

## Minutes of Schools' Forum Meeting

11 December 2025

### Members Present

Richard Rolfe – Governor at Micklands (Chair); Dave Dymond – Governor at Alfred Sutton (Vice-Chair), Justine McMinn – Head Teacher of EP Collier; Rebecca Brown – Head of Geoffrey Field Juniors; Nikki McVeigh – Head Teacher of Christ the King; Simon Uttley – Head Teacher of Blessed Hugh Faringdon; Jo Budge - Executive Head Teacher of Reading Early Years Schools Federation; Laura Mathews – Head Teacher of Highdown; Claire Willmott – Head of Cranbury College; Karyn Stiles – Business Manager of Blessed Hugh Faringdon; Julia Cottee – Governor at Reading Early Years Schools Federation; Annal Nayyar – Finance Director of Baylis Trust (Reading Girls); Symon Cooke – Head Teacher of The Avenue; Isabelle Sandy – Business Manager of Kendrick; Dorothy Company – Business Manager of King's Academy Prospect; Cathy Woodcock – Finance Director of Reading School; Alison McNamara – NEU; Jo Budge – Reading EY Schools Federation, Ceri Burns – Maiden Erlegh Scho

Mrs K Stiles, Dave Dymond, Dr Simon Utley, Alison McNamara, Jean, Symon Cooke, Cathy Woodcock, Richard Rolfe, head at Geoffrey field, Carly Price, Isabelle Sandy, Julia Cottee

### Apologies

Apologies received from: Julia Copley, Justine McMinn, and Steven Davis (Steven Davies – Strategic Finance Business Partner)

### In attendance

Brian Grady – Director of Education; Carly Price – Strategic Lead for SEND; Fiona Hostler – Head of Education Access and Support; Alice Boon – Senior Schools Standards Officer; Grahame Craig – DSG Business Partner; Clare Warren – School Finance Business Partner; Lara Manning – Accountancy Assistant, Maggie Buckley – SEND Team Manager, Deborah Talbot – minute taker

	Item	Notes
1	Welcome and apologies – Chair	<p>The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.</p> <p>Grahame Craig read out the protocol for the virtual meeting and voting was confirmed for:</p> <p>Item 2 – Approval of the previous minutes</p> <p>Item 7 – Agree the DSG budget setting strategy for 2026/7</p> <p>Item 8 – Agree the principles of the growth fund for 2025/6/7</p> <p>Recording of the meeting commenced. The recording will be retained until the minutes have been approved.</p>
2	Minutes of the meeting held on 26 June 2025	Minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting from 26 June 2025 by all present at this meeting.

	and matters arising - Chair
3	<p>It was noted on behalf of Richard Rolfe, that ongoing recruitment continues to be a priority for him. He has raised this with the primary headteachers and intends to discuss it with the academies team as well, to explore opportunities for recruiting additional members. We currently have a vacancy to fill, and recent changes in headteachers across several schools mean that a number of existing members are also due for renewal.</p> <p>There is a proposal subject to the Forum's agreement, that a generic email is prepared and circulated to all members. This will ask schools to confirm who is now responsible for representing them, identify their current Schools Forum member, and confirm whether those members wish to continue in their role. This will allow us to update the membership list accurately, particularly where terms are due for renewal.</p> <p>For the purposes of tonight's meeting, if Forum members are content, we will proceed on the basis of the current membership, and an updated list will be presented at a future meeting once confirmations have been received.</p> <p>The term of office is three years. Isabelle Sandy renewed her term at the June meeting, so that has already been updated. However, Dave Dymond the current Chair, whose term is now due for renewal, and we need confirmation of whether he wishes to continue. You are welcome to state now that you wish to carry on, including continuing as Chair. This was confirmed.</p> <p>Given the number of members whose terms are ending, along with the recent changes in headteachers—particularly within the primary phase—as stated above, It is proposed to send a full email round to all schools. This will ensure our membership records are accurate and up to date.</p> <p>Lou Slocombe who is the headteacher of Church End and has been in post since April received an email earlier this term asking whether she would be able to join the Schools Forum, which is why she is here this evening. she is happy to step aside if her attendance is not required, but understood that the previous headteacher represented the school, so is attending in that capacity.</p> <p>To clarify, the Forum does require representation from Church End, and Lou Slocombe's participation is appreciated. If you are willing to continue, we would be pleased for you to remain as the school's representative. Thank you for confirming your attendance.</p> <p>A Nayyar also received an email in June 2025 asking whether they wished to continue in the role as the representative for Reading Girls'. It was</p>

		<p>confirmed at that time that they are happy to remain in post and pleased to continue for a further three-year term.</p> <p>Justin McMinn also happy to continue if there's no other takers.</p> <p>Fiona Hostler offered to review this on Grahame's behalf as they already hold the current headteacher information, so can quickly identify any discrepancies or vacancies within each area. They are more than happy to do this, and it would not take long at all. This would save colleagues having to complete that piece of work themselves, given that we already maintain this information.</p>
4	SEND Strategy verbal update	<p>In terms of the SEND update for today, colleagues will be familiar with the three-strand approach we have used for several years to manage demand and address ongoing pressures within the High Needs Block. As demonstrated in the latest monitoring data, financial pressures within the High Needs Block continue to increase, and the update today reflects progress and challenges across each of the strands.</p> <p>Overall, the number of children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) suggests that we are managing demand relatively effectively. A key priority for the local area is to ensure that we are not missing or delaying the identification of need. The volume of Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) requests remains extremely high, and during June and July we experienced unprecedented levels of requests coming into the system. While this presents operational pressures, it does provide reassurance that the stable number of EHCPs is not due to unmet or unidentified need.</p> <p>Ordinarily available provision in schools continues to be successful and impactful across a wide range of needs. In addition, the advisory support provided through RISE continues to show strong evidence of impact, particularly around behaviour support, and this is reflected in the reports shared earlier.</p> <p>At the SEND Strategy Partnership Board meeting today, we discussed the continued rise in demand for EHCPs and the resulting pressures on services and budgets. We are seeing increased numbers of placements in independent and non-maintained special schools, as well as growing pressure on top-up funding. These trends underline the need for further work to stabilise the system and manage costs while ensuring needs are met appropriately.</p> <p>It is also worth highlighting the recent national updates from central government and from the groups attended on behalf of the Association of Directors of Children's Services. The statutory override—which enables central government to underwrite the deficit in the DSG High Needs</p>

		<p>Block—will remain in place for the next period. Government has also indicated its intention to assume responsibility for local authority DSG budget positions by 2028. Local authorities will continue to hold and commission budgets locally, and Schools Forums will continue in their current role. However, central government plans to address high-needs budget pressures nationally from 2028 onwards.</p> <p>The key issue still under national discussion is how any accrued deficits up to 2028 will be treated. This detail has not yet been confirmed. Current modelling suggests that, without further corrective action, our local DSG deficit could reach approximately £70 million by 2028. If local areas were required to resolve deficits accumulated before 2028 independently, any financial support announced from 2028 onwards would have limited benefit. We will therefore continue to engage closely with central government on this matter, and I will bring further updates to future meetings as more information becomes available.</p>
5	RISE verbal update	<p>As mentioned earlier, RISE consists of two distinct elements: the main RISE service and RISE Regulation, which is the behaviour-support strand. RISE Regulation is available exclusively to maintained primary schools. Firstly, begin by outlining the main RISE offer before moving on to RISE Regulation.</p> <p>A comprehensive overview of RISE—along with workforce summaries, guidance for parents and professionals, and details of our approaches—is available on the Brighter Futures Children website. Broadly, our work focuses on supporting schools with their plan–do–review processes and strengthening ordinarily available provision through a consistent graduated response to SEND.</p> <p>The main RISE service operates across five key strands:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Training and Capacity Building</b> We deliver a range of free training programmes, including therapeutic thinking and good autism practice, and support schools to embed these approaches in day-to-day provision.</li> <li><b>2. Early Intervention and Environmental Support</b> We work with schools to strengthen early intervention, delivering activities such as sensory and environmental audits.</li> <li><b>3. Networks and Peer Collaboration</b> We facilitate several professional networks, including the Alternative Resource Provision Network and the SENCO Network.</li> <li><b>4. Professional Reflection for SENCOs</b> We provide reflective sessions for SENCOs, recognising that many manage large and complex caseloads and may not have regular opportunities for external supervision.</li> </ol>

