

TO: ALL MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOLS' FORUM

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Notice of Meeting – Schools' Forum

A meeting of the Schools' Forum will be held on **March 19, 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.

AGENDA		Decision Making
1.	Welcome and apologies. <i>Chair</i>	
2.	Minutes of the meeting held on 11 th December 2025 (deferred from the January meeting), minutes of the meeting held on 22 nd January 2026 including matters arising. <i>Chair</i>	
3.	Schools' Forum Membership Update <i>Chair</i>	-
4.	Update on SEN strategy	-
5.	DSG High Needs Budget 2026/27 <i>Strategic Finance Business Partner</i>	-
6.	Budget Monitoring Summary 2025/26 <i>Finance Business Partner</i>	-
7.	Schools' Forum meeting dates and provision Agendas 2026/27 <i>Finance Business Partner</i>	✓
8.	Falling Rolls Criteria 2026/27 <i>Finance Business Partner</i>	✓
9.	Agenda Items for next meeting (provisional) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DSG outturn 2025/26 • Maintained school balances 2025/26 and budgets 2026/27 • Review of the Schools' Forum constitution • DSG budget 2026/27 • Scheme for Financing Schools update • SEND update 	- - ✓ - ✓ -
10.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any other business 	

Next Meeting: **June 25, 2026 (provisional) at 5pm** – To be held virtually via Teams

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	Schools' Forum Membership Update - Chair	<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"> 1. Training and Capacity Building 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. 2. Early Intervention and Environmental Support We work with schools to strengthen early intervention, delivering activities such as sensory and environmental audits. 3. Networks and Peer Collaboration We facilitate several professional networks, including the Alternative Resource Provision Network and the SENCO Network. 4. Professional Reflection for SENCOs We provide reflective sessions for SENCOs, recognising that many manage large and complex caseloads and may not have regular opportunities for external supervision.

5. Direct Support for Provision Planning

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.

When schools refer a child to RISE, we work in three main ways:

- Where a school needs help to understand what provision is required, we support them to identify this quickly and effectively.
- 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.
- 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.

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.

Looking ahead, there are several areas we plan to develop over the coming months and years:

- **Strengthening Peer Learning**
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.
- **Improved Communication Around SEND**
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.
- **Developing a Cluster-Based Model (Long-Term Aim)**
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.

- **Integration With Strategic SEND Work**

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.

- **Continuous Feedback and Offer Development**

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Looking ahead, there are several areas of further development:

- **Strengthening links with the SEND Team:**

We have an Inclusion Officer within RISE, and there is further work to do to ensure this role delivers maximum added value for schools.

- **More Integrated Planning:**

We want to deepen collaboration with health and social care colleagues, recognising that the children who access behaviour

		<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"> • Future Expansion to Academies: 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. <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>DSG Budget Monitoring 2025/26 <i>DSG Finance Business Partner</i></p>	<p>Revised Professional Budget Monitoring Update (Period 7 – DSG) 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>DSG Allocations – Updated November 2025</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"> • Early Years allocations based on the January 2025 census • Import/Export adjustments within the High Needs Block (HNB) <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>Budget Monitoring – Overview 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"> • Driven predominantly by High Needs Block overspend

- £7.4 million higher than the deficit forecast when the 2025–26 budget was originally set

This demonstrates that the overall DSG position is moving further into deficit, not improving.

Schools Block – Growth Fund and Reserves

The Schools Block reserves are largely committed to supporting the Growth Fund, including costs associated with:

- The continued expansion of River Academy
- The need to maintain an active Growth Fund to support this expansion

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.

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.

Central School Services Block

This block funds a range of statutory and historic services previously supported by the ESG grant.

An additional £10,000 is now required for copyright licences, following the receipt of the final invoice, which exceeded our original estimate.

Early Years Block

Key points:

- The pass-through rate is now **96%** for 2-, 3- and 4-year-olds
- Allocations were updated in **July 2025**, following revised January 2025 census data
- Reading ended the financial year with a **£1.6 million surplus**, which is unusually high for this block
- We are awaiting final DfE guidance on how this surplus should be treated in the accounts
- We anticipate an Early Years reserve of approximately **£800,000 (3%)** at year-end, which falls within the expected range for contingency (typically 1–3%)

High Needs Block (HNB)

This is the area of greatest concern.

- The High Needs Block deficit is now projected to be just over £20 million by the end of Period 7

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The deficit continues to increase month by month • This represents the majority of the overall DSG overspend <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"> • A clearer national roadmap for SEND • Government intentions regarding treatment of historic DSG deficits • Future expectations for local authority financial management of SEND <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> <hr/> <p>Borrowing and Interest Costs 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>High Needs Breakdown 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	DSG Budget setting Strategy for 2026/27 (Initial proposals for schools funding formula) <i>DSG Finance Business Partner</i>	<p>Revised Professional Version – Local Funding Formula Initial Proposals</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>Recommendations Schools Forum is asked to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note the funding announcements received to date for 2026–27.

2. Note the timetable for completion of the 2026–27 budget, as set out in Appendix 1.
3. Note the updates to the National Funding Formula (NFF) and DSG for 2026–27.
4. Agree the proposed approach to setting the schools funding formula for 2026–27.

Background

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.

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.

Operational Guidance and Key Points

The Schools Block operational guidance for 2026–27 includes several important points:

Alignment with the National Funding Formula

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.

Targeted SEND Funding

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.

Hard National Funding Formula (Future Plan)

The DfE has again reiterated its intention to introduce a **hard NFF**, at which point the local formula would effectively be replaced by a single national formula.

Incorporation of Grants

As in previous years, several grants will be incorporated into the DSG Schools Block:

- Schools Budget Support Grant
- National Insurance Contribution Grant

The part-year Schools Budget Support Grant has been uplifted to a full-year equivalent for 2026–27.

This results in the following increases within the NFF values:

- Primary basic entitlement: +£55
- Key Stage 3 basic entitlement: +£78
- Key Stage 4 basic entitlement: +£88
- FSM Ever 6 (primary): +£49
- FSM Ever 6 (secondary): +£72
- Lump sum: +£2,086

Area Cost Adjustment (ACA)

Reading's ACA has decreased marginally by 0.00002. This change is negligible and has no material impact on the allocation.

Early Years Funding Discussion

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.

Local Formula – No Significant Changes

There are no major changes to the local formula requirements for 2026–27 compared with 2025–26:

- Consultation processes, approval routes and timelines remain unchanged.
- Restrictions on cross-block movements remain the same:
 - Up to 0.5% of the Schools Block can be transferred with Schools Forum approval.
 - Anything above 0.5% requires DfE approval.
- Schools Forum statutory responsibilities remain unchanged.
- De-delegation arrangements for maintained schools remain in place.

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.

Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG)

The MFG range for 2026–27 remains –0.5% to +0%.

This means:

- A school's per-pupil funding cannot reduce by more than 0.5%.
- A school can gain under the formula, but the MFG does not permit a loss beyond the –0.5% level.
- The proposal is to use the maximum permissible MFG of 0%, as in previous years.

Funding Announcements

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.

For example, the primary unit of funding has increased from £5,569 to £5,850 for 2026–27.

These figures include the rolled-in grant values described earlier.

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.

Local Formula – Proposed Approach

Given the compressed timescales, it is proposed that we adopt the same method used in recent years:

1. Start with NFF factor values, including the ACA.
2. Use basic entitlement (primary, KS3, KS4) as the primary balancing item.
3. If further adjustment is required, use the lump sum as a secondary balancing item (not required in recent years).
4. Apply the maximum MFG of 0%.
5. No capping will be used.
6. Model Growth Fund requirements in January (for example, previous years included Green Park Village Primary Academy and River Academy).
7. Seek Schools Forum agreement in principle to a 0.5% transfer from Schools Block to High Needs Block for 2026–27.
8. Maintain existing de-delegation values pending modelling in January.

Timetable

Section 8 of the report provides the budget-setting timetable. Initial milestones have already been met.

