

SCHOOLS FORUM
PLEASE NOTE TIME OF MEETING

Wednesday 27th March 2019
at 4.00 pm – 6.00 pm

Mansbridge Primary School
Octavia Road, Swaythling, Southampton, SO18 2LX

This meeting is open to the public

LEAD OFFICER
Derek Wiles
Service Lead, Education

Tel: 023 8083 4731
Email: SchoolsForum.Admin@southampton.gov.uk

CONTACT
Meeting Support

Tel: 023 8083 2557
Email: SchoolsForum.Admin@southampton.gov.uk

Chair and Vice Chair		
John Draper	Head Teacher	Swaythling Primary School
Harry Kutty	Head Teacher	Cantell School
Primary School Representatives		
Julie Swanston	Head Teacher	Woolston Infant School
Mark Sheehan	Head Teacher	Mansbridge Primary School
Peter Howard	Head Teacher	Fairisle Junior School
Primary Governor		
Richard Harris	Governor	Moorlands Primary School
Ross Williams	Governor	Mason Moor Primary School

Secondary School Representatives		
<i>Not represented</i>		
Special Schools Representatives		
Maria Smyth	Head Teacher	Vermont School
Colin Grant	Governor	Cedar School
Academy Representatives		
Sean Preston	Chief Financial Officer	Hamwic Trust
Lyn Bourne	Head Teacher	St Anne's
Pupil Referral Unit Representative		
Alison Parsons	Head Teacher	Compass School
PVI Early Years Provider		
<i>Not represented</i>		
Non Schools Representative		
<i>Not represented</i>		
Observers		
Amjid Raza	Project Manager, SCC	
SCC Officers		
Derek Wiles	Service Lead, Education	
Paul Atkins	Schools Capital Programme Manager	
Nick Persson	Finance Business Partner for Education	
Dyfan Rowlands	Meeting Support (minutes)	
Kyran Goverd	Meeting Support (minutes)	

1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Chair John Draper welcomed delegates to the meeting and thanked MaSh for hosting this month's meeting.

2 APOLOGIES AND CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP (IF ANY)

Apologies:

Councillor Taggart	Millbrook Ward
Anne Downie	Team Manager – Early Years and Childcare, SCC
Anna Wright	Paint Pots Nursery
Jo Knight	Service Lead – Finance Business Partnering, SCC
Susanne Ottens	Head Teacher, Fairisle Infant and Nursery
Amanda Talbot-Jones	Head Teacher, St Denys Primary School

Changes in membership:

There were no new changes in membership.

3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING – 16th January 2019

The minutes were reviewed and deemed to be an accurate and faithful representation of the previous meeting.

Update on matters arising from the previous minutes is as follows:

- ❖ **Item 3: PA to clarify Capital Bidding remit** – To be discussed later within meeting.
- ❖ **Item 6: PA to liaise with Tammy Marks regarding the inaccurate figure** – Update to be provided at June Schools Forum Meeting.
- ❖ **Item 7: JK/NP to present an update on Business World at March's meeting** – Update to be provided later within meeting.
- ❖ **Item 7: JK to provide an update on Schools in Financial Difficulties at March's meeting** – NP to provide update on behalf of Jo Knight later within meeting.

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest signed and completed by delegates. No further update to be provided.

5 STANDING ITEM: LA UPDATE ON DFE/EFA FUNDING ANNOUNCEMENTS

With regard to updates of recent grant funding, NP noted Chancellor of Exchequers grant, totalling £14m, equating to £684,000 distributed across Southampton schools in February, with academies being paid directly from Education Skills Funding Agenda. Free School Meals Supplementary Funding Grant has been allocated to Southampton totalling £437,000, and distributed on a per-school basis to schools during the middle of March.

NP noted further that Sugar Tax money would also soon be distributed to schools. MaSh responded that in discussing Sugar Tax money with others, he had understood that academy heads had been given the full amount and maintained schools had been given a reduced form. SP responded that this would depend on the methodology of the funding authority, and that academies had been provided funding as a collective: the LA, however, may differ on their means and process of distribution. DW continued that initially a bid had been made for a grant of £2500, which has since increased to £3000 per school. DW clarified that some schools may operate on a 'grant per student' basis, however this was not the intention of the LA, and thus it was decided that the same amount should be allocated per school. DW noted that this funding constitutes partly education and health funding, with *Healthy High Five* also forming a part therein and any money not claimed will be transferred to health services and health visitors. DW confirmed, however, that the vast majority of this funding has been sent directly to schools.