	<p><b>5. Direct Support for Provision Planning</b></p> <p>Schools can refer to RISE when they need support in identifying or shaping provision for a child. We respond rapidly, ensuring early support is aligned to the child's emerging needs.</p> <p>When schools refer a child to RISE, we work in three main ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where a school needs help to understand what provision is required, we support them to identify this quickly and effectively.</li> <li>• Where a school already understands what is needed, we help with implementation—for example, through coaching for less experienced staff. All RISE staff are trained in the GROW coaching model.</li> <li>• Where a school is confident in current provision and simply wants external validation, a RISE specialist (for example, our neurodiversity lead) will review the arrangements and provide assurance. This supports schools' evidence within the plan–do–review process, particularly where a graduated response is being developed.</li> </ul> <p>Since September, we have focused our work more explicitly on support for individual children, and feedback indicates this is leading to stronger, clearer impact. Schools are now measuring identified areas of need on a consistent scale, and early results show reductions in need levels following RISE involvement. Anecdotally, schools are reporting increased confidence and capacity. We are also supporting work to reduce suspensions and strengthen collaboration through our professional networks.</p> <p>Looking ahead, there are several areas we plan to develop over the coming months and years:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Strengthening Peer Learning</b> There is excellent practice across our settings, and because RISE staff visit all schools, we are well placed to facilitate more peer-to-peer learning and sharing of effective approaches.</li> <li>• <b>Improved Communication Around SEND</b> We are launching a monthly SEND newsletter that will streamline key updates. This will free up time in the SENCO Network meetings for genuine collaboration and co-production, rather than these sessions being dominated by information-sharing.</li> <li>• <b>Developing a Cluster-Based Model (Long-Term Aim)</b> Currently, RISE practitioners are linked to schools in a way that is not strategically aligned. In the longer term, we would like to move to a cluster model, but this would not be considered until a new academic year.</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Integration With Strategic SEND Work</b>            RISE continues to link closely with the wider SEND strategic developments described earlier. For example, as the local area undertakes work around place planning, RISE is feeding in the detailed on-the-ground intelligence gathered through our daily engagement with schools. I am working closely with the strategic lead for SEND to ensure this informs planning.         </li> <li> <b>Continuous Feedback and Offer Development</b>            We are establishing an ongoing feedback cycle to ensure that the RISE offer continues to meet schools' needs. We want schools themselves to present more regularly to the SENCO Network about what is working and what could be improved.         </li> </ul> <p>Finally, in response to a recent query: all schools are currently engaging with RISE. We monitor this closely, and there are no schools we are aware of that are not accessing the service.</p> <p>We identified that there had previously been a gap in engagement from secondary schools, as they were not making full use of the RISE offer. This has been an area of focus, and we are pleased to report a significant increase in secondary involvement this term, which is extremely positive.</p> <p>I would also like to briefly outline the behaviour-support element of RISE, which is an enhanced offer designed to complement the core RISE provision. This strand includes additional staffing capacity, enabling us to spend more time in schools modelling strategies directly with staff, delivering more bespoke training, and providing closer oversight of data, planning and multi-agency coordination. Full details are available on our website for those who would like further information. At present, this enhanced behaviour-support offer is available only to maintained primary schools.</p> <p>As referenced earlier, the behaviour-support strand has been particularly effective. The strong outcomes achieved through its focus on individual children have informed our decision to adopt this approach across the wider RISE service.</p> <p>Looking ahead, there are several areas of further development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Strengthening links with the SEND Team:</b>            We have an Inclusion Officer within RISE, and there is further work to do to ensure this role delivers maximum added value for schools.         </li> <li> <b>More Integrated Planning:</b>            We want to deepen collaboration with health and social care colleagues, recognising that the children who access behaviour         </li> </ul>
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		<p>support frequently require coordinated multi-agency involvement. Work is underway to strengthen the frameworks that enable this.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Future Expansion to Academies:</b> In time, we will be seeking to extend the behaviour-support offer to academy primary schools and, eventually, to secondary schools. This would operate under the same funding formula that applies to maintained schools, ensuring that any school wishing to participate is able to do so.</li> </ul> <p>If this expansion proceeds, we will develop a broader offer that preserves the level of support currently received by maintained primary schools, while also providing appropriate additional support for schools choosing to buy into the service.</p>
6	<p><b>DSG Budget Monitoring 2025/26</b> <i>DSG Finance Business Partner</i></p>	<p><b>Revised Professional Budget Monitoring Update (Period 7 – DSG)</b> This is the Budget Monitoring Report for Period 7 for the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). It is presented for information only, and no decision or vote is required. Key points will be summarised.</p> <p><b>DSG Allocations – Updated November 2025</b></p> <p>The DSG allocations were updated on 24 November 2025 following confirmation from the Department for Education (DfE). These updates include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Years allocations based on the January 2025 census</li> <li>• Import/Export adjustments within the High Needs Block (HNB)</li> </ul> <p>As Forum members are aware, Reading continues to be a net exporter of pupils rather than an importer, which has ongoing implications for our High Needs funding levels.</p> <p>Table 1 in the report shows the updated November 2025 position, confirming total DSG income of £115.5 million for the 2025–26 financial year.</p> <p><b>Budget Monitoring – Overview</b> Appendix 1 provides a detailed breakdown of the four DSG blocks and the associated under- and overspends.</p> <p>The key figure for Forum to note is that the DSG deficit is now £21.7 million.</p> <p>This deficit is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Driven predominantly by High Needs Block overspend</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• £7.4 million higher than the deficit forecast when the 2025–26 budget was originally set</li> </ul> <p>This demonstrates that the overall DSG position is moving further into deficit, not improving.</p> <p><b>Schools Block – Growth Fund and Reserves</b></p> <p>The Schools Block reserves are largely committed to supporting the Growth Fund, including costs associated with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The continued expansion of River Academy</li> <li>• The need to maintain an active Growth Fund to support this expansion</li> </ul> <p>There is also the potential for a non-bulge class requirement, which links to the Growth Fund criteria that will be discussed later in the meeting.</p> <p>The Schools Block reserve currently stands at just over £1 million. Although this appears high, the final costs are unclear until the modelling for River Academy is completed, so the reserve must remain in place. Schools Forum receives regular updates on this ongoing issue.</p> <p><b>Central School Services Block</b></p> <p>This block funds a range of statutory and historic services previously supported by the ESG grant.</p> <p>An additional £10,000 is now required for copyright licences, following the receipt of the final invoice, which exceeded our original estimate.</p> <p><b>Early Years Block</b></p> <p>Key points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The pass-through rate is now <b>96%</b> for 2-, 3- and 4-year-olds</li> <li>• Allocations were updated in <b>July 2025</b>, following revised January 2025 census data</li> <li>• Reading ended the financial year with a <b>£1.6 million surplus</b>, which is unusually high for this block</li> <li>• We are awaiting final DfE guidance on how this surplus should be treated in the accounts</li> <li>• We anticipate an Early Years reserve of approximately <b>£800,000 (3%)</b> at year-end, which falls within the expected range for contingency (typically 1–3%)</li> </ul> <p><b>High Needs Block (HNB)</b></p> <p>This is the area of greatest concern.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The High Needs Block deficit is now projected to be just over £20 million by the end of Period 7</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The deficit continues to increase month by month</li> <li>• This represents the majority of the overall DSG overspend</li> </ul> <p>We are still awaiting the long-delayed SEND and AP Improvement Plan (White Paper). Although we continue to receive projected release windows—early spring, mid-spring, late spring—there is still no confirmed publication date.</p> <p>We are hopeful the paper will set out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A clearer national roadmap for SEND</li> <li>• Government intentions regarding treatment of historic DSG deficits</li> <li>• Future expectations for local authority financial management of SEND</li> </ul> <p>As referenced earlier in the meeting, central government intends to remove the need for DSG deficits to sit on councils' balance sheets by 2028, but we are awaiting detailed clarification on how the accumulated deficit prior to that date will be treated.</p>
	<p><b>Borrowing and Interest Costs</b></p> <p>Due to the expanding DSG deficit, the Council is now required to borrow to cover the shortfall.</p> <p>This results in a projected annual interest cost of nearly £2 million being charged to the DSG by March 2026.</p> <p><b>High Needs Breakdown</b></p> <p>A detailed breakdown of High Needs top-up forecasts and other cost drivers is provided in the report. I am happy to go through these line by line if Forum would find that helpful.</p> <p>The key point is that the total projected overspend for 2025–26 remains £21.7 million, as set out earlier.</p> <p>Appendix 1 provides the full analysis underpinning this position.</p>
7	<p>DSG Budget setting Strategy for 2026/27 (Initial proposals for schools funding formula) <i>DSG Finance Business Partner</i></p> <p><b>Revised Professional Version – Local Funding Formula Initial Proposals</b></p> <p>This item covers the initial proposals for setting the local funding formula for 2026–27. The report being referenced is dated 11 November 2025, and the cover page is correct.</p> <p><b>Recommendations</b></p> <p>Schools Forum is asked to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Note the funding announcements received to date for 2026–27.</li> </ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Note the timetable for completion of the 2026–27 budget, as set out in Appendix 1.</li> <li>3. Note the updates to the National Funding Formula (NFF) and DSG for 2026–27.</li> <li>4. Agree the proposed approach to setting the schools funding formula for 2026–27.</li> </ol> <p><b>Background</b></p> <p>This is now the ninth year of the National Funding Formula (NFF) within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). There were delays in the publication of the relevant guidance from the Department for Education (DfE), which placed pressure on the timetable and contributed to the decision to cancel the previous Schools Forum meeting.</p> <p>Some announcements for the 2026–27 DSG arrangements were published in late November, although Early Years Block announcements have not yet been released and are expected later in the year.</p> <p><b>Operational Guidance and Key Points</b></p> <p>The Schools Block operational guidance for 2026–27 includes several important points:</p> <p><b>Alignment with the National Funding Formula</b></p> <p>Local authorities are still required to mirror the NFF as closely as possible. Our local formula already mirrors the NFF very closely; the only variance is the use of the basic entitlement (per-pupil funding) as a balancing factor. This remains within the permitted tolerances.</p> <p><b>Targeted SEND Funding</b></p> <p>There is no indication that targeted SEND funding is being withdrawn. We will therefore continue to consider and manage this element through the usual processes.</p> <p><b>Hard National Funding Formula (Future Plan)</b></p> <p>The DfE has again reiterated its intention to introduce a <b>hard NFF</b>, at which point the local formula would effectively be replaced by a single national formula.</p> <p><b>Incorporation of Grants</b></p> <p>As in previous years, several grants will be incorporated into the DSG Schools Block:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools Budget Support Grant</li> <li>• National Insurance Contribution Grant</li> </ul> <p>The part-year Schools Budget Support Grant has been uplifted to a full-year equivalent for 2026–27.</p>
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	<p>This results in the following increases within the NFF values:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary basic entitlement: +£55</li> <li>• Key Stage 3 basic entitlement: +£78</li> <li>• Key Stage 4 basic entitlement: +£88</li> <li>• FSM Ever 6 (primary): +£49</li> <li>• FSM Ever 6 (secondary): +£72</li> <li>• Lump sum: +£2,086</li> </ul> <p><b>Area Cost Adjustment (ACA)</b></p> <p>Reading's ACA has decreased marginally by 0.00002. This change is negligible and has no material impact on the allocation.</p> <p><b>Early Years Funding Discussion</b></p> <p>A question was raised about whether Early Years funding should refer to provision from nine months rather than two years. This is correct: the funding now applies from nine months, and the documentation will be updated to reflect this. Funding is received through the same mechanism as the existing Early Years entitlements.</p> <p><b>Local Formula – No Significant Changes</b></p> <p>There are no major changes to the local formula requirements for 2026–27 compared with 2025–26:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultation processes, approval routes and timelines remain unchanged.</li> <li>• Restrictions on cross-block movements remain the same: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Up to 0.5% of the Schools Block can be transferred with Schools Forum approval.</li> <li>◦ Anything above 0.5% requires DfE approval.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Schools Forum statutory responsibilities remain unchanged.</li> <li>• De-delegation arrangements for maintained schools remain in place.</li> </ul> <p>The DfE has reiterated that the Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) will continue to reduce, particularly the historic commitments element, which continues to be reduced by 20% per year.</p> <p><b>Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG)</b></p> <p>The MFG range for 2026–27 remains –0.5% to +0%.</p> <p>This means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A school's per-pupil funding cannot reduce by more than 0.5%.</li> <li>• A school can gain under the formula, but the MFG does not permit a loss beyond the –0.5% level.</li> <li>• The proposal is to use the maximum permissible MFG of 0%, as in previous years.</li> </ul>
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	<p><b>Funding Announcements</b></p> <p>Although some tables currently show 0% changes, this is due to the formula adjustments incorporating grant uplifts. The actual Schools Block funding rates have increased.</p> <p>For example, the primary unit of funding has increased from £5,569 to £5,850 for 2026–27.</p> <p>These figures include the rolled-in grant values described earlier.</p> <p>All allocations remain based on October 2024 census data until updated figures are released. The revised base figures from the October 2025 census are expected shortly, though timelines are now tight.</p> <p><b>Local Formula – Proposed Approach</b></p> <p>Given the compressed timescales, it is proposed that we adopt the same method used in recent years:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Start with NFF factor values, including the ACA.</li> <li>2. Use basic entitlement (primary, KS3, KS4) as the primary balancing item.</li> <li>3. If further adjustment is required, use the lump sum as a secondary balancing item (not required in recent years).</li> <li>4. Apply the maximum MFG of 0%.</li> <li>5. No capping will be used.</li> <li>6. Model Growth Fund requirements in January (for example, previous years included Green Park Village Primary Academy and River Academy).</li> <li>7. Seek Schools Forum agreement in principle to a 0.5% transfer from Schools Block to High Needs Block for 2026–27.</li> <li>8. Maintain existing de-delegation values pending modelling in January.</li> </ol> <p><b>Timetable</b></p> <p>Section 8 of the report provides the budget-setting timetable. Initial milestones have already been met.</p> <p>The next key step is the release of the DfE modelling tool, after which detailed formula modelling can begin.</p> <p>A full update, including detailed allocations, will be brought to the January Schools Forum.</p> <p><b>Revised Professional Version – Discussion on the 0.5% Transfer and Bulge Class Item</b></p>
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	<p>A comment was raised regarding the proposed 0.5% transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block, highlighting the significant financial impact this presents for academy schools. For a school with a falling roll, the transfer equates to a reduction of approximately £12,000 from this year's budget, which represents around 13% of that school's in-year deficit. Concerns were expressed that academy deficits will not be offset by local authority arrangements in the same way DSG deficits may be addressed nationally from 2028. The challenge of managing increased numbers of pupils with high needs within mainstream settings—often without corresponding increases in staffing—was also emphasised.</p> <p>It was therefore requested that the 0.5% transfer be taken as a separate vote, rather than being included within the wider approval of the funding formula strategy.</p> <p>It was confirmed that this would be acceptable. Members were reminded that the vote at this stage relates only to agreeing the strategy and modelling approach, not approving the transfer itself. The transfer will be modelled and brought back with detailed figures so schools—particularly academies—can clearly see the proportional impact before a final decision is sought.</p> <p>The Chair agreed that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Schools Forum would vote on the overall strategy for the local formula excluding the 0.5% transfer.</li> <li>2. The 0.5% transfer would then be taken as a separate, stand-alone vote.</li> </ol> <p>All Members were confirmed as eligible to vote on the funding formula.</p> <p>The strategy (excluding the transfer) was approved.</p> <p>A separate vote was then held on the 0.5% transfer in principle. One member voted against the proposal, and this was noted. It was reiterated that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The transfer funds specific support services such as RISE, not only deficit reduction.</li> <li>• Once modelling is complete, Schools Forum will receive exact figures and proportional impacts for each sector.</li> </ul> <p>The local authority acknowledged the financial pressures on academies and confirmed that the feedback provided will inform the next stage of modelling and reporting.</p> <p><b>Transition to the Next Agenda Item – Growth Fund</b></p>
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	<p>The meeting then moved to the next agenda item concerning the Growth Fund. An update was provided on the in-year pressure in Year 9 within the secondary phase.</p> <p>The Council explained that monitoring had identified significant pressure on Year 9 places. This is linked to a local secondary school being unable to offer places up to its published admission number due to staffing and organisational challenges. While the local authority continues to work closely with that school during its improvement journey, directing pupils there at this time would not be appropriate.</p> <p>The Fair Access Protocol has allowed schools to go over PAN by two pupils per year group, and this has been used to manage placements where possible. However, this does not provide a sustainable long-term solution.</p> <p>Monitoring throughout the autumn term has shown fluctuations in pupil movement, including periods where more pupils have left Year 9 than have joined. Although this has reduced immediate pressure, capacity concerns remain significant enough that a contingency plan is required.</p> <p>The proposal, therefore, is to seek agreement in principle to implement a Year 9 bulge class of 30 places if required. This would:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only be activated if ongoing monitoring shows that Fair Access and natural movement do not resolve the pressure.</li> <li>• Be secured via an expression of interest to other local secondary schools.</li> <li>• Potentially extend into the next academic year if needed.</li> </ul> <p>A funding model has been developed for this bulge class, and Schools Forum is asked to approve the proposed funding calculation. The full calculation is included in the accompanying report.</p> <p><b>Revised Professional Version</b></p> <p>In reviewing the potential implementation date for a Year 9 bulge class, earlier modelling was based on a 3 November start, using the calculation of 30 pupils multiplied by the secondary base funding rate of £6,221, pro-rated for the remaining days in the academic year. This produced a figure of £15,261 to be drawn from the Growth Fund.</p> <p>If implementation is required from January or later in the spring term, this amount would be proportionally lower. As the precise timing cannot yet be determined—given the ongoing monitoring of Year 9 pupil numbers—the request being made today is not to approve a fixed figure, but to agree the methodology for calculating funding should a bulge class be required.</p> <p>This methodology is based on:</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A bulge class of 30 pupils</li> <li>• The secondary base per-pupil funding rate applicable at the time</li> <li>• A pro-rata calculation based on the implementation date within the academic year</li> </ul> <p>This forms the first decision point: to agree in principle that the Growth Fund will be used should a bulge class be needed, and that the calculation method presented is the agreed mechanism for determining the funding amount.</p> <p>At this stage, questions were invited.</p> <p>A query was raised regarding the location of the additional pupils and whether the bulge class would operate virtually. It was clarified that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The pupils would be placed physically within a secondary school</li> <li>• An expression of interest would be issued to all local secondary schools</li> <li>• The selected school would host the bulge class on site, using the allocated Growth Fund resources</li> <li>• This would not be a virtual or remote provision</li> </ul> <p>The first decision—agreement in principle to the funding calculation and use of the Growth Fund—was then taken, and approval was confirmed.</p> <p>It was also noted that, because this is a financial-year-based approval, a new request would be required beyond April should additional funding be needed in the next financial year.</p> <p>This paper also sought agreement on two further elements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To note the purpose of the Growth Fund, as outlined in Section 5 of the report.</li> <li>2. To agree the criteria for use of the Growth Fund, as set out in Section 7.2.</li> </ol> <p>Approval was recorded for these items.</p> <p>It was highlighted that while the Growth Fund is most commonly used to support expanding schools, its use for bulge classes is relatively infrequent. Monitoring of Year 9 numbers will continue, and the bulge class mechanism will only be activated if it becomes absolutely necessary to ensure appropriate school places.</p> <p>Approval was confirmed, and the item concluded.</p>
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		<p>The meeting then moved to the final agenda item, reviewing the provisional items for the next meeting. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DSG update</li> <li>• SEND update</li> <li>• The Schools Funding Formula for 2026–27</li> <li>• Central Schools Services Block</li> <li>• Additional items relating to budget-setting strategies (e.g., deficit limits), which will fall under the Schools Funding Formula item</li> </ul> <p>A request was made to include a <b>membership update</b>, which is ordinarily a standing item and will be included accordingly.</p> <p>Members were reminded that any urgent or additional items for consideration should be submitted to the clerk or relevant officer for review and possible inclusion, subject to the volume and complexity of scheduled reports.</p> <p>Under Any Other Business, a reminder was provided regarding the long-term real-terms reductions in school funding over the past 15–16 years, with reference to publicly available data demonstrating the scale of these pressures for individual schools. The point was made that this broader national context continues to drive the difficult budget decisions being faced both by schools and by Schools Forum.</p>
8	Growth Fund 2025/26 & 2026/27 DSG Finance Business Partner	<p><b>Revised Professional Version (No Names, Full Detail Preserved)</b></p> <p>The representative from Education Access and Support introduced the item, explaining that while financial queries would sit with the finance team, their role was to outline the operational pressures and seek agreement in principle for the potential establishment of a Year 9 bulge class within the secondary phase.</p> <p>It was explained that this pressure has been monitored for some time. The cohort currently in Year 9 was already tight for capacity when it first entered secondary as Year 7 in 2023–24. As discussed earlier in the meeting, pupil movement and migration within the local area can be volatile, with fluctuating in-year admissions. Since September, monitoring has shown significant concern regarding the availability of sufficient Year 9 places.</p> <p>This pressure arises because one secondary school is currently unable to offer places up to its published admission number. Under normal circumstances, if all schools were able to offer up to capacity, the local authority would not be facing this issue. However, due to operational challenges at that school, it is not currently feasible to place additional pupils there. Directing pupils into that school at this stage would hinder its</p>