The next key step is the release of the DfE modelling tool, after which detailed formula modelling can begin.

A full update, including detailed allocations, will be brought to the January Schools Forum.

Revised Professional Version – Discussion on the 0.5% Transfer and Bulge Class Item

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.

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.

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.

The Chair agreed that:

1. Schools Forum would vote on the overall strategy for the local formula excluding the 0.5% transfer.
2. The 0.5% transfer would then be taken as a separate, stand-alone vote.

All Members were confirmed as eligible to vote on the funding formula.

The strategy (excluding the transfer) was approved.

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:

- The transfer funds specific support services such as RISE, not only deficit reduction.
- Once modelling is complete, Schools Forum will receive exact figures and proportional impacts for each sector.

The local authority acknowledged the financial pressures on academies and confirmed that the feedback provided will inform the next stage of modelling and reporting.

Transition to the Next Agenda Item – Growth Fund

	<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">• Only be activated if ongoing monitoring shows that Fair Access and natural movement do not resolve the pressure.• Be secured via an expression of interest to other local secondary schools.• Potentially extend into the next academic year if needed. <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>Revised Professional Version</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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- A bulge class of 30 pupils
- The secondary base per-pupil funding rate applicable at the time
- A pro-rata calculation based on the implementation date within the academic year

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.

At this stage, questions were invited.

A query was raised regarding the location of the additional pupils and whether the bulge class would operate virtually. It was clarified that:

- The pupils would be placed physically within a secondary school
- An expression of interest would be issued to all local secondary schools
- The selected school would host the bulge class on site, using the allocated Growth Fund resources
- This would not be a virtual or remote provision

The first decision—agreement in principle to the funding calculation and use of the Growth Fund—was then taken, and approval was confirmed.

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.

This paper also sought agreement on two further elements:

1. To note the purpose of the Growth Fund, as outlined in Section 5 of the report.
2. To agree the criteria for use of the Growth Fund, as set out in Section 7.2.

Approval was recorded for these items.

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.

Approval was confirmed, and the item concluded.

		<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"> • DSG update • SEND update • The Schools Funding Formula for 2026–27 • Central Schools Services Block • Additional items relating to budget-setting strategies (e.g., deficit limits), which will fall under the Schools Funding Formula item <p>A request was made to include a membership update, 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	<p>Growth Fund 2025/26 & 2026/27 DSG Finance Business Partner</p>	<p>Revised Professional Version (No Names, Full Detail Preserved)</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">• 30 pupils × £6,221 (secondary base per-pupil rate)• Pro-rated according to the number of academic year days remaining• Resulting in a Growth Fund requirement of £15,261 <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">• A standard bulge class of 30 pupils• The secondary base per-pupil funding rate at the time• A pro-rata adjustment reflecting when the bulge class commences <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">1. To note the purpose of the Growth Fund, outlined in Section 52. To approve the Growth Fund criteria, detailed in Section 7.2 <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>Revised Professional Version (No Names, Full Content Preserved)</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">• Item 2.1: To note the purpose of the Growth Fund, as outlined in Section 5• Item 2.2: To agree the criteria of the Growth Fund, as detailed in Section 7.2 <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>Revised Professional Version</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>

10	Any other business	<p>Revised Professional Version (No Names, Full Detail Preserved)</p> <p>Any Other Business (AOB)</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>Meeting Close and Next Meeting</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"> • 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. • 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. • 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.
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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

Minutes of Schools' Forum Meeting

22 January 2026

Members Present

Dave Dymond – Governor at Alfred Sutton (Vice-Chair), Justin 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; Allison McMamara – NEU; Jo Budge – Reading EY Schools Federation, Ceri Burns – Maiden Erlegh School

Apologies

No apologies received

In attendance

Brian Grady – Director of Education; Carly Price – Strategic Lead for SEND; Alice Boon – Senior Schools Standards Officer; Grahame Craig – DSG Business Partner; Clare Warren – School Finance Business Partner; Ita McGullion

Deborah Talbot – minute taker

	Item	Notes
1	Welcome and apologies – Chair	<p>The meeting was chaired by Dave Dymond.</p> <p>The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.</p> <p>Voting will be required on the following items this evening:</p> <p>Item 2: Approval of the Minutes. <i>(Apologies were noted for difficulties speaking during this section.)</i></p> <p>Item 5: Agreement on the funding of the RISE Team, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delegation values, and • Local funding rates for the 2026–27 financial year. <p>Item 6: Agreement of the Central School Services Block (CSSB) budget for 2026–27.</p> <p>Item 7: Agreement of the Early Years budget for 2026–27. This relates specifically to the agreed carry-forward amount, not the full budget.</p>

		<p>The Chair then proceeded to share the relevant documents with members.</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 11 December 2025 and matters arising - Chair	As minutes were published late, agreement was deferred until the March meeting of schools forum.
3	Schools' Forum Membership Update - Chair	There were a few vacancies that Richard was following up on, however no updates have been received.
4	DSG Allocation 2026/27	<p>To clarify that Item 4 is presented for information and discussion only. No vote is required at this stage.</p> <p>GC provided an overview of the overall DSG budget. He noted that the forum would already be familiar with the structure of the DSG, which is divided into four blocks. The School's Block is funded through primary and secondary units of funding (PUFs and SUFs). The allocations for 2025/26 were published in November 2024, including updates relating to the Growth Fund and the Falling Rolls element. Allocations have also been released for the Central School Services Block, and provisional allocations for both the High Needs and Early Years Blocks.</p> <p>It was highlighted that these announcements were made shortly after the previous Schools Forum meeting, later than typically expected from the DfE.</p> <p>Appendix 1 details the DSG funding for 2026/27, with comparisons to the 2025/26 allocations. In summary, the overall DSG will increase by £9.7m, representing a 4.9% rise—from £199.5m to £209.3m. By comparison, the increase from 2024/25 to 2025/26 was £19.4m, meaning this year's uplift is smaller than the previous year's.</p> <p>The increase is spread across all four blocks, with the majority appearing in the Schools Block and Early Years Block. The High Needs Block shows a £1.7m increase prior to import/export adjustments, with a further update expected in the summer. The forum was reminded that Reading is a significant exporter, and therefore recoupment is expected to rise again from the current figure of £2.9m.</p> <p>Despite the continued 20% reduction to the historic element of the Central School Services Block, this block has not experienced an overall decline and shows a very small increase.</p>

For the Schools Block specifically, funding has increased by £3.9m. This is primarily due to uplifts in the basic unit of funding for both primary and secondary pupils. The primary allocation has increased by £1.471m (2.2%), and the secondary allocation by £2.36m (3.9%).

GC would like the forum to note that these figures incorporate the Schools Budget Support Grant and the National Insurance Contribution Grant, both of which were previously paid separately in 2025/26. When these elements are taken into account within the funding methodology, the underlying increase for primary schools is approximately £0.5m (0.8%), while the secondary allocation rises by £1.5m (2.25%).

The block has also seen substantial reduction in pupil numbers across the authority. Overall, pupil numbers have fallen by 2%, with primary numbers decreasing by 379 pupils and— for the first time —secondary numbers also falling, by 78 pupils. Of the 51 schools in the area, 30 are affected by this decline. GC highlighted that, had these pupils been retained, the Schools Block allocation would have been approximately £2.8m higher.

Turning to the Central School Services Block (CSSB), GC confirmed that this block has increased by £46,000. This small rise incorporates the ongoing 20% reduction to the historic element but is offset by reductions in the pupil count (down 457 pupils). The overall increase is mainly due to an uplift in the basic per-pupil funding rate, which has risen by £4.94.

For the High Needs Block, GC advised that there are no changes to the funding principles or formula. Reading's allocation has increased by £1.7m (5.2%) compared with 2025/26. However, this does not yet include adjustments for import/export recoupment. These figures are expected in the summer and are likely to increase due to Reading's status as a significant exporter.