JS queried whether it had been the LA's decision that the surplus money would go into Health. DW responded that this had been the advice received, with the transfer of the additional funding to Health being based around the *Healthy High Five*. JS questioned further whether this would be money which schools could seek to access from health visitors. DW responded that this could be achieved, and that this could be discussed with health nurses. DW noted further that Debbie Chase is the current lead officer with regard to this and should be consulted if any further queries arise.

HK further posed whether all schools had received extra funding that had been available. NP confirmed that this had been distributed, with £47,000 being distributed in February 2019. NP confirmed also that Sugar Tax money shall be placed into Capital. NP concluded in raising that nothing had been announced with regard to NFF since the previous meeting. SP added that the DFE would announce spend at the next spending review, which has since passed and so no update is likely to be provided in the near future.

6 **UPDATE ON SECONDARY SCHOOL EXPANSION, SCHOOLS CAPITAL PROGRAMME AND STUDENT NUMBERS**

A) Secondary school expansion

PA confirmed that Cabinet had approved proposal for secondary expansion scheme, ensuring that St Mark's School is progressed to the next stage of development. With regard to educational capacity, Cantell School and St George's College will have capital work undertaken to increase capacity. PA announced thanks to St Anne's School in coming forward and accepting additional children, along with other schools across the city, and raised that this cooperation had been greatly appreciated by the LA.

B) Schools Capital Programme

No update provided

C) Rise in Year 7 student numbers/portable classroom usage

PA noted that the most recent forecast, based on census data, had predicted 1510 Year 7 children schooled within Southampton schools, however current capacity for Year 7 stands at 1490 in existing schools. PA added that the LA were aware that there is a discrepancy here which requires management. PA continued that the biggest pressure upon this figure has been the inward migration into the city from all age groups, which had demonstrated as being apparent since July 2018: 50 additional children from year 6 have been recorded since previous census. A clear marked trend has been noted with an increase in children choosing Southampton schools, with 230 additional children who have opted for Southampton based schools. PA stated that challenges have indeed arisen from such an upsurge, and the LA are seeking to place interim accommodation in September to address this.

SP queried as to what discussion had taken place around funding to hold additional classes. Schools will not receive additional funding to hold these extra classes, and that this is something which the LA need to consider given that this will be maintained for some years. PA responded that initially the first action to take shall be to discuss this further individually with each school as the LA must recognise the varied impact this will have on each establishment. PA added further that with regard to funding, this would also need to be addressed in liaising with and assessing schools on a case by case basis. Funding shall be achieved for this, however, in the following year's DSG settlement.

HK raised that whilst it is beneficial that there are additional students opting for Southampton schools, there would appear to be an imbalance with first

choices for schools. With the further option of home education available for parents, HK posed what the LA's strategy would be to safeguard against a significant rise in parents opting for home educating their children due to first choice options not being achieved. PA responded that the LA's predictions with regard to this are that this should not materialise into a considerable problem.

RH questioned further whether schools with capacity are being able to reach out to children, or whether this was being hampered due to travel and logistical difficulties. RH posed further whether it would be most cost effective to provide transport for these children than build and maintain temporary accommodation. PA responded that the LA are currently looking into this, and have thus far concluded that the better resolution is to provide temporary accommodation in areas of demand to minimise scope of home schooling. RW posed further whether, at present, the LA are able to confirm with confidence that all Year 6 children are being offered a place at secondary education. PA confirmed that this was the case, other than those cases where an application was never received, which the LA are not able to address. PA added that historically, in these cases, as high as 90 children are left having not completed applications due to inward migration. MaSh asked whether appeals, therefore, will significantly increase. PA raised that upon speaking to Clodagh Freeston, it was agreed that this is likely to occur.