	<p>ongoing improvement work, which the local authority continues to support intensively.</p> <p>To manage placements in the short term, the Fair Access Protocol has been used, enabling schools to exceed their published admission number by up to two pupils per year group. This approach has helped temporarily, but it is not a sustainable long-term solution.</p> <p>The situation has been closely monitored throughout the autumn term. When initial modelling was completed, it was anticipated that a bulge class might be needed from 3 November 2025 due to significant pressure. More recent analysis, however, has shown slightly more pupils leaving Year 9 than arriving, meaning the position is stabilising for now. Nonetheless, the local authority requires an approved contingency arrangement should the pressure increase again later this academic year or into the next.</p> <p>The proposal seeks agreement in principle that, if current mitigations (Fair Access placements and natural pupil movement) do not address demand, the local authority would issue an Expression of Interest to secondary schools to host a bulge class of 30 Year 9 pupils.</p> <p>A funding model has been developed to accompany this proposal. For an implementation date of 3 November, the formula is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 30 pupils × £6,221 (secondary base per-pupil rate)</li> <li>• Pro-rated according to the number of academic year days remaining</li> <li>• Resulting in a Growth Fund requirement of £15,261</li> </ul> <p>If implementation were required later in the year—such as from January—the amount allocated would be proportionately lower. Because the precise date is unknown and will depend on continued monitoring, the request today is specifically to approve the calculation methodology, rather than a fixed amount.</p> <p>This methodology is based on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A standard bulge class of 30 pupils</li> <li>• The secondary base per-pupil funding rate at the time</li> <li>• A pro-rata adjustment reflecting when the bulge class commences</li> </ul> <p>Questions were invited at this point.</p> <p>A question was raised about the location of the bulge provision and whether it would be virtual. It was confirmed that this would be a physical,</p>
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	<p>on-site class hosted by a secondary school that responds positively to the Expression of Interest. It would not be a virtual or remote arrangement.</p> <p>The first decision—agreement in principle to use the Growth Fund and to adopt the proposed funding calculation—was then put forward and approved.</p> <p>It was noted that, because this approval relates only to the current financial year, any requirement extending beyond April would necessitate a new request to Schools Forum.</p> <p>The finance team clarified that this paper also serves to formalise the criteria and processes for establishing a bulge class, as this had not been previously presented for approval due to many years without needing to implement one.</p> <p>Approval was then sought for two additional elements from earlier in the paper:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To note the purpose of the Growth Fund, outlined in Section 5</li> <li>2. To approve the Growth Fund criteria, detailed in Section 7.2</li> </ol> <p>These items were also approved.</p> <p>It was noted that the need for bulge classes has been rare in recent years, and the local authority will continue to monitor Year 9 numbers closely to ensure the mechanism is only activated where absolutely necessary to secure appropriate school places.</p> <p><b>Revised Professional Version (No Names, Full Content Preserved)</b></p> <p>It was confirmed that the final calculation for the bulge class would be agreed at a later stage, should implementation become necessary. Attention then returned to the remaining elements from earlier in the report. These related to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Item 2.1: To note the purpose of the Growth Fund, as outlined in Section 5</li> <li>• Item 2.2: To agree the criteria of the Growth Fund, as detailed in Section 7.2</li> </ul> <p>It was noted that the meeting had already addressed Item 2.3, which concerned agreeing the funding calculation methodology for a potential bulge class. The remaining required actions therefore related to noting the purpose of the Growth Fund and approving the associated criteria.</p>
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		<p>A brief outline of these points was offered if required, but Members were already reviewing the information while voting, and no further explanation was needed.</p> <p>It was highlighted that the Growth Fund is typically used for supporting growing schools and that the creation of bulge classes is relatively rare. The local authority will continue to monitor pupil numbers closely, and the Growth Fund will only be utilised for a bulge class where it is absolutely necessary to secure appropriate school places.</p> <p>It was also noted that the absence of a recent up-to-date agreement for establishing bulge classes reflected the fact that such provision has not been required for some time, and the local authority has generally been successful in avoiding the need for them.</p> <p>The vote concluded with approval of the remaining items. Thanks were expressed to Members for their support.</p> <p>The meeting then returned to the Chair.</p>
9	Agenda items for next meeting	<p><b>Revised Professional Version</b></p> <p>Members reviewed the provisional agenda items for the next meeting, which will include the DSG update, the SEND update, and the Schools Funding Formula for 2026–27, along with the Central Schools Services Block. A question was raised as to whether the forthcoming papers would also incorporate items such as the 5% limit or deficit considerations relating to the budget-setting strategy.</p> <p>It was confirmed that these matters would be addressed within the Schools Funding Formula for 2026–27 item, and therefore will naturally fall under that agenda heading.</p> <p>A further question was raised regarding whether a membership update should be included. It was noted that membership is ordinarily a standing item, typically listed as Item 3 on the agenda, and will therefore be incorporated as standard. A note will be made to ensure this is included at the next meeting.</p> <p>Members were reminded that any urgent or additional agenda items can be submitted in advance. Requests should be directed to the relevant officer, who will work with the Chair and colleagues to determine whether the item can be accommodated. The volume and complexity of existing reports will be considered to avoid overloading the agenda, but where possible, additional requested items will be included.</p>

		<b>Revised Professional Version (No Names, Full Detail Preserved)</b>
10	Any other business	<p><b>Any Other Business (AOB)</b></p> <p>The Chair invited AOB. No hands were initially raised. A member then offered a reminder that both Schools Forum and individual schools continue to face very difficult financial decisions, noting substantial real-terms cuts to school budgets over approximately the last 15–16 years. Reference was made to publicly available information that quantifies the scale of reductions in terms of teaching and support staff numbers, and capital items such as laptops, and encourages lobbying for restoration of funding at a national level. A link to this information will be provided.</p> <p>The Chair thanked the member for the contribution and asked if there were any further AOB items. None were raised.</p> <p><b>Meeting Close and Next Meeting</b></p> <p>The next meeting will take place on 22 January 2026. Members were wished a good seasonal break. Thanks were recorded for attendance and contributions. The meeting was closed.</p> <p>It was confirmed that recording was stopped following the close of the meeting.</p> <p>A brief clarification was sought regarding the discussion on the 0.5% transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The concern expressed earlier centred on the financial impact on academy budgets, particularly where falling rolls are also present, and on the resulting effect across multi-academy trust finances.</li> <li>• It was noted that the objection raised was not a moral objection to the purpose of the transfer (i.e., funding specific support and services in the system, not simply reducing historic deficit), but a concern about in-year affordability for academies and trusts under current pressures.</li> <li>• For the avoidance of doubt, the meeting's approach was to separate the strategy approval (agreed) from a stand-alone vote on the 0.5% transfer in principle, with the understanding that detailed modelling—including proportional impact by sector—will be provided before any final decision.</li> </ul>

#### Summary of Actions Outstanding

SF Date & Item no.	Action Required	Responsible Person
5/12/24 – 3	Contact Primary Heads' Association to recruit two new members	Richard Rolfe

**TO: ALL MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOLS' FORUM**

**Your contact:** Grahame Craig – DSG Finance Business Partner

E-mail: Grahame.Craig@Reading.gov.uk

**Notice of Meeting – Schools' Forum**

A meeting of the Schools' Forum will be held on **January 22, 2026, at 5pm**. This will be held virtually using Microsoft Teams, the link will be sent via email. The agenda for the meeting is set out below.