Regarding Early Years funding, the system is moving from annual allocations to a termly funding model, with the exception of Disability Access Funding (DAF), which remains annual. Growth in entitlement hours is the primary driver of increased funding in this block. Current projections indicate a £4.1m increase compared with 2025/26, with £1.9m relating to the two-year-old entitlement and £1.7m relating to under-twos.

In terms of setting the budget, Appendix 2 sets out the timetable

GC reminded the Forum that the deadline for submitting the Authority Proforma Tool (APT) to the DfE is today. He emphasised that timely decisions from the Forum would therefore be very helpful, noting that the tight timescale is largely due to the scheduling of meetings relative to the DfE's timetable.

		<p>Further reports relating to the Schools Block formula, the Central School Services Block and Early Years would be presented next. There is no report on the High Needs Block for this meeting, and no decisions are required on that item.</p> <p>GC concluded by directing the Forum to Appendix 1, which provides a detailed breakdown of funding increases, noting again that the uplift in per-pupil primary and secondary funding includes the merging of the two previously separate grants.</p> <p>In terms of the timetable, this is a subset of the schedule previously presented to Schools Forum. The key date to note is 22 January 2026, by which point local authorities must agree the schools funding formula and submit the APT to the DfE. We are therefore working to a tight deadline.</p> <p>The Forum noted the update, and no questions were asked</p>
5	DSG Schools Funding Formula 2026/27	<p>GC outlined the decisions required from Schools Forum. The Forum is being asked to approve the allowable block transfer to continue funding the RISE team in 2026/27. He reminded members that the RISE team previously presented a report demonstrating the significant work they have undertaken.</p> <p>Forum is also asked to agree the funding formula for primary and secondary schools for 2026/27, as this local formula must be submitted to the DfE via the APT. In addition, agreement is required on the de-delegation and education function values for maintained schools. Academies are not subject to de-delegation and therefore do not vote on this item. GC also asked Forum to note the school budget allocations included at the end of the paper.</p> <p>He then referred members to the Schools Funding section for 2026/27, which provides further detail on the Schools Block. As previously discussed, the DSG is divided into four blocks, one of which is the Schools Block. While this block is largely ring-fenced, local authorities may transfer up to 0.5% of the Schools Block allocation to another block. This mechanism was used last year to support the RISE team, and a continuation of that transfer is being requested for 2026/27.</p> <p>The Schools Block allocations, including the Primary and Secondary Units of Funding, were detailed in the earlier section of the paper. These form the basis for all allocations calculated by the DfE. Two additional elements—the Growth Fund and the Premises Factor—also contribute to the final total.</p> <p>Final allocations were confirmed on 17 December. The total Schools Block funding is £139.8 million, as shown in Table 1. Of this, £728,000 relates to</p>

	<p>Growth Funding, which is used within the local formula to support the two new and growing schools—Green Park Village School and River Academy.</p> <p>At the December meeting, Schools Forum was asked whether it would support a block transfer to fund the RISE team. While an initial transfer of 0.5% was modelled, this has since been reduced to 0.41%. The proposed transfer of £580,000 reflects a small year-on-year increase to cover inflationary pressures.</p> <p>After deducting the cost of the RISE team, £139.2 million will be allocated to primary and secondary schools through the local formula, representing an increase of £4.92 million compared with 2025/26. However, this remains around half the level of increase seen in 2024/25, primarily due to reductions in pupil numbers.</p> <p>Craig highlighted again that part of the increase in the Schools Block relates to the incorporation of the former Schools Budget Support Grant and the National Insurance Contribution Grant, both of which have now been rolled into the main allocation.</p> <p>Pupil numbers have continued to fall, with the primary cohort decreasing from 13,102 to 12,723 and secondary numbers reducing from 8,192 to 8,114. This represents a total reduction of 457 pupils, which directly impacts the overall Schools Block allocation.</p> <p>GC also clarified that new and growing schools are treated differently within the formula and are not subject to the Minimum Funding Guarantee. Of the 51 schools in the authority, 49 are established schools, and 30 of these will see reductions in pupil numbers, affecting their budget shares.</p> <p>In summary, primary and secondary pupil numbers have fallen, business rates allocations have increased, and the Growth Fund has reduced due to specific changes in local pupil growth patterns. The resulting Schools Block allocation available for distribution is £139 million.</p> <p>GC reminded Forum that, during the modelling of the final schools funding formula at the previous meeting, a set of criteria had been agreed. He confirmed that the modelling complies with those principles and remains within all DfE requirements.</p> <p>Local authorities are required to model as closely as possible to the National Funding Formula (NFF) rates. Where variances remain, the aim is to keep these within 10% of the NFF values. Forum had previously agreed that the basic entitlement factors (OPU) would be used as the primary</p>
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	<p>balancing mechanism. GC confirmed that this approach was successful and it was not necessary to use the lump sum as a balancing factor.</p> <p>The Forum also agreed to apply the maximum permissible Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) rate for 2026/27. The allowed range is between –0.5% and 0%, and the maximum available—0%—has been applied. No capping has been used, meaning no school has been penalised through reductions to gains.</p> <p>The original model assumed a 0.5% block transfer to fund the RISE team; however, this requirement has now reduced to 0.41%, and the revised figure has been applied.</p> <p>GC advised that it was not possible to replicate the NFF in full. To balance the formula, an adjusted OPU has been used; the relevant rates would be shown shortly.</p> <p>Maintained Schools – De-delegation GC reminded members that a limited number of services can be de-delegated for maintained primary and secondary schools. Decisions on de-delegation are taken by the respective maintained school representatives on Schools Forum.</p> <p>The four areas requiring Forum agreement are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Behaviour Support Service2. School Improvement3. Union Duties4. General Education Functions <p>Behaviour Support: Now delivered fully within Reading. No increase in budget is being sought for 2026/27; the service is requesting that the 2025/26 level is retained. Behaviour support applies to primary schools only and therefore secondary representatives do not vote on this item.</p> <p>School Improvement: A small increase of £9,600 is requested to meet inflationary pressures.</p> <p>Union Duties: An increase of £500 per year is proposed to cover inflationary costs.</p> <p>General Education Functions: This includes central budgeting and accounting functions for maintained schools, financial oversight, compliance monitoring under the Scheme for</p>
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	<p>Financing Schools, statutory returns to the DfE, and attendance and welfare monitoring.</p> <p>GC referred members to Table 5.10, which sets out the detailed costs associated with each element. Members should note that Behaviour Support applies only to primary schools, and therefore secondary representatives will not vote on this item. School Improvement, Union Duties, and General Education Functions apply to both primary and secondary schools.</p> <p>As noted earlier, the allocation for Union Duties includes a modest increase of £500 to reflect inflationary pressures. For General Education Functions, an additional £20,000 is requested to cover inflation within the service. While per-pupil rates have increased, the overall reduction in pupil numbers has affected total funding, resulting in slight changes to the rates, which remain calculated on a per-pupil basis.</p> <p>He then introduced the proposed local funding formula, confirming that Reading remains compliant with the National Funding Formula (NFF), including the Area Cost Adjustment, across all factors except the basic entitlement (OPU for Primary, Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4). These OPU rates are 1.2% below the NFF values but remain well within the permissible range set by the DfE.</p> <p>GC next presented the proposed school-level allocations. Taking Alfred Sutton as an illustrative example, he explained the initial columns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The first column lists the school's name.• The second column shows the 2025/26 budget share previously allocated.• The third column details the 2025/26 pupil numbers used for that allocation.• The next column displays the per-pupil rate applied. <p>DD queried the pupil numbers shown for certain schools, noting a drop of 10 pupils for both Alfred Sutton and Redlands for 2026/27. He questioned whether a full-year adjustment had been applied.</p> <p>GC confirmed that the figures were taken directly from the APT dataset supplied through the DfE census. He asked DD to double-check the numbers and confirmed that any discrepancies would need to be referred back to the DfE.</p> <p>GC explained that the next column shows the average per-pupil funding. He confirmed that, for comparison purposes, an adjusted figure has been included to incorporate both the Schools Budget Support Grant (SBS) and the National Insurance Contribution (NIC) Grant, which were previously</p>
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		<p>paid separately in 2025/26. This allows for a consistent year-on-year comparison.</p> <p>The 2026/27 post-MFG figure represents the amount each school would receive under the proposed local funding formula, based on the pupil numbers provided through the APT. The corresponding average per-pupil value for 2026/27 is shown alongside.</p> <p>The total variance column reflects the difference between the adjusted 2025/26 funding (including the two grants) and the proposed 2026/27 post-MFG allocation. The pupil variance indicates the change in pupil numbers year on year, and the percentage change is calculated accordingly. GC highlighted that most variances arise from decreases in pupil numbers rather than changes in rates or formula factors.</p> <p>GC stated that he is happy to speak with individual members about their specific school allocations outside the meeting. However, he did not recommend reviewing each school line-by-line during the session. He confirmed that, in principle, the figures presented reflect the outcome of the proposed local funding formula.</p> <p>GC explained the process for taking decisions and asked members to indicate whether they agreed, abstained, or supported continuing to fund the RISE team via the proposed block transfer, noting that clear responses would be very helpful.</p> <p>Isabelle Sandy sought clarification on the rationale for reducing the secondary basic entitlement (OPU), she noted that, for schools such as Kendrick—where additional formula factors have limited impact—a reduction of 1.2% could have a more significant effect. GC acknowledged the point and confirmed that the funding formula had now been approved and even without transferring funding to support the RISE team, an adjustment to the basic entitlement (OPU) would still be required.</p> <p>If members are content to approve the local funding formula as presented—namely, the application of the NFF rates to each allocation, with a 1.2% reduction applied to the basic entitlement—then we can proceed on that basis. This was agreed by those present at the Forum</p> <p>The next item concerns de-delegation, which applies to maintained schools only and does not apply to academies. This was agreed by those present at the Forum.</p>
6	Central Schools Services Block Budget 2026/27	GC introduced the next report, the Central School Services Block (CSSB) budget for 2026/27, and that a decision was required from Forum regarding the proposed budget breakdown for CSSB.

