**Minutes of Schools Forum Meeting**

**16th July 2025 at 2.30 pm**

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| ***Members*** | ***Position*** | ***Voting*** | ***Attendance*** |
| Steve Geary | Primary Maintained Headteacher | Voting | Present |
| Vicky Aspen | Special Maintained Headteacher | Voting | Absent |
| Victoria Richmond | Primary Academy Headteacher | Voting | Present |
| **Vacancy** | **Secondary Academy Headteacher** | **Voting** | **n/a** |
| Marie Woolston | Special/PRU Academy Headteacher | Voting | Present |
| Kyle Taylor | CFO Multi Academy Trust | Voting | Present |
| Richard Warnham | Governor Primary Maintained | Voting | Absent |
| Barbara Fincham | Governor Primary Academy | Voting | Present |
| Dympna Lennon | Governor Secondary Maintained | Voting | Absent |
| Peter Martin (Chair) | Governor Secondary Academy | Voting | Present |
| Justin Stuart | Governor Special and PRU | Voting | Absent |
| Hannah Cartwright | Early Years Representative | Non-voting | Absent |
| Simon Cook | 16-19 Provider Representative | Non-voting | Absent |
| **Vacancy** | **C of E Diocese Representative** | **Voting** | **n/a** |
| **Vacancy** | **RC Diocese Representative** | **Voting** | **n/a** |
| **Vacancy** | **Teaching Unions Representative** | **Non-voting** | **n/a** |
| Stuart Gardner | CEO Multi Academy Trust | Voting | Present |
| Elizabeth Halton | SPI over 19 Provisions | Non-voting | absent |
| ***In Attendance*** |  |  |  |
| Celia Buxton | Assistant Director of Education and SEND LA |  | Present |
| Maria Beaney | Finance Business Partner LA |  | Present |
| Sarah Phillipson | Governance Professional |  | Present |
| Tracey Coombs | Portfolio Holder for Education |  | Apologies |
| Paul Clarke | Strategic Head of Education; Planning and Access |  | Apologies |
| Leanne Farach | Director of Children Services |  | Apologies |
| Joanna Mahadoo |  |  | Present |

1. Welcome, attendance and apologies:

As noted above.

No apologies given.

1. Declaration of Interests:

No changes to the previously declared interests and no conflicts to the agenda.

1. Minutes from the previous meeting 21st January 2025:

Accuracy:

The minutes were agreed as an accurate representation of the meeting.

Matters Arising: None

**Minutes from the previous meeting, 24th June 2025 – Ongoing**

1. 2025-26 DSG Budget Update – Maria Beaney:

MB noted the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budget update and explained that the Department for Education requires Local Authorities to regularly provide updates to their Schools Forum about the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). This grant is divided into four distinct funding blocks. The Schools Block finances both maintained schools and academies, with the stipulation that at least 99.5% of this funding must be allocated directly to schools. The High Needs Block supports special educational needs and alternative provision, while the Early Years Block funds nursery and early years, ensuring that at least 96% of the funding is allocated to these providers. Lastly, the Central Services School Block is designated for supporting the statutory functions of the Local Authority as they pertain to both maintained schools and academies.

In Medway, the Local Authority utilises its DSG grant to fund various educational activities, either through direct payments to schools and educational providers or, if approved, through centrally retained funds for educational purposes. The allocation of retained DSG is adjusted multiple times throughout the year, particularly when maintained schools convert to academies.

For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the ESFA announced changes to Medway's DSG allocation in March 2025. The initial allocation for the Schools Block was £275,358,078, which was subsequently adjusted to £40,131,237 following deductions for academies. The High Needs Block initially stood at £48,095,201 before being reduced to £47,920,698. The Early Years Block remained steady at £44,149,165, while the Central Services School Block remained unchanged at £1,302,034.

For per-pupil funding, the 2025-26 allocations were as follows:

The primary school block increased to £5,364.96, reflecting a rise of £394.60, or 7.4%, from the previous year. The secondary school block rose to £7,105.62, an increase of £553.92, or 7.8%. The High Needs Block remained at £4,665.15, unchanged from last year. For early years funding, the rates for three-year-olds increased to £5.79 (up by 21p or 3.6%), two-year-olds increased to £8.20 (up by 22p or 2.7%), and under-twos rose to £11.15 (up by 28p or 2.5%).

The Schools forum members noted this report.

1. Policy Review Updates – Maria Beaney:

MB advised that on 30th June 2025, the government released a preliminary document to help Local Authorities and schools prepare for the upcoming detailed National Funding Formula (NFF) guidance, which is scheduled to be published in Autumn 2025. Starting in September 2026, free school meals (FSM) will be available for all children in households receiving Universal Credit. The 2026-2027 funding formula will maintain the same 16 factors as the previous year, with funding for FSM expansion provided through a separate grant rather than altering the NFF factors.

Local Authorities will continue to manage funding formulas for mainstream schools, ensuring local factor values are adjusted to align with the NFF, unless already in line. The Chancellor outlined plans for an average 1% increase in per-pupil funding over the next three years, with the core schools budget expected to rise from £64.8 billion in 2025-26 to £69.5 billion by 2028. This budget increase includes costs related to the expansion of FSM and teacher pay increases. Additionally, £760 million is allocated for reforming the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) system, primarily affecting the 2026-27 year.

**Q - How much of the funding increase will make it to schools, given various allocations for SEND and free school meals?**

A - I would not bank on more than a 0.5% increase. This is my best guess based on the spending allocation, and central government has been very tight-lipped about the exact figures.

**Q - How will recent confirmations about National Insurance and SPSG grants be reflected in the consultation?**

A - The consultation will be updated as the government releases information piece by piece. I must consult with schools, so updates will be provided as more details become available.

A Schools forum member noted that it is important to recognise that these small increases are not sustainable for schools, particularly in light of the pay award.

**Q - Will the consultation be presented to CFOs and demonstrate what the transfer means for schools?**

A - Yes, it will go to CFOs. Currently, it will be based on last year's allocations, and the workings will be attached to help explain the impact.

The Schools forum members noted this report.

1. Funding Support Business Cases – Standard Item:

MB advised the Schools forum that there are currently no business cases for funding support. However, MB has received a request from one school, which is the last institution seeking additional funding from the previous year. MB has reviewed and approved this request. The school will be invoicing Medway Council for just over £34,000, as they had 16 or 18 pupils in their reception class, something that MB had already factored into the planning. MB clarified that this payment will be processed and has already been accounted for in the budget.

1. Governance Update - Term of Office Renewal – SP:

SP thanked Richard Warnham for his contributions to the Schools forum as he prepares to step down in July 2025 after four years of service.

SP noted that Kyle Taylor and Barbara Fincham would like to continue, pending approval from their colleagues, while Peter Martin also wishes to remain. SP will confirm the status of Hannah Cartwright and Simon Cook, whose term of office has ended, and investigate possible new candidates.

SP welcomed Steve Geary to the Schools forum as the new Primary Maintained Headteacher representative.

1. AOB:

MB noted that the next meeting is scheduled for 01st October 2025, and an item regarding the transfer from the school's block to the high needs block needs to be added to the agenda, agreed by the Schools forum members.

Meeting dates School forum 2025/26:

* 01st October 2025
* 10th December 2025
* 14th January 2026
* 03rd June 2026