<b>AGENDA</b>		<b>Decision Making</b>
1.	Welcome and apologies. <i>Chair</i>	
2.	Minutes of the meeting held on 11 <sup>th</sup> December 2025, including matters arising. <i>Chair</i>	
3.	Schools' Forum Membership Update <i>Chair</i>	-
4.	DSG Allocation 2026/27 <i>Finance Business Partner</i>	-
5.	DSG Schools Funding Formula 2026/27 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultation for block movement</li> <li>• Schools Formula rates</li> <li>• De-Delegations</li> <li>• Draft individual school budgets</li> </ul> <i>Finance Business Partner</i>	✓ - ✓ -
6.	Central Schools Services Block Budget 2026/27 <i>Strategic Finance Business Partner</i>	✓
7.	Early Years Block Budgets 2026/27 (including Early Years rates) <i>Strategic Finance Business Partner</i>	✓
8.	Agenda Items for next meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High Needs Budget 2026/27</li> <li>• Budget Monitoring Summary 2025/26</li> <li>• Agree Schools' Forum meeting dates for 2026/27.</li> <li>• Update on SEN strategy.</li> </ul>	- - ✓ -
9.	• Any other business	

Next Meeting: **March 19, 2026, at 5pm** – To be held virtually via Teams

# Reading Schools' Forum

DSG Allocations for  
2026/27

January 22, 2026

Agenda Item 4

For decision

For discussion

For information

## 1. Summary

1.1 This report sets out the latest DSG funding allocations for 2026/27 and an update on the budget setting for each block.

## 2. Recommendations

1.1 Notes the DSG funding for 2025/26.

1.2 Notes the requirement for setting the 2026/27 overall DSG budget.

## 2. Background

2.1 The DSG allocations for 2026 to 2027 are made up of:

2.2 **The schools block**, based on the primary units of funding (PUF), and secondary units of funding (SUF), and premises funding announced in November 2025, and growth and falling rolls funding

2.3 **The central school services block (CSSB)**, based on the units of funding and total historic commitments funding announced in November 2025

2.4 **The high needs block**, based on the calculations outlined in this note

2.5 **The early years block**, based on the early years funding rates published in December 2025 and made up of items 1 to 8 below.

- The 30 hours entitlement for eligible working parents of children from 9 months up to 2 years old.
- The 30 hours entitlement for eligible working parents of 2-year-old children.
- The 15 hours entitlement for families of 2-year-olds receiving additional support (formerly known as the 2-year-old disadvantaged entitlement).
- The universal 15 hours entitlement for all 3 and 4-year-olds.
- The additional 15 hours entitlement for eligible working parents of 3 and 4-year-olds
- Funding for the early years pupil premium (EYPP) for 3 and 4-year-olds, 2-year-olds and under 2s.
- Funding for the disability access fund (DAF) for 3 and 4-year-olds, 2-year-olds and under 2s.
- Supplementary funding for maintained nursery schools (MNS) for 3 and 4-year-olds.

2.6 The allocations for 2026/27 were published by the Government last month, on 18<sup>th</sup> December. Most are now fixed for the year; part of the high needs block will be confirmed later in the year (July 2026), and the early years block will be based on data from future census', although the funding rates are now confirmed.

2.7 The DSG must be deployed in accordance with the conditions of grant and the latest School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations. Detailed guidance is contained within various operational guidance documents issued by the Department for Education.

2.8 Transfers of funding between blocks are allowed, but a transfer out of the schools' block must be consulted with all schools and agreed by the Schools' Forum.

2.9 This report sets out the 2025/26 funding for each block, and the work required to finalise the budgets for 2026/27.

### 3. Funding for 2026/27

3.1 Appendix 1 sets out the DSG funding for 2026/27 and compares this to the 2025/26 allocations. Overall, the DSG budget will increase by £9.7m (4.9%) from £199.5m to £209.3m. This compares to a £19.4m increase in 2024/25. This increase is distributed amongst all the blocks, but the majority occurring within the Schools Block and Early Years Block. A £1.7m increase occurring within the High Needs Block, but this is prior to the import/export update; scheduled to occur in the summer. Reading is a significant exporter and can therefore expect that our recoupment amount will again be increased from the current £2.9m level. Despite the ongoing 20% reduction of the historical element within the Central Schools Services Block this block has not seen a decline in funding.

3.2 The schools block has increased by £3.9m, the majority of which is due to increases in the basic funding unit rates for primary and secondary schools. The primary allocation has increased by £1,471m (a 2% increase from last year) and the secondary by £2,360m (a 3.9% increase from last year). However, it should be noted that this includes the incorporation of the School Budget Support Grant and the National Insurance Contribution Grant that were paid as separate grants in 2025/26. Factoring these increases in the funding methodology the increase for primary is circa £0.551m (0.8%) and the secondary £1.520m (2.5%). The block has also seen a substantial reduction in pupil numbers. The total number of pupils reducing by 2% with a fall of 379 within the primary phase and 78 within the secondary phase. 30 of our 51 schools are impacted by the issue. Were these pupils still within the school system this would equate to a further £2.8m in schools block funding.

3.3 The central school services block has increased by £0.046m to £1.198m from £1.151m. This includes a reduction of 20% from the Historic element due to the phasing out of funding for historical commitments. The overall fall in pupil numbers from 21,294 to 20,837 a decline of 457 pupils, is a major factor with regards to funding. The issues has been offset by a £4.94 increase in the unit of funding rate used for the block.

3.4 There is no change to the High Needs funding formula. Funding for Reading has increased by £1.7m from 2025/26 (5.2%). This excludes any change to the export recoupment made to Reading from 2025/26 which is likely to increase later in the year. Funding for the High Needs Block is not static and is subject to variation within the year; import(exports will be confirmed in July 2026. Any changes to place funding will be confirmed in March 2026.

3.5 From 2026/27 DfE funding for Early Years will move from an annual allocation to a termly funding approach for all setting; with the exception of DAF which will remain annual. The expansion of the provision from 9 months accounts for a large portion of the increased funding within this sector. This block funding will increase by £4.1m (14.1%) compared to 2025/26. The main increases in funding occurring within the 2 year old funding (£1.9m additional funding) and under 2 year old funding (£1.7m additional funding).

### 4. Requirements for Setting the 2026/27 budget

4.1 Appendix 2 sets out the timetable for setting the budget.

4.2 **Schools Block** – A further report to forum sets out the final budget proposals and the allocations to individual schools.

4.3 **Central School Services Block** - A further report to forum sets out the proposed budget for this block. A balanced budget is being set.

4.4 **High Needs Block** - The additional high needs funding will be £1.7m. The deficit is currently forecast at around £21.7m. There is the expectation from the DfE that local authorities whose high needs block is in deficit will continue to work towards reducing the deficit. However, as the number of pupils with EHCPs and costs of their placements continue to increase, most of the additional funding will go towards these increases

in costs. Top up funding makes up the greatest proportion of expenditure in this block (at around 90%). The budget will be based on the current actual average cost of each type of placement with an average inflation rate added and an annual increase in number of placements according to current trends. The review of the top up banding system for Reading schools is on-going. Schools Forum will be kept updated with any progress. The deficit recovery plan will also be refreshed, and a projection made using the same base data and assumptions. Further details will be made available in later papers to forum.

- 4.5 Note that the DSG regulations changed in 2020 and the deficit is now totally separate from local authority funding and reserves. This means that the deficit must not be funded by the local authority's general reserves, we await details from the government as to how this will be resolved in future years.
- 4.6 **Early Years Block** - A further report to forum sets out the proposed budget for this block. A balanced budget is being set.

## 5. Appendices

- 5.1 Appendix 1 – DSG Allocations 2025/26 & 2026/27.
- 5.2 Appendix 2 – Timetable for setting the 2026/27 budget.

### Appendix 1 – DSG Allocations 2025/26 & 2026/27

	2025/26 ACTUAL		2026/27 ESTIMATE		YEAR ON YEAR CHANGE		
		Funding £'000		Funding £'000	£'000	%	Notes
<b>Schools Block (SB):</b>							
Primary Unit of Funding (PUF)	£5,568.74		£5,850.27		+£281.53		Confirmed
<i>Primary Pupil numbers &amp; funding</i>	13,102.00	72,962	12,723	74,433	+1,471	+2.0%	Confirmed
Secondary Unit of Funding (SUF)	£7,382.34		£7,744.14		+£361.80		Confirmed
<i>Secondary Pupil numbers &amp; funding</i>	8,192.00	60,476	8,114	62,836	+2,360	+3.9%	Confirmed
Premises		1,666		1,781	+115	+6.9%	Confirmed
<b>TOTAL SB excl. Growth</b>		<b>135,104</b>		<b>139,053</b>	<b>+3,949</b>	<b>+2.9%</b>	
Growth Funding Factor		765		728	-37	-4.8%	Confirmed
<b>TOTAL SB</b>		<b>135,870</b>		<b>139778</b>	<b>+3,908</b>	<b>+2.9%</b>	
<b>Central School Services Block (CSSB):</b>							
Unit of Funding	£45.70		£50.64		+£4.94		Confirmed
<i>Pupil Numbers</i>	21,294	973	2,837	1,055	82	+8.4%	Confirmed
Historic Commitments		178		143	-35	-20.0%	Confirmed (Planned reduction by DfE)
<b>TOTAL CSSB</b>		<b>1,151</b>		<b>1,198</b>	<b>+47</b>	<b>4.1%</b>	
<b>High Needs Block (HNB):</b>							
Formula		33,169		36,193	+3,024	+9.1%	Confirmed
Hospital & AP pay grants		332		359	+27	+8.1%	Confirmed
Place Funding Unit of Funding	£4,913.23		£3,213.63		-£1,699.60		Confirmed
<i>Place Numbers</i>	495.5	2,439	464.0	1,492	-947	-38.8%	Confirmed
Import/Export Adjustment		-2,700		-2,946	-246	-9.1%	Based on Oct 24 census & Jan 25 ILR
Additional HN Funding		144		16	<b>-128</b>	<b>-88.9%</b>	