CG noted that in communication with schools within Romsey, these schools are currently unable to cope with the number of first choice applications within this area, which is likely to have an impact upon numbers diverting towards Southampton instead. PA confirmed that Southampton is not alone in facing such challenges, with Birmingham, Sheffield, Greater Manchester and near to half of the London boroughs experiencing similar problems with reliance on free schools increasing in some of these areas.

JS posed whether the influx of additional families entering the city has placed extra pressure on Year R. PA responded an increase had been noted with regard to this, however this is being managed as currently the LA are operating at 3% below absolute capacity levels. Thus, with regard to Primary and Infant years this has become easier to manage and has allowed a spread across multiple schools. PA emphasised, however, that this rise should nevertheless be noted and could potentially have implications in the future.

PH raised that he himself had volunteered to be part of a working group in looking into scheme for financing schools, and had raised his interest in taking part in this in October 2018. PH confirmed that he would still be happy to contribute towards this moving forward.

ADMISSIONS POLICIES

7

PA confirmed that Clodagh Freeston is covering inspection feedback at present, and will seek to provide an update on admissions policies at the next Schools Forum meeting

6

Actions Arising:

- *Admissions Policies* to form agenda item for June Schools Forum meeting, presented by Clodagh Freeston

8

UPDATE ON INVESTIGATIONS OF SCHOOLS IN FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES FUND

DW presented the decision paper, dated 14th February 2016, enclosed within the report pack, noting that also included is a spreadsheet of all schools' financial situations, delineating all surpluses and deficits pertaining to each school. DW affirmed, however, that his intention is to bring this matter into current focus, emphasising that the LA can no longer allow schools to fall into large deficits. Whilst it cannot be expected that all schools fall within budget, and in some cases surpluses are recorded, substantial deficits should be avoided at all costs. DW noted that a proactive approach is required moving forward, as such deficits are of real concern.

DW continued that, conversely, attention should also be awarded to those schools with large surpluses, adding that past suggestions had been that any surplus may be clawed back from those schools and used to subsidise those in deficit. DW affirmed however that this should not be suggested, as this would be unjust on those schools who have managed their budgets and finances carefully. Notwithstanding, it would appear that the surpluses accrued by these schools are not being directly used to better children's welfare and education which is a concern. DW noted that he would propose an agreement to work alongside a number of head teachers to update the enclosed decision paper and provide agreement on quantifying legitimate deficits and surpluses. Should schools have a clear and justifiable plan, for example savings made for capital bill, then this would be understandable. However, should schools go above an agreed percentage then a decision to claw back funds may be made.

PH confirmed that in October, he had volunteered to be part of a working group in looking into the scheme for financing schools, adding that he would maintain his support and involvement in such a project. PH noted further that schools were told each year that if they accrued surpluses above 5% then a disclosure would need to be made to the LA on how this would be utilised. PH questioned, therefore, whether some schools may opt for non-disclosure on this. DW confirmed that he had not been under the impression that schools do this. NP admitted, however, that previously the process had faltered slightly and that this would need revisiting.

MaSh noted that the minutes from the October meeting are in direct conflict with the policy agreed upon, however commended the LA that they now have a greater understanding on deficits. MaSh continued that uncertainty still persists with regard to capital projects, and that it is unclear on whether a

deficit would or would not become a loan. Furthermore, this would be contradictory on whether a school would need to be in surplus or whether this would depend instead on whether it would fall on year 2 or 3. MaSh requested clarity on terms of surpluses and deficits, including balances, given current conflation between people on this subject, including head teachers and business managers. MaSh emphasised further that little can be achieved in the space of 6 months, and that any actions made will not have a direct impact upon the following year.

MaSh continued in raising issues with regard to capital projects. MaSh raised that to have his school re-glazed, this was previously paid for by the council however at present schools are utilising savings in their own budgets to fund such projects. MaSh noted further that he had heard that some schools are being funded out of LA budget and receiving surpluses in their account, suggesting that all schools are not treated equally. DW confirmed that this would need further investigation. JD confirmed further that MaSh should also constitute a member of the working party, and would be welcomed.