		<p>He briefly summarised the position, noting that much of the detail had already been covered earlier in the meeting. The CSSB comprises two elements: historic commitments and ongoing responsibilities. The historic element continues to be reduced by 20% year-on-year. It was noted that despite this reduction, the CSSB has seen a small overall increase due to the uplift in the per-pupil funding rate, which has risen by £4.95, even though pupil numbers have fallen by 457. The historic commitment has reduced from £178,000 to £142,000, but overall, the block has increased by £47,000.</p> <p>Table 2 sets out the services funded from the CSSB, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admissions services • Schools’ Forum administration • Copyright licensing (a significant cost, negotiated nationally and mandated to be funded from the CSSB) • Statutory and regulatory services such as financial oversight, prudential borrowing, and contributions to Early Years and Children’s Social Care <p>GC reminded members that historic commitments cannot exceed previous budget levels, and no new commitments may be added, in accordance with DfE regulations. The services funded are consistent with those presented in previous years and primarily reflect statutory duties. CSSB budget approved for 2026/27 by those present at the Forum</p>
7	Early Years Block Budgets 2026/27	<p>GC introduced the Early Years Block budget for 2026/27 and noted that a decision was required regarding the retained element of the Early Years Block.</p> <p>Although the final Early Years allocation has not yet been released, Forum was asked to approve the proposed retained budget for 2026/27, as set out in Table 2. GC highlighted the updates to the Early Years National Funding Formula (EYNFF) between 2025/26 and 2026/27, and referred members to Tables 3 and 4, which outline the proposed provider rates for the coming year.</p> <p>He advised that, in line with DfE guidance, local authorities are permitted to retain up to 3% of the Early Years Block in 2026/27. This represents a reduction from previous years:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4% permitted in 2025/26 • 5% in the year prior <p>However, Reading is not proposing to retain the full 3%. Instead, the proposed retention level is 2.9%, ensuring that as much funding as possible</p>

is passed through to Early Years providers while still covering the required central functions.

GC explained that the proposed retention level of **2.9%** is sufficient to fund all the required Early Years functions without negatively impacting any other areas. While it may be necessary in future years to retain the full 3%, the current proposal reflects only what is required. He noted that there is no value in retaining more funding than necessary, as this would reduce the amount passed through to Early Years providers.

He referred members to Section 4.2, which sets out the breakdown of expenditure funded from the retained element. This includes:

- Early Years Team: £486,000, covering 8.68 FTE posts
- Portage Team: just over 12 FTE posts
- Central establishment charges: £30,000

GC highlighted that the Early Years Team budget includes a modest increase of £165,000 to cover costs incurred in previous years. The increase is considered reasonable in the context of the overall Early Years budget and the scale of duties funded from the retained element.

He then outlined the funding rates provided by the DfE. For 2025/26, the following increases were applied to Early Years National Funding Formula rates:

- 44p increase for three- and four-year-old universal and extended (working parents) entitlement
- 16p increase for disadvantaged and working parents' two-year-old entitlement

For 2026/27, the Council proposes to passport a significant proportion of these increases to provider rates:

- 33p increase for three- and four-year-old rates (rather than the full 44p)
- 11p increase for two-year-old rates (rather than the full 16p)

GC noted that Early Years entitlement has expanded substantially over recent years, with the overall budget growing from around £15 million to £30 million, while the permitted retention has reduced from 7% to 3%. Ensuring that the maximum possible funding is passed through to providers remains a priority, alongside required supplements such as the £1 per hour Early Years Pupil Premium top-up. Agreed by those present at the Forum.

		The new funding formulas will take effect from April for maintained schools, and from the start of the academic year for academies.
8	Agenda items for next meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High Needs Budget 2026/2027 • Budget Monitoring Summary 2025/26 • Agree Schools Forum meeting dates for 2026/27 • Update on SEN Strategy
9	Any Other Business	There was no other business on this occasion. Meeting closed at 17.54
10	Date of next meeting	19 March 2026 5pm to be held virtually by teams.

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

Agenda Item 3

SCHOOLS' FORUM MEMBERSHIP	Jan-26
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Group / Sub Group	Votes	Position	Name	School	First elected / appointed to SF	Last elected / appointed to SF	Period of office as member	Due for re-election / appointment
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School Members:

Nursery (2)	1	Head teacher	Jo Budge	Reading EY Schools Federation	Jan-17	Jun-22	3 yrs	Jun-25	
	2	Governor	Julia Cottee	Reading EY Schools Federation	Mar-20	Mar-23	3 yrs	Mar-26	
Maintained Primary (7)	3	Head teacher	Rebecca Brown	Geoffrey Field Junior		Jan-25	3 yrs	Jan-28	
	4	Head teacher	Justine McMinn	EP Collier	Nov-13	Jun-22	3 yrs	Jun-25	
	5	Head teacher	Nikki McVeigh	Christ the King	Jul-21	Jan-25	3 yrs	Jan-28	
	6	Head teacher	Vacant				3 yrs		
	7	Governor	Dave Dymond	Alfred Sutton	Dec-22	Dec-22	3 yrs	Dec-25	
	8	Governor *	Richard Rolfe	Micklands	Dec-16	Dec-22	3 yrs	Dec-25	
	9	Vacant	Vacant						
Maintained Secondary (1)	10	Head teacher	Simon Utley	Blessed Hugh Faringdon	Jan-17	Jan-25	3 yrs	Jan-28	
Academy Primary (2)	11	Vacant							
	12	Academy Member	Howard Seymour	Churchend	Mar-20	Mar-20	3 yrs	Mar-23	
Academy Secondary (5)	13	Academy Member	Isabelle Sandy	Kendrick	Feb-12	Jun-22	3 Yrs	Jun-25	
	14	Academy Member	David Littlemore	Propsect	Feb-12	Dec-22	3 Yrs	Dec-25	
	15	Academy Member	Laura Mathews	Highdown	Jan-25	Jan-25	3 Yrs	Jan-28	
	16	Academy Member	Annal Nayyar	Reading Girls	Dec-17	Jun-22	3 Yrs	Jun-25	
	17	Academy Member	Ceri Burns	Maiden Erlegh School	Sep-21	Sep-21	3 Yrs	Sep-27	
			Observer/Substitute	Louise Baker	John Madjeski				
			Observer/Substitute	Cathy Woodcock	Reading School				
		Observer/Substitute	Jonathan Nicholls	UTC					
		Observer/Substitute		The River Academy					
		Observer/Substitute	John Salberg	The Wren					
Maintained Special (1)	18	Head teacher	Vacant	Holy Brook				n/a	
Academy Special (1)	19	Academy Member	Symon Cooke	The Avenue	Mar-18	Mar-21	3 Yrs	Mar-24	
Alternative Provision (1)	20	Head teacher	Claire Willmott	Cranbury College			On-going	n/a	