Total HNB		33,385		35,114	+1,729	+5.2%	
<b>Early Years Block (EYB):</b>							
3 & 4 Year Old Funding Rate	£6.86		£7.30		+£0.44		Confirmed
3 & 4 year olds numbers & funding	3,512	13,734	3,397	14,133	+399	+2.9%	To be based on Jan 24 & Jan 25 census
2 Year Old Funding Rate	£10.02		£10.18		+£0.16		Confirmed
2 Year old numbers & funding	1,138	6,497	1,452	8,426	+1,929	+29.7%	To be based on Jan 24 & Jan 25 census
Under 2 Year Old Funding Rate	£13.76		£14.03		+£0.27		Confirmed
Under 2 Year old numbers & funding	951	7,459	1,150	9,198	+1,739	+23.3%	To be based on Jan 24 & Jan 25 census
Pupil Premium		223		329	+106		To be based on Jan 24 & Jan 25 census
Disabled Access Fund		120		130	+10		
Maintained Nursey Grant		1,041		966	-75		To be based on Jan 25 census
<b>Total EYB</b>		<b>29,074</b>		<b>33,182</b>	<b>+4,108</b>	<b>+14.1%</b>	
<b>TOTAL ALL BLOCKS</b>		<b>199,480</b>		<b>209,272</b>	<b>+9,792</b>	<b>+4.9%</b>	

## Appendix 2 – Schools Formula allocations for Primary and Secondary Schools 2025/26 & 2026/27

TASK	DATE
RBC inform all schools on proposals for 2026/27 school formula, de-delegation proposals and to consult with all schools on the transfer of funding from the schools block to high needs block.	Consult with Schools/Forum - SF Meeting 2026
RBC complete High Needs Place Review	5th December 2025
Confirm school formula for 2025/26, Agree growth and falling rolls funding for 2025/26 Agree transfer of funding from Schools Block to High Needs Block. Approve de-delegations	January 2026
RBC work on high needs and central school services budgets	December 2025 - January 2026
Final funding allocations received from DfE for schools, high needs (part), central services block and Early Years. Final data received from DfE for school formula based on October 2025 census.	December 2025
RBC finalise the school formula based on final funding allocation	January 2026

Schools' Forum informed on final school formula, Approval of central school services budget. Schools' Forum review first draft of high needs budget in light of funding available/deficit position.	January 2026
<b>Local Authority agrees school formula for 2026/27 and RBC submits APT to DfE</b>	<b>22 January 2026</b>
RBC Inform mainstream maintained schools of their budget shares for 2025/26	By 28 February 2026 (statutory date but in reality by end of January 2026)
RBC work on final high needs and early years budgets This will include confirmation of Early Years Funding rates	January to February 2026
Schools' Forum review/agree final budgets for high needs and early years	March 2026
DfE confirm to academies their general annual grant (budget shares) for 2026/27	March 2026
High Needs place numbers at institution level published by ESFA	March 2026

# Reading Schools' Forum

Schools Funding Formula -  
2026/27

January 22, 2026

Agenda Item 5

For decision

For discussion

For information

## 1. Summary

1.1 This report presents the final 2026/27 school funding formula for Reading primary and secondary schools 2026/27.

## 2. Recommendations

1.1 Agree the allowable block transfer to continue to fund the RISE team in 2026/27.

1.2 Agree the schools funding formula and primary and secondary school funding allocations for 2026/27.

1.3 Agree the de-delegation and Education Functions values for 2026/27 (Maintained schools only).

1.4 Notes the indicative school budget allocations for 2026/27.

## 2. Background

2.1 The final version of “Schools revenue funding 2026 to 2027 operational guide” was published in December 2025. This details the funding formula and requirements for 2026/27. The policy document “The national funding formulae (NFF) for schools and high needs 2026 – 2027” was published later than usual. The document details the actual formula factor values in the NFF and was finally published in November 2025.

2.2 This report sets out the final schools’ block funding allocation for 2026/27, and the final formula and allocations to schools for 2026/27 as proposed by the Council.

## 3. Schools Block Funding for 2026/27

3.1 Local authorities receive the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), which is split between four funding blocks. The schools block is specifically for primary and secondary mainstream formula allocations and for growth funding (for new and expanding schools and bulge classes). It is largely ring fenced; up to 0.5% of the allocation can be transferred to other funding blocks, but only with the agreement of Schools’ Forum.

3.2 The schools block allocation is based on Primary Units of Funding (PUFs) and Secondary Units of Funding (SUFs). These units are calculated for each local authority by adding together the total formula allocations for each school in each phase using the NFF but using the previous year’s data, and dividing by the previous year’s pupil numbers for each phase. These units are then fixed and are multiplied by the October 2025 census pupil numbers to give the final funding allocation for the following year.

3.3 The final schools block funding allocation for 2026/27 was confirmed by the Government on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2025, and totals £139.8m as set out in Table 1. Of this, £0.728m is for growth funding. This has been used within the local formula to offset the cost of the two “New and Growing” schools; Green Park Village School and River Academy.

3.4 The Schools’ Forum at its December 2025 meeting members were asked to consult schools on the continued funding of the RISE team via a transfer from Schools Block to High Needs. An initial assumption of 0.5% of the Schools block was projected, but this has been revised during modelling to reduction the request to 0.41%. The service is seeking a transfer of £0.580m; a small increase on last year to cover inflationary costs to the service.

3.5 After deducting the cost of the RISE team, there is £139.2m to allocate to primary and secondary schools through the school funding formula. This is £4.92m greater than in 2025/26, but half the increase of 2024/25.

£3.4m is due to the incorporation of the School Budget Support Grant and NIC Grant from 2025/26. Overall pupil numbers have fallen. A fall in primary pupils from 13,102 to 12,723 and for the first time, a reduction in secondary pupils from 8,192 to 8,114. This is an overall reduction of 457 pupils (in 2025/26 pupils reduced by 77.5). The DfE allocation for growth funding also fell by £0.370m. The remaining £1.4m increase in schools block allocation is a rise in the level of primary and secondary units of funding and a £0.115m increase in premises allocation.

3.6 Due to the decrease in pupil number this year, this will have an impact on schools throughout the authority. Of the 49 schools within the authority (excluding the two “New & Growing” schools which are subject to different rules for the local formula), 30 schools are experiencing reductions in pupil numbers, with some primary phase schools seeing pupils reducing by up to 44 pupils and secondary phase schools seeing reductions of up to 109 pupils. As school budgets are, at the core, based on pupil numbers, these reductions will have a direct impact on schools within the authority. values.

**Table 1 School Block DSG Allocation**

	2025/26 Actual		2026/27 Actual	
		Funding £'000		Funding £'000
Primary Unit of Funding (PUF)	£5,568.74		£5,850.27	
<i>Primary Pupil Numbers</i>	13,102	72,9623	12,723	74,433
Secondary Unit of Funding (SUF)	£7,382.34		£7,744.14	
<i>Secondary Pupil numbers</i>	8,192	60,476	8,114	62,836
Business Rates		1,666		1,781
Growth Funding Factor		765		728
<b>TOTAL SCHOOLS BLOCK ALLOCATION</b>		<b>135,870</b>		<b>139,778</b>
Less: to growth fund budget		-300		0
Less: transfer to high needs block		-564		-580
<b>FUNDING AVAILABLE FOR SCHOOL FORMULA</b>		<b>135,006</b>		<b>139,198</b>

#### 4. Final School Funding Formula for 2026/27

4.1 There will be no change to the National Funding Formula factors in 2026/27.

4.2 The actual DSG funding received and available may not enable the NFF to be replicated in full due to there being a mismatch between the funding received and what would have been allocated to schools through a hard NFF:

- Differences in the pupil characteristics data from the previous year which is driving the DSG funding compared to the October 2025 census on which the formula funding allocations to schools is based (which may result in funding which is higher or lower than the actual requirement).
- Increases in business rates bills and other premises costs compared to the historical figures on which the DSG funding is based.

- Funding transfers to other blocks (namely high needs).
- Overspends in the previous financial year which are a first call on resources in the following year. This will only happen for business rates and/or growth funding.

4.3 The main change shows many factors becoming compulsory rather than optional. This limits what each LA can do as the DfE are forcing LAs to get closer to the national funding formula. For 26-27 each LA must be at least 10% closer to the NFF values than their baseline values. Reading have followed the NFF and made the change in 2018-2020

4.4 Since receiving the DSG allocations, and following the funding approach agreed with schools forum in December.

- Start with all factors and values mirroring the national factors and values.
- Use Basic entitlement factors (AWPU) as a balancing figure. All rates to be reduced by the same percentage.
- If basic entitlement is not sufficient to balance the formula then use lump sum as an additional or alternative balancing figure.
- Assume the maximum permissible MFG rate of 0.0%. (Government agreed range -0.5% to 0.0%)
- Capping will not be used.
- A 0.5% transfer from the schools block to fund RISE team will be factored into budget modelling.

4.5 It has not been possible to mirror the NFF due to affordability. The basic entitlement values have been used to balance the schools funding formula. All other factor values including Lump Sum and Split Sites mirror the NFF factor values.

## 5. De-Delegation for 2026/27

5.1 There continues to be a limited number of central services that maintained mainstream primary and secondary schools can opt to de-delegate from their formula budget allocation. This decision is made by the relevant members on schools' forum for their school phase. It is not the same as a buy back which is an individual school decision. This the decision made will apply to all maintained mainstream schools in that phase. This is an annual decision made for 2026/27 and will be for that year only.

5.2 There is no change to the services being offered for de-delegation in 2026/27 which are as follows:

- Behaviour Support Services.
- School Improvement.
- Union Duties.
- General Duties (Education Functions).

This report sets out what each service covers, the cost, and how this will be de-delegated from each school's budget. This must be a fixed contribution for each service so that funding can be removed from the formula before school budgets are issued.

5.3 **Behaviour Support.** The service is now run from within Reading. The transfer was the subject of previous forum reports in 2024/25. The service is not seeking any increase in the base budget for 2026/27.

5.4 **School Improvements.** Due to cuts in previous years the schools forum has supported the schools improvement in raising standards in maintained schools. The service is asking an addition £9,600 to support in-year inflationary pressures.

5.5 **Union Duty.** Successive governments have recognised the importance of good industrial relations and have legislated to provide a statutory basis for facilities time. These provisions are contained within the Employment Relations Act 1999, the Trade Union Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 and the Safety representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1997. Pooled funding is the most effective and efficient arrangement to help the local authority and all schools to meet their statutory obligations on trade union facilities time. It helps maintain a coherent industrial relations environment where issues and concerns, whether individual or collective, can be dealt with efficiently. It provides funding for union representatives to accompany workers to disciplinary or grievance hearings, attend union training, carry out union duties and relevant learning activities, and to carry out health and safety functions.

5.6 To cover each of these as the need arises, without the arrangements made possible through a central funding arrangement, would be considerably more costly for schools. This service is also available to academies and free schools via a service level agreement. No request was made last year to increase the base budget but the service is requesting a £500 increase this year to cover inflationary pressures.

5.7 **Education Functions.** This funding goes towards paying for the statutory duties carried out on behalf of maintained schools that were previously funded by the Education Services Grant. This grant was removed in 2017/18 with the expectation that all maintained schools would now pay for these services from their delegated budgets. The grant was also removed from academy schools, so brings all schools onto the same financial basis.

5.2.1 The services this funding covers includes:

- Central budgeting & accounting functions relating to maintained schools.
- Financing of maintained schools.
- Monitoring of compliance with the scheme for financing schools.
- Functions in relation to schools who do not have financial delegation.
- Consistent financial reporting.
- Provision of statutory information to the DfE.
- Education welfare e.g. monitoring attendance.

5.8 This is not all of the statutory services previously funded by the grant, and some are now charged direct to schools through a traded service. The service is requesting a small increase to contribute to increased costs.

5.9 Any unspent de-delegated funding remaining at year-end will be reported to the Schools' Forum as part of the year-end report. This funding can be carried forward and used specifically for de-delegated services. Schools' Forum are required to approve any overspend, which would be met from the following year's schools budget allocation.

