

Schools Forum Briefing

From the meeting held on 26th January 2024

This Briefing provides a summary of key discussions and decisions taken by Forum at their most recent meeting. If you want to find more detail, the minutes and papers from all meetings are in the public domain and can be found on the Norfolk Schools website [here](#), along with contact details for Forum representatives.

Election of Chair/Vice Chair

The annual election of Schools Forum Chair and Vice-Chair was held, and it was agreed that **Martin White** would remain as Chair, with **Glyn Hambling** remaining as Vice-Chair.

Schools Forum Membership review

Schools forum reflects annually on its membership structure, in order to best represent the educational landscape. It was agreed to retain the current membership structure but to monitor the ratio of representation, such that the structure accurately reflects the Norfolk education landscape.

Proposed Schools Budget 2024-25

Schools Forum heard an update on funding announcements relating to the schools budget, details of which can be found in the [meeting papers](#). Schools Forum questioned the change in the Early Years Funding Formula for 2-year-olds; it was reported that although the April 2024 base rate will be slightly lower than the current rate, most currently eligible children will now attract Early Years Pupil Premium and many will also attract the disadvantaged supplement, so the net funding amount for disadvantaged 2-year-olds remains higher than it is currently.

Planned Growth (Pupil Variations) 2024-25

Schools Forum were updated on the formula that NCC are using with the Block Transfer, and to inform that there were 4 schools who were either growing or new that would require pupil variations. This information can be found [in the papers](#).

Schools Forum asked about the process for checking the accuracy of pupil estimates; it was reported that the numbers are set based on the best available estimates, but that there would be value in looking retrospectively at any variances to the estimates.

Disapplication for Sparsity Distance

Schools Forum [heard](#) that a disapplication request has been made for a change to the average sparsity distance calculation for Duchy of Lancaster CE School for 2024-25, in order to ensure that the school is funded equally to other sparse schools in Norfolk. This has been acknowledged and approved by the DfE, and the data issue will be corrected at source for 2025-26. Schools Forum asked whether this was likely to be an issue for other schools in the county; it was reported that this was an unusual situation, usually confined to multi-site, all-through schools.



LFI Update to Schools Forum

Schools Forum members heard an update regarding the Local First Inclusion programme. Since the last update, NCC has met the DfE twice as part of the **Enhanced Monitoring and Support Programme**, triggered as a result of higher-than-expected demand for SEND services. The DfE have been provided with high-level information as to the progress of the five workstreams, and NCC have reiterated that both financial and outcome benefits for children & young people are planned for delivery in the middle and later years of the programme plan.

As well as delivering the existing programme of work, the programme team are working with school leaders to develop new proposals which will further support the goals of the programme and strengthening the ability of mainstream schools to meet the needs of children with SEN. There will be a particular emphasis on transformation of how services are coordinated when needs first emerge and getting more help in more quickly, and on the partnership between special schools and mainstream schools to ensure all children are supported in the right way.

Schools Forum asked for further detail as to the long-term projections for bringing the projections back in line with the aims; it was reported that these mitigation strategies were part of the conversations with the DfE and that these issues were not unique to the county. Schools Forum also indicated that an effective priority would be a focus on the inclusivity of mainstream schools from across the sector and earlier, clear messaging as to the opportunities available to support children & young people with SEND. Forum members also reiterated the importance of ongoing communication with the wider sector to provide insights into the Local First Inclusion programme.

Schools Forum also heard that **Element 3 Funding**, which has been increased to support mainstream inclusion, has risen at an increased rate and over and above that originally forecast. It is hoped that over time this additional funding in mainstream schools will support good outcomes for children in mainstream schools. Ongoing work is in place to monitor in the medium and long term the levels at which this operates.

Conversations with **Independent schools** have continued positively, with an increase in engagement from the independent sector and significant negotiated savings in this area. Schools Forum asked questions regarding the impact on teachers working in that sector on the continued viability of Independent School places; this is something that the programme is working with the sector on an ongoing basis and that a number of options are being discussed.

School and Community Teams have been working with 320 schools and 600 Children & Young People since their implementation and have been expanding their offer at this early stage. Schools Forum raised questions about the impact that these teams were having, particularly where school staff moved into these roles. Members also highlighted the importance of the 'team around the school, supporting parental competence and school confidence. There is, in some areas, a lack of awareness of the services available, and there was a request for evidence of the impact of these teams as they become more embedded. Schools Forum welcomed further dialogue and more detailed discussion as to how School and Community Teams could benefit education settings and their overarching strategic aims and goals. Further communication and engagement with schools on the impact of these teams will take place based on this feedback from forum.

The Forum heard that the **Alternative Provision** workstream is now moving into the piloting phase, building on the design principles phase, and there is currently a **Secondary Expression of Interest live for 11 Specialist Resource Bases**, closing on the 2nd of February. The two new state funded **Special Schools** are due to open in 2026.

As part of a 'stock-take' to inform 2nd year of the 6-year LFI programme, **some workstreams/projects are being combined** alongside new developments that have been informed by year 1 experience, such as ensuring that projects are considered from both a capital delivery and a sufficiency perspective. Work is also ongoing to implement a new **SEND Front Door** after the spring, to ensure a single point for all SEND enquiries / referrals for parents and professionals.