Non-School Members:

Early Year's PVI (1)	21	PVIs	Ita McGullion	Kennet Day Nursery	Oct-17	Oct-24	3 yrs	Oct-27
Trades Unions (1)	22	Trades Unions	Ali McNamara	NEU			On-going	n/a
			Katie Gumbrell	NEU			On-going	n/a
16 - 19 Provision (1)	23	FE College						

Non Members

Observer	-	RBC	Cllr Lead Member for Education
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* Chair

Elected October 2020

** Vice chair

VACANT



Reading Schools' Forum

High Needs Block Budget for 2026-27

March 19, 2026

Agenda Item 5

For decision

For discussion

For information

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 NOTE: The high needs block funding for 2026/2027 (section 3)
- 1.2 NOTE: The proposed budgets for the high needs block in 2026/2027 (section 5)

2. Background

- 2.1 The High Needs Block (HNB) supports the delivery of the Council's Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy (2022–2027). The strand 1 work stream which includes representative members of Schools Forum incorporates the analysis of data and information, including financial information, to inform future provision and joint commissioning.
- 2.2 The High Needs Block (HNB) allocation for 2026/27 remains at 2025/26 cash levels, with no additional uplift from the DfE beyond incorporation of supplementary grants. The £1.867m increase reflects grant consolidation rather than new funding.
- 2.3 Although the national High Needs Block has increased by 58% since 2019/20, demand growth has significantly exceeded funding. The 2026/27 increase for Reading primarily reflects grant consolidation rather than additional funding. The cumulative deficit is forecast to reach £49m by March 2026, covered by statutory override. However, the scale of the deficit is now impacting on the council's treasury and borrowing costs.
- 2.4 Councils continue to face rapidly rising demand for SEND support and significantly increasing numbers of EHCPs and specialist placements, especially in independent and non-maintained special schools, which remain the biggest cost pressure.
- 2.5 Reading's High Needs Block cumulative deficit will potentially increase to £49m by March 2026. This substantial DSG deficit by the end of the financial year is covered by the statutory override that shields councils from technical bankruptcy. This is effectively an 'overdraft' on the balance sheet and at these levels it is starting to impact the amount of investment income the council can earn due to the interest on borrowing to maintain the day-to-day business of the council.
- 2.6 Government statements acknowledge the SEND system is not financially sustainable and requires structural reform to improve outcomes and restore sustainability, with a SEND system being fairer, more inclusive and financially viable. The reform acknowledges long-standing issues: inconsistent support, rising EHCP demand, escalating costs, and widespread parent dissatisfaction. The Government has committed to detailed reforms in a forthcoming Schools White Paper (published on the 23rd February), with consultation and co-design underway.
- 2.4 **The local authority decides the high needs budget but welcomes comments and suggestions from the Schools' Forum.**

3. High Needs Block Funding 2026/2027

- 3.1 The HNB element of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2026/2027 was announced on 19th December 2025 and further information on the funding arrangements can be found in ESFAs High Needs Operational Guide. High needs funding: [High needs funding: 2026 to 2027 operational guide - GOV.UK](#)
- 3.2 In 2026 to 2027 the DfE are temporarily suspending the high needs national funding formula (NFF), which in previous years been used to calculate local authorities' high needs allocations. Instead, local authorities' allocations will be based on their 2025 to 2026 allocations, with some adjustments around Special School Grants. Following wider reforms to the SEND system, the DfE will review the methodology for allocating high needs funding so that it supports the SEND reforms.
- 3.3 The suspension of the high needs NFF means that the DSG high needs block allocations will include neither an update to the basic entitlement pupil numbers in special schools, nor a special free school adjustment. The DfE will be retaining the import/export adjustment which reflects changes in the balance of pupils and students educated within and outside the local authority's area, and consequent costs.

3.4 At the January 2026 meeting of the Schools' Forum, it was agreed to transfer up to the maximum 0.5% of funding from the schools' block to the high needs block, to financially fund the RISE Team.

3.5 The allocation for 2026/2027 is broken down as shown in Table 2 (also comparing to the 2025/2026 allocation).

Table 2: High Needs Block Funding Allocation 2025/2026 and 2026/2027

High Needs Allocation		2025/2026	2026/2027
National Funding Formula	*	£33,169,127	£36,193,032
Unit of Funding		£4,913	£0
Number of pupils (in Special Schools)		497	£0
Total Basic Entitlement	*	£2,439,419	£0
Number of pupils (net amount of imported/exported)		(464)	(464)
Total Import/Export adjustment		-£2,946,000	-£2,946,000
Total Additional funding for special free schools	*	£252,000	£0
Total Hospital and Special Schools Grants	*	£332,486	£1,866,385
Total High Needs Block before deductions		£33,247,032	£35,113,417
Deductions to High Needs Block due to direct funding of places		-£4,455,336	-£4,452,000
Total High Needs Block after Deduction		£28,791,696	£30,661,417

All lines with a * for 2025/2026 add up to the basic funding amount for 2026/2027.

4. Inflation Uplift to Top-up Unit Values from April 2026.

4.1 Reading Borough Council recognise the national inflation still being over the Bank of England target, as well as pay awards yet to be agreed but likely to be increased. Officers have discussed potential increases in Reading banding levels for 2026/2027 but with the severity of the current High Needs Block deficit, the difficult decision to continue with the 3-year freeze on all Reading banding top-ups for mainstream, special, resource units and other lump sum funding to schools has been made. Further consideration around banding top-ups will be planned when the council has received more information around the SEN reforms and the scheme to receive 90% of the March 2026 High Needs Deficit (standing around £50m).

4.2 For commissioning purposes we will reject and challenge any independent provider who asks for more than 4% to make sure all educational settings are treated in a fair way. The inflation amount is based on the increase in the living wage as well as CIPH inflation as at December 2025.

5. High Needs Block Budget 2026/2027

5.1 The budget proposed for 2026/2027 is £54.096 million, which is 76% more than the HNB DSG allocation of £30.662m, which will mean a continued increase to the deficit by £23.434 million. National reforms will slowly change the High Needs Block, but for the next 3 years the deficit will continue to increase even after the government is planning to supply 90% of the March 2026 High Needs Deficit.

5.2 All Reading owed top-ups' budgets have been frozen for 2026/2027 as discussed in January 2025. Appendix 1 confirms the continued top-up values

5.3 Table 3 sets out the current proposed budget for 2026/2027. The paragraphs that follow set out further information for each budget line.

5.4 The RISE team has been funded from School Block funding for 2026/2027 with agreement from all School Forum members. This is the key driver in supporting schools with SEN and fundamental to any new strategic work to reduce the in-year deficit while supporting all Reading children who require additional SEN support.

5.5 All changes in banding structures have been put on hold until more detail on the SEN reforms is published in the summer.