5.10 The tables below details the current De-Delegation values for 2025/26 and the proposed values for 2026/27.

Service	2026/27 Value	2026/27 Value
Behaviour Support (Primary)	£286,000	£286,000
School Improvement (Primary)	£294,926	£303,045
School Improvement (Secondary)	£30,463	£31,954
Union Duties (Primary)	£47,000	£47,500
General Duties (Primary)	£77,949	£79,606
General Duties (Secondary)	£8,051	£8,394

Service	2025/26 pupil amount	2025/26 pupil amount
Behaviour Support (Primary)	£147.42	£155.35
School Improvement (Primary)	£32.79	£34.81
School Improvement (Secondary)	£32.79	£34.81
Union Duties (Primary)	£5.23	£5.46
General Duties (Primary)	£8.67	£9.14
General Duties (Secondary)	£8.67	£8.14

## 6. Appendices

- 6.1 Appendix 1 – Proposed Formula Factors and values for 2025/26 & 2026/27.
- 6.2 Appendix 2 – Schools Formula allocations for Primary and Secondary Schools 2025/26 & 2026/27.

## Appendix 1 – Proposed Formula Factors and Values for 2025/26 & 2026/27

Formula Values	2024/25		2025/26		2026/27		Note for 2026/27 Actual Values (Reading ACA is 1.0362)
	NFF with ACA	Reading Final	Reading NFF with ACA	Reading Final	Reading NFF with ACA	Reading Proposed	
<b>Basic Entitlement</b>							
Primary	£3,690.45	£3,653.48	£3,986.34	£3,966.03	£4,211.12	£4,161.22	NFF with ACA - reduced by 1.2%
Secondary - KS3	£5,203.09	£5,150.97	£5,618.38	£5,573.08	£5,891.83	£5,822.01	NFF with ACA - reduced by 1.2%
Secondary - KS4	£5,865.14	£5,806.39	£6,334.41	£6,283.33	£6,642.04	£6,563.33	NFF with ACA - reduced by 1.2%
<b>Deprivation</b>							
Free School Meals - Primary	£507.67	£507.67	£512.93	£512.93	£523.28	£523.28	As per NFF with ACA
Free School Meals - Secondary	£507.67	£507.67	£512.93	£512.93	£523.28	£523.28	As per NFF with ACA
Free School Meals Ever 6 - Primary	£849.57	£849.57	£1,098.39	£1,098.39	£1,253.80	£1,253.80	As per NFF with ACA
Free School Meals Ever 6 - Secondary	£1,243.27	£1,243.27	£1,611.32	£1,611.32	£1,787.45	£1,787.45	As per NFF with ACA
IDACI Band A (over 0.6) - Primary	£704.52	£704.52	£709.81	£709.81	£725.34	£725.34	As per NFF with ACA
IDACI Band A (over 0.6) - Secondary	£979.08	£979.08	£984.41	£984.41	£1,005.11	£1,005.11	As per NFF with ACA
IDACI Band B (0.5 - 0.6) - Primary	£533.57	£533.57	£538.83	£538.83	£549.19	£549.19	As per NFF with ACA
IDACI Band B (0.5 - 0.6) - Secondary	£766.68	£766.68	£771.98	£771.98	£787.51	£787.51	As per NFF with ACA
IDACI Band C (0.4 - 0.5) - Primary	£502.49	£502.49	£507.75	£507.75	£518.10	£518.10	As per NFF with ACA
IDACI Band C (0.4 - 0.5) - Secondary	£714.88	£714.88	£720.17	£720.17	£735.70	£735.70	As per NFF with ACA
IDACI Band D (0.3 - 0.4) - Primary	£461.05	£461.05	£461.12	£461.12	£471.47	£471.47	As per NFF with ACA
IDACI Band D (0.3 - 0.4) - Secondary	£652.72	£652.72	£658.00	£658.00	£673.53	£673.53	As per NFF with ACA
IDACI Band E (0.25 - 0.3) - Primary	£295.28	£295.28	£295.32	£295.32	£300.50	£300.50	As per NFF with ACA
IDACI Band E (0.25 - 0.3) - Secondary	£466.23	£466.23	£466.30	£466.30	£476.65	£476.65	As per NFF with ACA
IDACI Band F (0.2 - 0.25) - Primary	£243.47	£243.47	£243.51	£243.51	£248.69	£248.69	As per NFF with ACA
IDACI Band F (0.2 - 0.25) - Secondary	£352.26	£352.26	£352.31	£352.31	£357.49	£357.49	As per NFF with ACA
<b>Prior Attainment</b>							
Primary	£1,212.19	£1,212.19	£1,217.56	£1,217.56	£1,243.44	£1,243.44	As per NFF with ACA
Secondary	£1,839.01	£1,839.01	£1,849.65	£1,849.65	£1,891.07	£1,891.07	As per NFF with ACA
<b>English as an Additional Language</b>							
Primary	£611.28	£611.28	£616.55	£616.55	£632.08	£632.08	As per NFF with ACA
Secondary	£1,642.16	£1,642.16	£1,652.77	£1,652.77	£1,689.01	£1,689.01	As per NFF with ACA
<b>Mobility</b>							
Primary	£994.62	£994.62	£999.95	£999.95	£1,020.66	£1,020.66	As per NFF with ACA
Secondary	£1,429.76	£1,429.76	£1,435.16	£1,435.16	£1,466.22	£1,466.22	As per NFF with ACA
Lump Sum	£139,246.46	£139,246.46	£150,355.52	£150,355.52	£158,227.74	£158,227.74	As per NFF with ACA
Split sites basic eligibility funding	£55,636.42	£55,636.42	£55,955.88	£55,955.88	£57,094.62	£57,094.62	As per NFF with ACA
Split sites distance funding	£27,870.01	£27,870.01	£27,977.94	£27,977.94	£28,599.12	£28,599.12	As per NFF with ACA
<b>Minimum Per Pupil Level</b>							
Primary		£4,610.00		£4,955.00		£5,115.00	As per NFF
Secondary		£5,771.00		£6,465.00		£6,640.00	As per NFF
(KS3 Only School)		£6,331.00		£6,221.00		£6,388.00	As per NFF
(KS4 Only School)		£5,995.00		£6,831.00		£7,018.00	As per NFF
Max. Minimum Funding Guarantee		0.50%		0.00%		0.00%	Local Decision between -.5% & 0%