With regard to specific capital funding, PH affirmed that a transparent spending method through spending agreements is required from the LA. PH added that previously the LA would conduct visits to schools to assess what works should be accomplished and this would be documented. Notwithstanding, these visits appear to have ceased, and PH questioned how the LA can be aware of what works need to be carried out if this is the case. DW admitted that cost cutting within the LA has brought around a premature end to such visits, adding that there is also no longer an annual review of the condition of school buildings. However, PA had requested that this be reinstated. DW affirmed, however, that the LA must adopt a proactive rather than a reactive role with regard to monitoring and assessing structural condition of buildings.

DW continued further that the LA are spending money in areas of absolute need, however there persists a range of flaws within processes relating to surpluses and deficits which require attention. DW questioned, however, what stance Schools Forum as a whole should take to ensure that schools do not find themselves under such large deficits. DW noted further that whilst there is a firm policy in relation to surpluses, action planning around considerable deficits is lacking. Furthermore, those schools which have ignored processes agreed in Schools Forum should also be considered and called into question.

MaSh commended the LA's approach with regard to seeking redress for funds schools have lost out on due to MFG process, and voiced support thereof. MaSh stressed importance of capping and scaling in ensuring that schools are not losing significantly year on year and which further ensures that schools are not closing off as much funds. MaSh noted however that many delegates present at the meeting had historically voted in favour of MFG in spite of the negative cost impact this would have on schools, and this was globally accepted by almost all schools and governing bodies. MaSh affirmed that at present, a significant funding crisis is apparent, and

that the energy of both schools and the LA should be turned towards achieving extra funding for all schools.

MaSh stressed further that the LA has been accused in the past of making poor decisions, however affirmed that all delegates at Schools Forum are culpable also for such decisions, not solely the LA. MaSh emphasised solidarity should be shown, and it would be appropriate for PHC and Schools Forum to commit that no schools would be given redress due to funds which may have been gained through MFG process. Lessons can be learned from the MFG process, with MaSh noting that any calls for retrospective redress is unjust to head teachers and schools. Furthermore, any accommodation with regard to this by the LA would equally be unjust.

DW confirmed that schools could have the LA's assurance that no underhand funding to specific schools who have put themselves in financial difficulty will take place, in spite of public NEU pressure placed on the LA. Five years have been allowed for schools to pay back such finances. DW confirmed that the impact on staffing would have been too detrimental to the welfare of children if this was insisted on a 3 year basis. An expectation is placed by the LA on schools for budgets to have been balanced in 5 years. MaSh posed whether Schools Forum could declare their support of the LA in their approach. DW confirmed that this would be beneficial.

RH noted further that, whilst not a member of the NEU, he was disappointed that pressure and attention has been directed towards the LA rather than attention being better placed on the lack of funding allocated... RH stated further that during his time as cabinet member, collective surpluses stood at £5/6m, whereas at present schools are £600k in deficit. Thus, there is no possibility of borrowing money in using such figures.

SP raised that Schools Forum had taken the view, with regard to capping, that limited funds would be distributed, following transfer to High Need, with a limited pot of money for schools to achieve this. More than -1.5% could not be taken, thus the decision was made to enforce capping SP affirmed that schools should financially plan ahead to predict any possible setbacks in 18 months' time. LA oversight, however, is also required, with monitoring needed in relation to such unplanned deficits.

NP stated that in the next financial year, the LA plans to carry out a project to go into schools and assess budgets, working with these schools to devise savings and strategically plan to balance budgets. NP confirmed that funding has been provided to carry out this project, with a member of staff within the Finance and Services team working with schools and challenging any assumptions that might have arisen. NP noted that, nationally, school budgets are all going into deficits situation, and LA's have been asked to procure working payment document wherein schools who have gone above 1% of funding are listed. Plan is then given back to schools to see how this can be addressed.

RH stated further that he is proud that the LA and schools have been seen as a collective and have taken equal responsibility for the children of the city.

RH noted also that as a governor of a school, lacking the presence of a head teacher since July 2018 due to illness, the school itself had come just about within budget. During this period, staff had to be accrued and the finance governor had done works with the school to ensure balance of budget. RH affirmed that it is disappointing to witness schools accruing large deficits at the cost of other schools.