Table 3: High Needs Budget 2025/2026 and 2026/2027

REF to PARAGRAPH BELOW	DESCRIPTION	CURRENT BUDGET 2025/26	PROPOSED BUDGET 2026/27	Variance between 25/26 and 26/27
A	Centrally Retained Budgets			
A.1	Inclusion support posts	£299,300	£229,900	(£69,400)
A.2	Inclusion Support – Therapeutic Thinking	£25,000	£25,000	£0
A.3	Inclusion Support – ASD outreach	£42,000	£42,000	£0
A.4	Early Intervention Funding	£500,000	£0	(£500,000)
A.5	Early years inclusion funding	£200,000	£300,000	£100,000
A.6	Contract - Sensory consortium	£405,000	£421,000	£16,000
A.7	Contract – CYPIT (Therapy)	£520,000	£541,000	£21,000
A.8	Contract - Speech/language for Early Years	£45,000	£0	(£45,000)
A.9	Virtual School – Children looked after	£249,600	£277,400	£27,800
A.10	Hospital Education Funding	£180,000	£187,200	£7,200
A.11	Central overheads	£90,000	£150,000	£60,000
A.12	Historic Special School Grants	£197,700	£1,832,800	£1,635,100
A.13	Commissioning	£100,000	£140,000	£40,000
A.14	Medical Tutoring (Children Missing Education)	£100,000	£100,000	£0
A.15	Hard-to-Place Funding	£50,000	£50,000	£0
A.16	Children Missing Education Team	£168,700	£183,200	£14,500
A.17	Medical Hospital Tuition (Tier 4)	£10,000	£10,000	£0
A.18	Preventative work in schools	£105,000	£121,100	£16,100
	Total Centrally Retained Budgets	£3,287,300	£4,610,600	£1,323,300
B	Placement Funding			
B.1	Resource Unit Base Funding	£92,000	£104,000	£12,000
B.2	Special School Base Funding	£320,000	£320,000	£0
B.3	Academy Base Funding (Recouped)	£4,476,000	£4,452,000	(£24,000)
B.4	Pupil Referral Unit Contract	£905,000	£945,000	£40,000
B.5	Maintained Additional Resourced Provision	£4,095,000	£4,123,000	£28,000
B.6	Academy Additional Resourced Provision	£1,253,000	£1,540,000	£287,000
B.7	Early Years Additional Resourced Provision	£663,600	£555,300	(£108,300)
Adjust	Recouped by DfE to passport to Academies	(£4,476,000)	(£4,452,000)	£24,000
	Placement Funding	£7,328,600	£7,587,300	£258,700
C	EHCP Top Ups			
C.1	Mainstream schools	£5,952,300	£7,241,000	£1,288,700
C.2	Special Schools	£14,143,000	£16,384,600	£2,241,600
C.3	Resource units	£300,000	£1,330,900	£1,030,900
C.4	Independent & Non-Maintained Special	£8,120,000	£10,745,700	£2,625,700
C.5	Further Education Colleges	£3,244,000	£3,076,100	(£167,900)
C.6	Other Independent Alternative	£570,000	£2,550,000	£1,980,000
C.7	Personal Budgets	£100,000	£570,000	£470,000
	Total EHCP Top Ups	£32,429,300	£41,898,300	£9,469,000
D	High Needs Block Expenditure Total	£43,045,200	£54,096,200	£11,051,000
E	High Needs Block DSG Indicative Income	(£28,791,700)	(£30,661,900)	(£2,242,000)
F	Net Budget Variance (Deficit / Surplus)	£14,253,500	£23,434,300	£8,809,000

A Centrally Retained Budgets – following from Table 3

- A.1 Inclusion support posts (£229,900) – this budget includes the cost of three posts retained by the Local Authority. They carry out a range of statutory functions relating to monitoring exclusions, part time timetables and other issues relating to vulnerable pupils, and ASC advisory support/outreach.
- A.2 School Inclusion Panel (Therapeutic Thinking Approach) (£25,000) – Supplied to the Educational Psychologist service to support the Therapeutic Thinking Approach within Reading Schools.
- A.3 ASD Outreach (£42,000) is provided by Christ the King School.
- A.4 Early Intervention Funding (£0) – Ceased in April 2025.
- A.5 Early Years Inclusion Fund (£300,000) - It supports inclusion of children in early years settings in the Private, Voluntary and Independent sectors to assist all children to be able to receive their early years entitlements.
- A.6 Sensory Consortium (£421,000) – This is a joint arrangement with other Berkshire Local Authorities.
- A.7 Speech and Language (SALT) and Occupational Therapy (OT) Contract (£541,000) – Contract via Wokingham Borough Council.
- A.8 Speech and Language (SALT) contract for Early Years Settings (£0) – contract via NHS that ceased in December 2025
- A.9 Virtual School Children Looked After (£277,400) - This contribution towards the Virtual school for Children Looked After.
- A.10 Hospital Education (£187,200) - This budget funds a teaching team at the Royal Berkshire Hospital and is hosted by Maiden Erlegh Trust. It is required to support pupils from any Local Authority area who are in hospital in Reading.
- A.11 Central overheads (£150,000) - This contributes towards the cost of council overheads.
- A.12 Historic Special School Grants (£1,832,800) – This amount has been added to the HNB DSG for the local authority to pay over to special schools and alternative provision these grants based on the actual number of pupils recorded in the January 2025 census. This now includes all new grants paid separately since September 2024.
- A.13 Commissioning (£140,000) – SEN Placement costs are the main driver of spend within the High Needs Block and RBC are focusing on the procurement of high-cost placements to see better arrangements, contracts and partnership working can bring down the average costs of placements.
- A.14 Medical Tutoring (Children Missing Education) (£100,000) – To ensure the local authority can discharge their statutory duty in providing appropriate tuition to pupils who are medically unfit for school.
- A.15 Hard-to-Place Funding (£50,000) – To create a fund to support children going through the fair access protocol or requiring intervention to prevent permanent exclusions.
- A.16 Children Missing Education (CME) (£184,200) – To maintain the offer of service regarding Children Missing Education and Elective Home Education where numbers have increased considerably since the pandemic. In conjunction with the growing statutory duties with the attendance support team, the CME will adopt service roles from them to ensure continued service delivery.
- A.17 Other hospital funding (£10,000) - This budget funds the cost of pupils' education while they attend tier 4 specialist independent mental health hospital provision which is commissioned by NHS England.
- A.18 Preventative work in schools (£121,100) – Professional employment to reach the children who most need this timely identification and coordinated support. Input enables those children who need ordinarily available provision and SEND support to be effectively identified.

B Placement Funding – following from Table 3

- B.1 Primary Resource Unit (£104,000) – EPC resource unit.
- B.2 Holybrook Special School Place Funding (£320,000) - £10k each 32 placed special school
- B.3 Academy Schools (Recouped and paid for by DfE)
- B.4 Pupil Referral Units (PRU) top up funding (£945,000) – Maiden Erlegh Trust receive this sum for PRU placements. Funding removed from schools for permanent exclusions is credited against this budget if the pupil is subsequently placed in a PRU.
- B.5 Maintained Additional Resourced Provisions (£4,123,000) – Continuing support for ARPs with financial year 2026/2027
- B.6 Academy Additional Resourced Provisions (£1,540,000) – Continuing support for ARPs with financial year 2026/2027
- B.7 Nursery Additional Resourced Provisions (£553,300) – Continuing support for ARPs with financial year 2026/2027 as well as closing down two ARPs.

C. EHCP Top Ups – following from Table 3

- C.1 Mainstream schools Top Up (£7,241,000) – this is based on the actual number of top ups as of January 2026 with forecasted numbers for 2026/2027
- C.2 Special School Top Up (£16,384,600) – this is based on the actual number of top ups as of January 2026 with forecasted numbers for 2026/2027. Including 2.5% increase for other local authorities' schools increases.
- C.3 Resource Unit Top Ups (£1,330,900) - this is based on the actual number of top ups as of January 2026 with forecasted numbers for 2026/2027. Including 2.5% increase for other local authorities' schools increases.
- C.4 Independent and Non-Maintained Special Schools (INMSS) (£10,745,700) – this is based on the actual number of top ups as of January 2026 with forecasted numbers for 2026/2027. Including 4% increase in inflation.
- C.5 Further Education Colleges (£3,076,100) – this is based on the actual number of top ups as of January 2026 with forecasted numbers for 2026/2027. Including 2.5% increase for inflation.
- C.6 Other independent alternative placements (AP) (£2,550,000) – this is based on the actual number of top ups as of January 2026 with forecasted numbers for 2026/2027. Including 4% increase in inflation.
- C.7 Personal Budgets (£570,000) – Demand led budget based on parent/carers choice.