## Appendix 2 – Schools Formula allocations for Primary and Secondary Schools 2025/26 & 2026/27

School Name	25-26 Post MFG Budget	25-26 NOR	25-26 Post MFG per pupil Budget (A)	25-26 SBSG Grant	25-26 NIC Grant	Adjusted 25-26 Allocation	26-27 Post MFG Budget	26-27 NOR	26-27 Post MFG per pupil Budget (B)	Total Variance	% Change Year-on-year	Per Pupil variance (B - A)	% Increase Year-on-Year per Pupil
Alfred Sutton Primary School	£3,175,438.51	624	£5,088.84	£30,863.00	£61,629.00	£3,267,930.51	£3,257,472.20	614	£5,305.33	-£10,458.30	-0.32%	£216.49	4.25%
Caversham Primary School	£2,043,084.00	405	£5,044.65	£17,704.00	£36,777.00	£2,097,565.00	£2,149,402.36	413	£5,204.36	£51,837.36	2.47%	£159.71	3.17%
Coley Primary School	£1,247,036.57	205	£6,083.11	£10,906.00	£22,477.00	£1,280,419.57	£1,294,549.19	203	£6,377.09	£14,129.62	1.10%	£293.98	4.83%
E P Collier Primary School	£2,190,002.61	379	£5,778.37	£20,587.00	£39,886.00	£2,250,475.61	£2,021,157.41	335	£6,033.31	-£229,318.21	-10.19%	£254.93	4.41%
Geoffrey Field Junior School	£2,078,018.20	352	£5,903.46	£19,444.00	£40,576.00	£2,138,038.20	£2,231,958.69	358	£6,234.52	£93,920.49	4.39%	£331.06	5.61%
Geoffrey Field Infant School	£1,603,509.36	257	£6,239.34	£13,879.00	£28,778.00	£1,646,166.36	£1,653,407.18	257	£6,433.49	£7,240.82	0.44%	£194.15	3.11%
Oxford Road Community School	£1,246,504.46	202	£6,170.81	£13,190.00	£23,556.00	£1,283,250.46	£1,364,302.34	205	£6,655.13	£81,051.89	6.32%	£484.32	7.85%
Redlands Primary School	£1,148,622.89	193	£5,951.41	£11,153.00	£20,730.00	£1,180,505.89	£1,139,320.92	183	£6,225.31	-£41,274.97	-3.50%	£273.89	4.60%
The Hill Primary School	£1,998,639.00	393	£5,085.60	£17,099.00	£35,497.00	£2,051,235.00	£2,133,975.00	407	£5,243.18	£82,740.00	4.03%	£157.59	3.10%
The Ridgeway Primary School	£2,389,899.74	385	£6,207.53	£21,398.00	£44,720.00	£2,456,017.74	£2,318,043.33	352	£6,585.35	-£137,974.41	-5.62%	£377.82	6.09%
Park Lane Primary School	£2,078,343.91	385	£5,398.30	£18,787.00	£39,125.00	£2,136,255.91	£2,188,739.34	387	£5,655.66	£52,483.44	2.46%	£257.36	4.77%
Wilson Primary School	£2,202,463.46	409	£5,385.00	£21,193.00	£39,666.00	£2,263,322.46	£2,360,903.92	413	£5,716.47	£97,581.46	4.31%	£331.48	6.16%
Emmer Green Primary School	£2,101,452.00	417	£5,039.45	£17,983.00	£37,359.00	£2,156,794.00	£2,178,982.49	419	£5,200.44	£22,188.49	1.03%	£160.98	3.19%
Southcote Primary School	£2,939,198.19	551	£5,334.30	£29,979.00	£54,485.00	£3,023,662.19	£3,013,407.90	534	£5,643.09	-£10,254.28	-0.34%	£308.79	5.79%
St Michael's Primary School	£2,259,237.61	391	£5,778.10	£21,900.00	£43,496.00	£2,324,633.61	£2,259,841.90	366	£6,174.43	-£64,791.70	-2.79%	£396.33	6.86%
Moorlands Primary School	£1,721,290.86	284	£6,060.88	£18,154.00	£34,847.00	£1,774,291.86	£1,708,742.96	267	£6,399.79	-£65,548.89	-3.69%	£338.90	5.59%
Thameside Primary School	£1,899,974.39	344	£5,523.18	£20,423.00	£35,811.00	£1,956,208.39	£1,833,797.78	316	£5,803.16	-£122,410.60	-6.26%	£279.98	5.07%
Katesgrove Primary School	£3,272,618.46	605	£5,409.29	£30,128.00	£59,133.00	£3,362,063.46	£3,441,065.20	610	£5,641.09	£79,001.74	2.35%	£231.80	4.29%
Caversham Park Primary School	£716,678.28	115	£6,231.99	£6,223.00	£12,560.00	£735,461.28	£653,418.24	91	£7,180.42	-£82,043.04	-11.16%	£948.44	15.22%
Micklands Primary School	£1,790,457.65	319	£5,612.72	£16,837.00	£35,033.00	£1,842,327.65	£1,761,281.41	294	£5,990.75	-£81,046.24	-4.40%	£378.03	6.74%
Manor Primary School	£1,738,572.46	287	£5,057.74	£17,695.00	£54,623.00	£1,790,890.46	£1,686,330.42	263	£6,411.90	-£104,560.03	-5.84%	£354.16	5.85%
All Saints Church of England Aided Infant School	£448,885.69	60	£7,481.43	£19,932.00	£7,725.00	£460,542.69	£462,462.96	60	£7,707.72	£1,920.27	0.42%	£226.29	3.02%
St Anne's Catholic Primary School	£890,387.32	146	£6,098.54	£8,318.00	£17,008.00	£915,713.32	£943,629.80	147	£6,419.25	£27,916.48	3.05%	£320.71	5.26%
English Martyrs' Catholic Primary School	£2,094,833.41	389	£5,385.18	£18,650.00	£38,826.00	£2,152,309.41	£2,071,382.98	366	£5,659.52	-£80,926.43	-3.76%	£274.34	5.09%
Christ The King Catholic Primary School	£1,756,585.21	285	£6,163.46	£20,083.00	£35,161.00	£1,811,829.21	£1,811,247.20	278	£6,515.28	-£582.01	-0.03%	£351.82	5.71%
St Martin's Catholic Primary School	£801,333.75	136	£5,892.16	£7,209.00	£14,646.00	£823,188.75	£802,576.11	128	£6,270.13	-£20,612.64	-2.50%	£377.97	6.41%
Whitley Park Primary and Nursery School	£2,898,148.58	476	£6,088.55	£29,546.00	£55,185.00	£2,982,879.58	£2,818,595.51	440	£6,405.90	-£164,284.07	-5.51%	£317.35	5.21%
Blessed Hugh Faringdon Catholic School	£6,813,799.71	929	£7,334.55	£70,786.00	£83,733.00	£6,968,318.71	£7,077,407.84	918	£7,709.59	£109,089.13	1.57%	£375.04	5.11%
All Saints Junior School	£585,369.30	94	£6,227.33	£5,345.00	£10,707.00	£601,421.30	£641,454.80	97	£6,612.94	£40,033.50	6.66%	£385.60	6.19%
Meadow Park Academy	£1,958,722.47	330	£5,935.52	£19,144.00	£39,964.00	£2,017,830.47	£1,824,930.84	292	£6,249.76	-£192,899.62	-9.56%	£314.24	5.29%
Battle Primary Academy	£2,229,399.28	402	£5,545.77	£20,962.00	£43,763.00	£2,294,124.28	£2,422,251.76	416	£5,822.72	£128,127.48	5.59%	£276.95	4.99%
The Palmer Primary Academy	£2,193,994.56	386	£5,683.92	£20,022.00	£41,770.00	£2,255,786.56	£2,416,823.97	398	£6,072.42	£161,037.41	7.14%	£388.50	6.84%
Civitas Academy	£2,186,083.37	390	£5,605.34	£18,688.00	£38,907.00	£2,243,678.37	£2,239,631.64	383	£5,847.60	-£4,046.73	-0.18%	£242.26	4.32%
The Heights Primary School	£1,818,321.00	363	£5,009.15	£15,876.00	£32,916.00	£1,867,113.00	£1,837,722.53	355	£5,176.68	-£29,390.47	-1.57%	£167.53	3.34%
Ranikhet Academy	£1,273,957.98	201	£3,338.10	£12,494.00	£25,884.00	£1,312,335.78	£1,209,616.31	180	£6,720.09	-£102,719.67	-7.83%	£381.99	6.03%
New Town Primary School	£2,159,291.72	385	£5,608.55	£19,041.00	£39,669.00	£2,218,001.72	£2,241,696.84	382	£5,868.32	£23,695.12	1.07%	£259.77	4.63%
Churchend Primary Academy	£2,186,985.50	409	£5,347.15	£20,142.00	£41,997.00	£2,249,124.50	£2,100,397.96	376	£5,586.16	-£148,726.54	-6.61%	£239.01	4.47%
St Mary & All Saints Church of England Primary School	£1,991,239.58	326	£6,108.10	£17,540.00	£36,532.00	£2,045,311.58	£1,912,020.76	288	£6,638.96	-£133,290.82	-6.52%	£530.86	8.69%
Green Park Village Primary Academy	£1,439,195.06	247	£5,826.70	£11,973.00	£24,706.00	£1,475,874.06	£1,742,795.49	293	£5,948.11	£266,921.44	18.09%	£121.41	2.08%
New Christ Church Church of England Primary School	£1,155,294.49	199	£5,805.50	£10,386.00	£21,370.00	£1,187,050.49	£1,113,324.78	179	£6,219.69	-£73,725.71	-6.21%	£414.19	7.13%
St John's Church of England Primary School	£2,290,349.59	411	£5,572.63	£20,291.00	£42,314.00	£2,352,954.59	£2,373,426.45	413	£5,746.80	£20,471.86	0.87%	£174.17	3.13%
UTC Reading	£1,212,013.43	140	£8,657.24	£11,864.00	£15,709.00	£1,239,586.43	£1,215,188.06	124	£9,799.90	-£24,398.37	-1.97%	£1,142.66	13.20%
Maiden Erlegh School in Reading	£6,668,906.79	885	£7,535.49	£66,151.00	£84,383.00	£6,819,440.79	£7,063,529.30	895	£7,892.21	£244,088.52	3.58%	£356.72	4.73%
The WREN School	£6,364,418.16	834	£7,631.20	£61,370.00	£78,399.00	£6,504,187.16	£6,359,220.93	786	£8,090.61	-£144,966.23	-2.23%	£459.42	6.02%
Reading Girls' School	£6,873,302.29	906	£7,586.43	£66,674.00	£85,110.00	£7,025,086.29	£6,992,002.53	887	£7,882.75	-£33,083.77	-0.47%	£296.33	3.91%
River Academy	£2,122,567.71	289	£7,344.52	£23,963.00	£27,823.00	£2,174,353.71	£3,746,523.36	479	£7,821.55	£1,572,169.65	72.31%	£477.03	6.50%
Hightown School and Sixth Form Centre	£8,128,669.62	1,212	£6,706.82	£79,392.00	£101,397.00	£8,309,458.62	£8,543,437.23	1217	£7,020.08	£233,978.62	2.82%	£313.26	4.67%
Reading School	£4,905,672.20	753	£6,514.84	£48,481.00	£62,545.00	£5,016,698.20	£5,111,105.78	764	£6,689.93	£94,407.58	1.88%	£175.09	2.69%
King's Academy Prospect	£8,631,167.95	1,058	£8,158.00	£85,152.00	£108,318.00	£8,824,637.95	£8,311,104.36	966	£8,603.63	-£51,533.60	-5.82%	£445.62	5.46%
Kendrick School	£4,177,644.00	641	£6,517.39	£41,574.00	£53,718.00	£4,272,936.00	£4,315,953.12	641	£6,733.16	£43,017.12	1.01%	£215.77	3.31%
Hartland High School (was John Madejski Academy)	£5,472,077.94	651	£8,405.65	£53,020.00	£67,490.00	£5,592,587.94	£4,826,426.60	542	£8,904.85	-£766,161.34	-13.70%	£499.20	5.94%

# Reading Schools' Forum

Central Schools Services Block budget  
for 2026-27

January 22, 2026

Agenda Item 6

For decision

For discussion

For information

## 1. Recommendations

1.1 That Schools' Forum approve the 2026/27 Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) budget as set out in Table 2.

## 2. Background

2.1 The Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funds a range of statutory and centrally delivered local authority functions that support all maintained schools and academies. The Schools Revenue Funding 2026–27 Operational Guide outlines which services can be charged to this block, as well as any conditions or restrictions. The CSSB budget must be approved annually by Schools' Forum.

2.2 This report provides the CSSB funding allocation for 2026/27 and presents the proposed budget for the year.

## 3. Funding for 2026/27

3.1 The CSSB is made up of two components:

- Ongoing responsibilities – statutory functions the local authority must deliver for all pupils.
- Historic commitments – legacy funding relating to pre-2013/14 local authority commitments.

3.2 For 2026/27, the allocation for ongoing responsibilities has increased by 10.81%. Funding for historic commitments continues to be reduced by 20%, in line with the phased national withdrawal. The combined effect is an overall funding increase of 4%, though the total funding for historic commitments continues to decline as the national redistribution progresses.

3.3 Table 1 summarises the funding methodology and changes between 2025/26 and 2026/27.

Table 1	2025/26		2026/27		Change		
	Value per Unit	Funding £000	Value per Unit	Funding £000	Difference	Funding £000	%
Unit of Funding	£45.70		£50.64		£4.94		10.81%
Pupil Numbers	21,294		20,837		(457)		(0.4%)
Central Schools Block		£973		£1,056		£83	8.53%
Historic Commitments		£178		£142		(£36)	(20%)
<b>TOTAL CSSB</b>		<b>£1,151</b>		<b>£1,198</b>		<b>£47</b>	<b>4.08%</b>

## 4. Proposals for the 2026/27 Central Schools Services Block Budget

4.1 Table 2 outlines the services funded from the CSSB, comparing the 2025/26 budget with the proposed 2026/27 budget. Further detail for each service area is provided in Appendix 1. To maintain a balanced overall budget, reductions have been applied to the historic commitment budgets to reflect the continued national reduction in this area. These reductions represent decreased contributions to services, which will need to either absorb the shortfall or adjust service levels accordingly. Table 2 also indicates which budgets require approval by Schools' Forum.

4.2 Table 2: Central School Services Budget 2025/26 and 2026/27

Service	2025/26 Budget (£'000)	2026/27 Budget (£'000)	Change £ From Apr-25 to Apr-26	Approval Required by Schools Forum	Restrictions
Admissions	270.4	292.3	21.9	Yes	None
Servicing of Schools' Forum	20	20	-	Yes	None
Copyright Licences	148	168	20	No	None
Statutory/Regulatory services e.g. finance	535	575.1	40.1	Yes	None
Prudential Borrowing	17	13.6	(3.4)	Yes	(Historic commitment)  Cannot exceed previous budget & no new commitments
Contribution to School Effectiveness	34	27.2	(6.8)	Yes	
Contribution to Early Help Services	38	30.4	(7.6)	Yes	
Contribution to Children's Social Care	89	71.2	(17.8)	Yes	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,151.4</b>	<b>1,197.8</b>	<b>46.4</b>		

- That Schools' Forum approve the 2026/27 CSSB budgets as detailed in Table 2.
- All members may vote on these items, either as a full block or by individual budget lines.

## Appendix 1 Central Schools Services Budgets – Ongoing Duties

### Admissions

The Admissions budget funds the staffing required to deliver statutory admissions functions, including coordinated primary and secondary admissions processes and the management of all in-year applications.

From April 2026, all school admission appeals will be funded through the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). Previously, academies were charged by the Council on a per-appeal basis; however, updated national guidance now strongly advises that local authorities apply a consistent approach to all schools. This change ensures that maintained schools and academies are treated equitably in the delivery and funding of appeals.

### Servicing Schools' Forum

Covers officer time to prepare reports, manage meeting logistics, attend meetings, and maintain published documents on the website. The £20,000 budget is a contribution towards these costs and has remained unchanged for several years. Due to efficiencies gained from holding remote meetings, no increase is proposed.

### Copyright Licences

The DfE has agreed with various agencies to purchase a single national licence managed by the DfE, which means that local authorities and schools do not need to negotiate individual licences. The DfE recharges the cost to the local authority, who has the option to pay for it out of the central school services budget rather than charge individual schools from their delegated budget. The licences included in this agreement are as follows:

CLA (Copyright Licensing Agency)

SPML (School Printed Music Licence)

NLA (Newspaper Licensing Agency)

ERA (Education Recording Agency)

PVSL (Public Video Screening Licence – Filmbank Distribution Ltd.)  
MPLC (Motion Picture Licensing Company)  
PPL (Phonographic Performance Ltd.)  
PRS (Performing Right Society Ltd.)  
MCPS (Mechanical Copyright Protection Society Ltd.)  
CCLI (Christian Copyright Licensing International)

## **Statutory/Regulatory Services**

These services were previously supported by the Education Services Grant and are now funded by CSSB.