With regard to clawback, SP advised that in relation to 5 year timescale any school under a 10% deficit of budget scale should not immediately have this clawed back, at risk of crippling the school even further. Level of clawback should therefore be considered in such events. SP affirmed that in 5 years' time this level of clawback cannot afford to happen lest teaching and learning in schools be at risk of sharp decline. SP noted that the priority must be to educate children, rather than seeking to balance the budget

JS affirmed that a further mechanism needs to be in place wherein those schools which do not return funding or find themselves under considerable deficits receive repercussions or intervention. JS noted that Schools Forum has previously asked for this intervention, however this has not been realised. MaSm raised, however, that there is often reasoning behind schools with significant deficits, often due to budgeting not being appropriate for that specific school, rather than labelling a school reckless. MaSm noted further that those schools with the largest deficits are often those who work the closest with the LA.

In relation to special schools, CG noted that his school currently has 82 registered pupils, however consideration must be made also to the statutory level of staff which is required to look after this number of children. Large costs are implicated in maintaining the welfare and education of these children, however the school has financially been very prudent over the year. CG noted further that attention should also be drawn to staffing, particularly given staff absences due to pregnancies which the school had undergone of late. Not all schools will have such flexibility in staffing. CG raised further that in regard to earlier discussion on schools financing building repairs, funding in Hampshire school could be sought from a special budget for building works. CG further welcomed the additional support to be offered by LA officers in this regard.

HK raised further that he is in disagreement with the amalgamation of all deficits together, given that for some schools poor financial control is the reason for such a deficit. HK continued that there is a lack of transparency, and part of this also becomes clouded across the issue of NF. Many schools have correctly made significant changes to their structures and systems, however there are many who have not. Secondly, HK questioned whether any clawback took place in the last financial year. NP responded that this did not take place. HK therefore requested that a more robust system be implemented. DW confirmed that once this had been agreed by Schools Forum, then this shall be put in place.

PA confirmed that in relation to the knowledge the LA has on monitoring building condition across schools, this can indeed be improved. Commitment

is required to undertake survey work on all schools, as without this data and information poor choices will likely be made. PA cited that recently the LA had decided to place a new roof on a primary school, having no knowledge however that given a drainage issue the roof subsequently failed. Rework, therefore, in addressing this the consequence of this lack of pre-assessment had cost the LA significantly: money which, otherwise, could have been used to survey all schools.

JD therefore posed to delegates present whether they would be in favour of the resolution that Schools Forum notes that the LA has distributed funds according to formula, as democratically approved by Schools Forum, and that all schools budget responsibly

For: 11

Against: 0

Abstentions: 0

Cllr P confirmed further that he would defend the decision of Schools Forum, made in collaboration with the LA. Cllr P continued that he has since dispelled any myths that the quantity of capping amounts taken are not locked away within the LA and waiting to be released at request. Cllr P affirmed that those schools that have benefited shall not be requested to transfer funds back to the LA, contrary to what has been circulated in the media of late. Cllr P reassured that whilst difficult decisions have been made, these have been made in the best interests of schools to distribute funding and raised that he appreciated the continued support throughout these decisions.

SP noted further that final balances post year-end should be provided at future Schools Forum meetings. NP confirmed that this would be a continuing theme and updates on balances would indeed be provided moving forward.

JD posed further whether all were aware of grants amounting of £50,000 being distributed. NP confirmed that 2 funds were released back into funding for years 19/20, one being the unutilised primary growth funding of £350,400 and the other, a transfer of the balance of £125,000 from the schools contingency balance.

BUSINESS WORLD UPDATE

9

NP confirmed that a setback has been noted with regard to Business World implementation, and thus the expected release date in April shall be earmarked to a later date in the year. JS queried whether education for training will need to be redone as a result of Business World release. NP responded that he was not sure, and that this would be the remit of the LA's Business Team.

10 CLOSING REMARKS AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING

All members present awarded congratulations to PA for his efforts and dedication to Schools Forum, after having announced that he shall be leaving the LA imminently and shall no longer form a part of Schools Forum. PA thanked all, and reminded delegates present that he shall seek to resolve any lasting queries prior to his departure. PA added that any queries raised in need of a response shall be documented and handed over to Project Manager, Amjid Raza.

Date of Next Meeting:

Wednesday 26 June 2019

3:30pm or 4:00pm start tbc

Venue: Cantell School