Appendix 1 - Reading Borough Council Top-up values from April 2026

	CURRENT RATE
SPECIAL SCHOOLS	
The Avenue	
ASD1	£8,671
ASD2	£17,299
ASD3	£21,619
ASD4	£27,995
ASD5	£33,765
ASD6	£44,450
ASD7	£55,556
MLD1	£3,778
MLD2	£7,686
MLD3	£11,583
MLD4	£15,480
MLD5	£21,045
MLD6	£23,102
PMLD1	£18,836
PMLD2	£26,566
PMLD3	£28,374
SLD1	£6,917
SLD2	£10,826
SLD3	£14,723
SLD4	£18,620
SLD5	£24,184
SLD6	£26,241

	CURRENT RATE
SPECIAL SCHOOLS	
HB (Holybrook)	£20,902
PC (Hamilton)	£24,000
RESOURCES	
HI RESB	£13,693
EP RESB	£3,298
ARP MLD	£21,000
ARP SLD	£28,000
ARP SLD (MNS)	£15,666
MAINSTREAM	
BAND A	£3,085
BAND B	£5,543
BAND C	£8,000
BAND D	£9,927
BAND E	£18,620



Reading Schools' Forum

Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)
Budget Monitoring
2026/27

March 19, 2026

Agenda Item 6

For decision

For discussion

For information

1. Summary

1.2 This report sets out the updated position on the Dedicated Schools Grant for 2025/26 for period 10.

2. DSG Allocation 2025/26

2.1 The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) is a ring-fenced specific grant and can only be used in support of the schools' budget and spent on school/pupil activity as defined by the School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2025.

2.2 The Authority must ensure that DSG is correctly spent and must report the outturn position to inform the impact upon the following year's budget position. The budget monitoring of the Authority distinguishes between how services are funded, namely by DSG or by the Local Authority.

2.3 The LA receives its DSG allocation gross (including allocations relating to academies and post-16 provision), and then the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) recoups the actual budget for these settings to pay them direct, leaving a net or LA allocation.

2.4 The current DSG allocation for 2025/26 is summarised in Table 1 below.

2.5 The allocations shown in the table are prior to any transfers between blocks. For the 2025/26 budget the Schools' Forum has agreed a transfer of £564k from the school's block to the high needs block.

2.6 Allocations were updated on the 22 January 2026 with no changes since last reported in December 2025. Previous changes include updated export and import provisions within the High Needs Block. Next update would be July 2026 when the January 2026 census updates the Early Years Block.

Table 1: Readings Current DSG allocations for 2025/26 (January 2026)

BLOCK	REVISED DSG ALLOCATION 2025/26				
	Gross DSG Allocations £m	Less Recoupment relating to Academies £m	Draft LA DSG Allocations March 2025 £m	In year allocation changes £m	Current Allocation January 2026
Schools Block	135.870	(79.142)	56.728	0.000	56.728
Central Schools Block	1.151	0.000	1.151	0.000	1.151
Early Years Block	29.074	0.000	29.074	0.015	29.089
High Needs Block	33.385	(4.454)	28.930	(0.138)	28.792
Total	199.480	(83.596)	115.883	(0.123)	115.760

3. DSG Budget 2025/26 Budget Monitoring

3.1 Appendix 1 contains the original 2025/26 budget as agreed/notified at previous meetings of the Schools' Forum. This is split between the four funding blocks and broken down by the main reporting lines for the DSG.

3.2 There is a forecast in-year deficit of £21.876m on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). This is £7.622m higher than planned. The end-of-year projection for the DSG overspend is now £46.779m. The main pressure remains the costs within the High Needs Block element of the DSG. A breakdown is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary expenditure Budget per Block 2025/26

	Current Budget (£m)	Forecast (£m)	In Year Variance (£m)	C/Fwd (£m)	Cumulative Variance (£m)
Schools Block	56.728	57.369	0.641	(1.779)	(1.138)
Central Schools Block	1.151	1.161	0.010	0.000	0.010
Early Years Block	29.074	29.573	0.498	(1.662)	(1.164)
High Needs Block	28.930	49.657	20.727	28.344	49.071
Total	115.884	137.759	21.876	24.903	46.779

This current budget was set in March 2025 and allocations have changed since and will continue to change (see table 1).

3.3 Schools Block (SB)

- There is a small overspend within the schools block arising from ongoing growth funding commitments. This has not impacted schools and was offset from the carry forward growth funding set aside for the purpose.

3.4 Central Schools Services Block (CSSB)

- Most of the central school services budgets are contributions and the majority will not therefore have a variance. There is a small variance in copyright licences, as this is a national contract agreed in advance.

3.5 Early Years Block (EYB)

- There continues to be a degree of volatility within this block as government makes further changes after the enhancements already made to this area with the expansion of early years funding from 9 months and the reduction of the retained percentage available to local authorities to 3% from 5%. The DfE are now introducing termly funding as part of the overall changes to the funding of this block, which creates potential cash flow risks going forward.
- The authority did receive a £0.373m adjustment in the summer term.

3.6 High Needs Block (HNB)

- The financial position of the High Needs Block is challenging with an in-year deficit of £20.727m projected at the end of Period 11; this is due to the increase in demand for SEN support against the smaller increase in funding. Although this is recognised as a national issue, there is a requirement for the authority to manage this. These priorities contribute to reducing the High Needs deficit through better use of resources linked to developing greater capacity across all types of education provision. This includes diverting children from starting in Independent Specialist Provision (INMSS) which has the highest placements cost at an average of £71.5k
- The number of funded Education Health and Care Plans continue to rise throughout the year and is now 96 over the initial estimate set at the start of the year. At the same time the increases in top-up for various placement types have increased from 1% to 42%
- By the end of 25/26, Reading could face a deficit of £49m within the High Needs Block. The government white paper outlining changes to the High Needs funding and the controls around the statutory override are designed to assist the position, including the 90% relief of the high needs block overspend. However, only initial high-level information has been published at the time of writing, and the authority awaits detailed guidance on the specifics of how these proposals will be implemented.