They include:

- Director of Children's Services and strategic planning for education
- Budget preparation, monitoring, and accounts
- Formula development and administration
- Processing payments to schools (including SEN and early years)
- External audit
- Statutory data returns (e.g., Section 251)
- SACRE
- Education welfare services
- School effectiveness functions

## **Appendix 2 Central Schools Services Budgets – Historic Commitments**

### **Prudential Borrowing**

Refers to borrowing undertaken to modernise and rationalise the school estate where revenue savings offset the cost of borrowing. Reading traditionally includes a small notional contribution in this block to reflect long-term borrowing costs associated with capital projects.

Historically Reading has included a small 'notional' amount within the main schools' block for prudential borrowing which reflects the fact that a significant element of the ongoing school's capital programme has historically been and will be funded by borrowing over many years, which represents a significant cost to the Authority. The cost included here will be more than matched by revenue savings and/or offset the opportunity costs accruing from these projects. The charge is very small compared to the annual costs of servicing the debt associated with borrowing costs on major schools' capital projects.

### **School Improvement**

Supports targeted interventions for schools experiencing significant challenges, including additional staffing or leadership capacity. Also provides support for new headteachers and those new to Reading. This area links with the de-delegation arrangements, detailed elsewhere.

### **Children Safeguarding and Family Support**

A contribution towards Early Help and safeguarding services accessed by schools, including family support, mental health, youth services, education welfare officers, educational psychology, Troubled Families work, youth offending support, and substance misuse services. It also contributes to children's safeguarding structures such as the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

# Reading Schools' Forum

## Early Years Block budgets for 2026-27

January 22, 2026

### Agenda Item 7

For decision

For discussion

For information

## 1. Recommendations

- 1.1 AGREE that the centrally retained budgets for the Early Years Block in 2026/27 are approved as outlined in Table 2.
- 1.2 NOTE the updates to the Early Years Block between the 2025/26 and 2026/27 financial years
- 1.3 NOTE the changes to the Early Years National Funding Formula (EYNFF) rates for local authorities and the proposed provider rates for 2026/27, as set out in Tables 3 and 4

## 2. Background

- 2.1 The Early Years Block (EYB) funds the government's free early education and childcare entitlements delivered across a range of settings, including maintained nursery schools, nursery classes in primary schools, and private, voluntary, and independent (PVI) providers.

The EYB contributes to the delivery of:

- Universal 15 hours per week for all 3- and 4-year-olds
- Additional 15 hours (30 hours total) for eligible working parents of 3- and 4-year-olds
- 15 hours for disadvantaged 2-year-olds
- Funding for children aged 9 months to 2 years
- Centrally retained funding to support local authority early years functions (e.g., quality improvement, sufficiency planning), up to a maximum of 3% of the total block

- 2.2 The Early Years Block aims to:

- Ensure all children can access early education that supports learning and development
- Promote inclusion through targeted supplements for disadvantaged children (EYPP) and children with disabilities
- Support providers across all sectors to deliver high-quality early education

- 2.3 The Department for Education (DfE) has introduced several changes to Early Years Block funding and operational guidance to strengthen the delivery of early years entitlements.

Key updates include:

- Increase in the minimum pass-through rate from 96% to 97% for 2026/27
- 28 February deadline for local authorities to confirm provider funding rates, now a statutory requirement
- Introduction of a termly funding system for all early years entitlement streams from 2026/27
- Changes to the eligibility criteria for the Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund (SENIF)

In line with the Best Start in Life policy (July 2025), the DfE will undertake a broader review of early years funding arrangements and consult on changes to allocation and distribution by summer 2026.

- 2.4 Local authorities must:

- Secure sufficient, high-quality, flexible, and inclusive childcare, particularly for disadvantaged families, and ensure capacity meets rising demand
- Provide information, advice, and training to support providers in meeting Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) requirements
- Administer revenue budgets and manage income and expenditure associated with early years entitlements
- Ensure parents and prospective parents have clear, accessible, and up-to-date information about childcare options and funded places
- Communicate forthcoming changes, opportunities, and system updates effectively to all providers

- 2.4 The 2026/27 Early Years Block arrangements—including funding rates for local authorities—were published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) in December 2025. This report sets out Reading's 2026/27 funding allocation and the proposed centrally retained budget.

[Early years entitlements: local authority funding operational guide 2026 to 2027 - GOV.UK](#)

### 3. DfE Allocation for 2026/27

3.1 Table 1 summarises the Early Years Block allocations issued by the Department for Education (DfE) in December 2025. These allocations are based on estimated participation levels and the national unit funding rates applied to each entitlement category.

Table 1: Early Years Block Allocation 2026/27 (DfE December 2025 Notification)

Table 1	2026/27 – December '25 Notification			
	Unit Rate	PTE No.	No. of Units	Allocation
3 & 4 year olds - universal	£7.30	2,489	1,418,764	£10,356,979
3 & 4 year olds – eligible working parents	£7.30	907	517,252	£3,775,941
2 year olds - disadvantaged entitlement funding	£10.18	232	132,422	£1,348,060
2 year olds - eligible working parents	£10.18	1,220	695,275	£7,077,895
Under 2s - entitlement Funding	£14.03	1,150	655,557	£9,197,465
Early Years Pupil Premium	£1.15	502	286,362	£329,317
Disability Access Funding (DAF)	£975.00	133	133	£129,675
Maintained nursery grant	£5.47	310	176,643	£966,237
<b>Total Allocation</b>		<b>6,944</b>	<b>3,882,409</b>	<b>£ 33,181,569</b>

3.2 Increase to the Minimum Pass-Through Requirement

Following consultation in 2023, the previous government confirmed its intention to raise the minimum pass-through requirement to ensure that more funding reaches providers directly. The minimum pass-through rate increased from 95% to 96% in 2025/26 and will rise to 97% in 2026/27. This change reduces the proportion of funding that local authorities may retain for central early years functions.

3.3 The maximum that can be retained locally in 2026/27 is 3% of the Early Years Block. Expenditure within this allowance may include:

- Centrally retained funding for local authority early years functions, including SEND support
- Transfers between early years entitlement streams
- Locally funded discretionary hours in addition to government entitlements
- Movements of funding out of the Early Years Block, where permitted

The council's proposed retained budget represents 2.90%, within the maximum allowable threshold.

3.4 The proposed retained amount is compliant with the 2026/27 requirements and supports statutory early years functions and essential specialist services, while ensuring the majority of funding is passed through to early years providers, in line with national expectations.

### 4. Proposals for the 2026/27 Centrally Retained Early Years Block Budget

4.1 Schools' Forum is requested to approve a centrally retained budget of £1.190m for 2026/27. This reflects an increase of £0.165m compared with the 2025/26 financial year. The majority of the additional funding relates to the continued rise in demand for Early Years SEND advisory services (Portage), necessitating expanded provision.

Details of the proposed retained elements are outlined in sections 4.2 to 4.4 and summarised in Table 2

4.2 Early Years Team £486,000 – This budget funds the management and operational functions required to deliver early years entitlements. It covers staffing costs for 8.68 FTE posts, including:

- Early Years Service Manager 0.5 FTE
- Early Years Team Manager 1.0 FTE
- Early years and Childcare Advisory Manager 1.0 FTE
- Early Years, Childcare Data and Entitlement Advisor 0.68 FTE
- Early Years and Childcare Development Officer 1.0 FTE
- Early years and Childcare Project Officer 1.0 FTE
- Early Years and Childcare Advisor x 1.0 FTE
- Wraparound and Holiday Childcare Advisor 1.0 FTE
- Early years and childcare business support 2.0 FTE

These roles support statutory delivery, quality improvement, sufficiency, provider engagement, and financial administration.

4.3 Early Years Portage Team £674,000 - This allocation supports early intervention and SEND provision through home-based Portage services. It funds **12.69 FTE** posts:

- Early Years SEND Team manager – 1.0 FTE
- Senior Portage Worker - 1.0 FTE
- Portage Workers – 6.8 FTE
- Early Years SEND Advisor - 2.0 FTE
- Senior SEND Advisors– 1.89 FTE (reflecting the additional specialist capacity added in 2025/26)

Demand for SEND-focused early support continues to increase, making this uplift essential to maintaining statutory and high-quality early intervention support.

4.4 Central Establishment Charges £30,000 – This contribution supports corporate costs such as finance, ICT, and office accommodation. The budget has remained unchanged since 2017 and has been reviewed as part of wider organisational realignments following BFfC returning to the Council.

#### 4.5 Summary of Proposed Retained Budgets

Table 2: Centrally Retained Early Years Budget 2025/26 and 2026/27

Service	2025/26 Budget	2026/27 Budget	Change £ From Apr-25 to Apr-26
Early Years Team	£446,800	£486,000	£39,200
Early Years support - Portage	£568,100	£674,000	£105,900
Central Costs recharged	£10,000	£30,000	£20,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£1,024,900</b>	<b>£1,190,000</b>	<b>£165,100</b>

The proposed total retained funding for 2026/27 is £1.190 million, representing an increase of £165,100 from the previous year.

4.6 The proposed retained amount represents 2.9% of the total Early Years Block, remaining within the 3% maximum set by the DfE. This corresponds to a 97.1% pass-through rate to early years providers, exceeding the statutory minimum of 97% for 2026/27.

## 5. Early Years 2026/27 Local Funding Rates

5.1 Table 3 provides a comparison of Reading's 2025/26 and 2026/27 national Early Years funding rates as determined by the Department for Education (DfE). These national rates form the basis of funding allocations to local authorities prior to the application of any local formula, permitted central retention, or deprivation supplements.

Table 3: DfE Funding rates 2025/26 and 2026/27

Table 3 : Entitlement	2025/26 (April 2025)	2026/27 (April 2026)	Increase £ From Apr-25 to Apr-26	Increase %
3 and 4 year old – Universal (15hrs)	£6.86	£7.30	£0.44	6.4%
3 and 4 year old – Working Parents (30hrs)	£6.86	£7.30	£0.44	6.4%
2 year olds – Disadvantaged (15hrs)	£10.02	£10.18	£0.16	1.6%
2 year olds – Working Parents (30hrs)	£10.02	£10.18	£0.16	1.6%
Under 2 olds - entitlement (15hrs)	£13.76	£14.03	£0.27	2.0%
Early Years Pupil Premium (all ages @ 15hrs only)	£1.00	£1.15	£0.15	15%
Disability Access Fund (DAF)	£938	£975	£37	3.9%
MNS supplementary funding	£5.27	£5.47	£0.20	3.8%

5.2 Table 4 sets out the proposed local hourly rates that will apply from April 2026 for all early years entitlements across different provider types. These reflect:

- The updated national funding rates
- The local authority's statutory pass-through requirements
- The permitted 3% central retention
- Mandatory deprivation supplement arrangements

Table 4: Current (2025/26) and Proposed (2026/27) Local Rates

Table 4: Entitlement	Current 2025/26 (Apr 25)	Proposed 2026/27 (Apr 26)	Increase £ From Apr-25 to Apr-26	Increase %
3 and 4 year olds (Universal & Working Parents)	£6.55	£6.88	£0.33	5.0%
2 year olds (Disadvantaged & Working Parents)	£9.57	£9.68	£0.11	1.1%
Under 2 olds - Entitlement (15hrs)	£13.14	£13.58	£0.44	3.3%
Early Years Pupil Premium & Deprivation top-up (all ages @ 15hrs only)	£2.00	£2.15	£0.15	7.5%
Disability Access Fund (DAF) – annual	£938	£975	£37	3.9%
MNS supplementary funding	£5.27	£5.47	£0.20	3.8%

### 5.3 Differences Between National and Local Rates

The variances between the national rates in Table 3 and the proposed local rates in Table 4 primarily relate to:

- The 3% centrally retained funding, which supports the delivery of statutory early years functions
- The mandatory deprivation supplement, which must be included in the local formula
  - This supplement equates to an additional £1.00 per hour on top of the Early Years Pupil Premium rate
  - It ensures funding is appropriately targeted to disadvantaged children

These adjustments result in differences between the nationally published rates and the final local provider rates applied from April 2026.