group
- Margaret Mason – Children 1st
- Cllr Jack Bradley
- Cllr Sam Redfern
- Randa Jelbert – Minerva Learning Trust

Peter Johnstone welcomed the new members to the Forum.

25/30 – Indicative Funding Settlement

Kevin Smith presented a paper to inform the Schools Forum of the indicative national school funding settlement for 2026-27 and the potential implications for Derbyshire.

Kevin explained that the provisional figures presented are based on October 2024 census data, the final allocation will be based on October 2025 census data and should be announced before parliament goes into recess on 19th December 2025.

After adjustments for 2025-26 grants being rolled into Schools Block a real term increase of around 2.1% is anticipated prior to any census data induced pare back of multipliers, which was 0.7% last year. Andy Walker added that although no pay awards for school staff have been finalised it would be prudent to anticipate around 2% which will be included in School Support Finance forecasts in due course.

A report at the next meeting will confirm the actual funding levels and multipliers to be used in Derbyshire which will mirror the National Funding Formula as far as possible, with a pare back utilised if total funding is insufficient.

25/31 – Dedicated School Grant (DSG) 2025-26 Budget Monitoring

Kevin Smith presented a paper to provide the Schools Forum with the quarter 2 projected Revenue Budget outturn position of the DSG for 2025-26.

The accumulated deficit carried forward from 2024-25 totalled £44.847m and monitoring at the end of quarter 2 indicates an estimated in year over spend of £39.799m for 2025-26, resulting in a total estimated deficit at the end of 2025-26 of £84.646m. This is almost exclusively due to over spends on the High Needs Block (HNB).

The Early Years Block is only finalised three months after the year end and the Schools Block is almost a passport process and will not vary much.

The risk of further increases is all about the HNB.

A discussion took place with the following points made;

EHCP applications are starting to plateau, it is unclear whether this is due to a reduction in applications, due to success of Inclusion Funding, or a reduction in approvals. Parents are more aware of the existence of EHCP's and more likely to apply.

Over spend in Inclusion Support is due to the redesign of services in this area.

Members asked if an additional column could be added to tables with under/over spends quoted showing their percentage of total budget set.

Also, on Appendix 1 HNB Expenditure 2025-26 a column showing number of pupils being funded in each area was requested in future DSG monitoring reports.

Clarification was given regarding comparison of cost of funding a pupil within an LA Maintained/Academy school compared with an independent setting as this is the major area of over spend.

In an LA Maintained/Academy school DfE stipulates that funding consists of 3 elements

Element 1 - £4,000

Element 2 - £6,000

Element 3 – pupil specific top-up

In an Independent school, it is just a fee.

When a parent takes LA to a tribunal, placement of pupil is dictated by parental choice, not capacity within settings. Parents often attend the tribunal with a Barrister and 90%+ will get the Independent placement they request at the fee charged and the LA has to pay.

SEN issues are discussed at other partnerships forums and members are welcomed to join them.

The Government currently have a DSG override procedure in place which has recently been extended to April 2028 which means that LA's are able to keep the DSG deficit 'off their books' to prevent them from declaring bankruptcy. From 2028, Government will take responsibility for SEN funding. The current deficit has an impact on other LA budgets as interest payments of approximately £1m p.a are being incurred which means that funding cannot be spent in other areas. LA is working on a HNB management plan.

Everyone is waiting for the delayed government white paper on SEN to be published to see what changes this will bring. Opinion on the Forum was that Government needs to be brave and bold in addressing a nationwide problem that is out of hand.

Action point: Additional columns to be added to tables with under/over spends quoted showing their percentage of total budget set and on Appendix 1 HNB Expenditure 2025-26 to show number of pupils being funded in each area.

Responsibility: Kevin Smith

Timeline: to be included in future DSG monitoring reports

25/32 – What have we achieved at this meeting for the children in Derbyshire

Greater knowledge about financial issues for Forum members.

Next meeting – Wednesday 28 January 2026, County Hall Matlock, Committee Room 1 at 4.45pm

The meeting closed at 6.15pm.

Summary of action points

Action point: Copy of the Slough LA Case Study to be presented to Forum members

Responsibility: Elena Beard to organise

Timeline: January Forum meeting

Action point: Seek the views of Special representatives on the de-delegation of funding for 2026-27.

Responsibility: Elena Beard

Timeline: January Forum meeting

Action point: Education Sufficiency report from Development Section

Responsibility: Jenny Webster

Timeline: January Forum meeting

Action point: Additional columns to be added to tables with under/over spends quoted showing their percentage of total budget set and on Appendix 1 HNB Expenditure 2025-26 to show number of pupils being funded in each area.

Responsibility: Kevin Smith

Timeline: to be included in future DSG monitoring reports