Appendix 1 – Summary DSG Budget 2025/26

Ref	Description	Budget £m	Forecast £m	In Year £m
Schools Block				
1	Individual Schools Budget - Maintained Schools	56.428	56.398	(0.030)
2	Growth Fund & Falling Roles	0.484	0.484	0.000
3	Behavior Support Services (de-delegation)	0.000	(0.078)	(0.078)
4	Staff costs supply cover (trade unions) (de-delegation)	0.000	0.000	0.000
5	School Improvement (de-delegation)	0.000	0.000	0.000
6	Statutory/regulatory Duties (ESG) (de-delegation)	0.000	0.000	0.000
7	Additional high needs targeted funding (0.5% Transfer)	0.564	0.564	0.000
8	Contingency	(0.748)	0.001	0.749
Sub Total Schools Block Net Expenditure		56.728	57.369	0.641
Central Schools Services Block				
9	Contribution to combined budgets	0.161	0.161	0.000
10	School admissions	0.270	0.270	0.000
11	Servicing of schools forum	0.020	0.020	0.000
12	Prudential borrowing costs	0.017	0.017	0.000
13	Other Items (copyright licenses)	0.148	0.158	0.010
14	Statutory/regulatory Duties (ESG)	0.535	0.535	0.000
15	Central Schools Services Block allocation changes from Budget	0.161	0.161	0.000
Subtotal Central School Services Block Net Expenditure		1.151	1.161	0.010
Early Years Block				
16	Early Years Funding (free entitlement)	28.049	28.302	0.253
17	SEN support services (Portage/Dingley)	0.568	0.768	0.200
18	Central expenditure on early years entitlement	0.457	0.517	0.060
19	Early Years Block Allocation changes from Budget	0.000	(0.015)	(0.015)
Subtotal Early Years Block Net Expenditure		29.074	29.573	0.498
High Needs Block				
20	SEN placement Funding & PRU lump sum	1.338	1.802	0.464
21	ARP Funding	6.012	6.178	0.166
22	Therapies & Sensory Consortium	1.012	1.001	(0.011)
23	Support for Inclusion & SEN Services	1.379	0.732	(0.647)
24	Children Missing Education (including Hospital)	0.499	0.499	0.000
25	Teachers pay & pension grants to special schools/PRU	0.315	0.318	0.003
26	Central Services	0.190	0.250	0.060
27	Top up funding - Alternative Provision	0.570	2.480	1.910
28	Top up funding - Special Schools	14.143	15.423	1.280
29	Top up funding - Resource Units	0.300	0.436	0.136
30	Top up funding - Mainstream	5.852	7.022	1.169
31	Top up funding - Nursery	0.100	0.182	0.082
32	Top up funding - FE Colleges	3.244	2.823	(0.421)
33	Top up and other funding - non maintained & independent schools	8.120	9.943	1.823
34	Personal Budgets	0.100	0.561	0.461
35	Tier 4 + Unallocated Future EHCPs	0.010	(0.129)	(0.139)
36	Budgeted Overspend as of April 2025	(14.254)	0.000	14.254
37	High Needs Block allocation changes from Budget	0.000	0.138	0.138
Subtotal High Needs Block Net Expenditure		28.930	49.657	20.727
Total ALL Blocks Net Expenditure		115.884	137.759	21.876



Reading Schools' Forum

Schools Forum Meeting Dates
2026/27

March 19, 2026

Agenda Item 7

For decision For discussion For information

1. Summary

1.1 This report proposes the dates and agenda items for the 2026/27 financial year.

2. Recommendations

1.1 Notes proposed agenda items for 2026/27.

1.2 Agrees the proposed Schools' Forum dates for 2026/27.

3. Proposed Dates

3.1 The Schools' Forum is a statutory and public meeting, which is required to meet as a minimum four times a year. In Reading, the Forum met four times in the last financial year with September Schools Forum cancelled due to late releases of information. We plan to have 5 meetings for 2026/27 financial year.

3.2 The meetings need to be scheduled at appropriate points in the year to tie in with decision making deadlines in relation to the setting of the school budget, and release of key data and information from the Department of Education (DfE). The frequency and timing of the meetings need to be agreed in advance of each financial or academic year.

3.3 In 2025/26 the dates worked with the DfE deadlines and it is proposed to keep to similar dates in 2026/27. The meetings will continue to be held on Thursday at 5pm virtually and scheduled for a maximum of two hours.

3.4 The dates proposed are set out in Table 1. The agenda papers need to be dispatched one week in advance and published on the website so that all interested parties can access the papers and can make representation to the Schools' Forum Members.

Table 1: Proposed Schools' Forum Dates 2026/27 Financial Year

MEETING DATE	DISPATCH AGENDA
June 25, 2026	June 19, 2026
September 24, 2026	September 18, 2026
December 10, 2026	December 4, 2026
January 21, 2027*	January 15, 2027*
March 18, 2027	March 12, 2027

***Depending on APT submission date**

4. Agenda Items

4.1 The key agenda items for each meeting are set out below. Other ad hoc reports will be added as and when, for example to discuss school funding based national announcements or consultations launched by the DfE.

4.2 June meeting agenda items:

- DSG outturn 2025/26
- Maintained school balances 2025/26 and budgets 2026/27
- Review of the Schools' Forum constitution
- DSG Budget 2026/27
- Scheme for Financing Schools update
- SEND update

4.3 September meeting agenda items:

- DSG budget setting strategy for 2027/28
- Initial proposals for school funding formula for 2026/27
- Budget monitoring 2026/27 month 5
- SEND update.

4.4 December meeting agenda items:

- DSG budget overview for 2027/28
- Final proposals for school funding formula for 2027/28
- Budget monitoring 2026/27 month 8
- Agree de-delegations for 2027/28
- Agree central school services budget for 2027/28

4.5 January meeting agenda items:

- DSG actual funding settlement for 2027/28
- Final school funding formula for 2027/28
- Agree Falling Rolls & Growth fund for 2027/28
- Agree Early Years centrally retained budget for 2027/28
- Early Years funding rates for 2027/28

4.6 March meeting agenda items:

- High needs budget (Including SEND Top-Ups) for 2027/28
- Confirm Early Years Budgets
- Budget monitoring 2026/27 month 11
- Agree Schools' Forum meeting dates for 2027/28
- SEND update.



Reading Schools' Forum

Falling Roles for 2026-27

March 19, 2026

Agenda Item 8

For decision For discussion For information

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 AGREE: To consult Schools' Forum on an amendment to the Falling Rolls criteria for 2026-27 and to approve the proposal from Reading Borough Council.

2. Falling Rolls Fund Operation Guidance

- 2.1 Local authorities may set aside schools block funding to create a small fund to support with falling rolls, where schools capacity data 2025 (SCAP) shows that school places will be required in the subsequent three to five years.
- 2.2 The Schools' Forum should agree both the value of the fund and the criteria for allocation, and the local authority should regularly update the Schools' Forum on the use of the funding. As with the Growth Fund, the Falling Rolls Fund is also within the NFF schools block. Any in-year reduction to the Falling Rolls Fund needs to be agreed with the Schools' Forum or Secretary of State if appropriate.
- 2.3 Criteria for allocating the Falling Rolls Fund should contain clear objective trigger points for qualification, and a clear formula for calculating allocations. Differences in allocation methodology are permitted between phases
- 2.4 Compliant criteria would generally contain some of the features set out below:
 - a. SCAP shows that school places will be required in the subsequent three to five years **(this is a mandatory requirement)**.
 - b. surplus capacity exceeds a minimum number of pupils, or a percentage of the published admission number
 - c. formula funding available to the school will not support provision of an appropriate curriculum for the existing cohort
 - d. the school will need to make redundancies to contain spending within its formula budget
- 2.5 Methodologies for distributing funding could include:
 - a. a rate per vacant place, up to a specified maximum number of places (place value likely to be based on basic per pupil funding)
 - b. a lump sum payment with clear parameters for calculation (for example, the estimated cost of providing an appropriate curriculum, or estimated salary costs equivalent to the number of staff who would otherwise be made redundant)
- 2.6 Where Falling Rolls funding is payable to academies, the local authority should fund the increase for the period from the additional September intake through until the following August
- 2.7 Local authorities should report any Falling Rolls Fund remaining at the end of the financial year to the Schools' Forum.
- 2.8 Funding may be carried forward to the following funding period, as with any other centrally retained budget, and local authorities can choose to use it specifically for falling rolls.

3. Reading's Falling Rolls Policy 2025-2026

- 3.1 We are proposing criteria (as seen below) to help assist schools with falling pupil numbers. SCAP shows that the school places will be required in subsequent three to five years. This is a mandatory requirement by the DfE.
- 3.2 **Falling roll below 76% of overall school PAN.** Removing the year-on-year movement check eliminates a school being penalised for trying to increase pupil numbers. Decreasing the PAN comparison figures compensating for the removal of this secondary check.
- 3.3 **Schools must not have more than 8% of reserves as at 31 March of previous financial year.** It is within the best interest for Reading for schools to use their surplus reserves prior to requesting any share of the Falling Rolls Fund, to which there is a limited amount of agreed funding to which the Council and Schools' Forum have at their disposal. 8% has come from the previous removed mechanism of Primary school's surplus balances review.
- 3.4 **Formula funding available to the school will not support provision of an appropriate curriculum for the existing cohort without making teacher redundancies.** Additional funding is awarded to schools where without funding they would have to consider closing a classroom and as a result impact the education of the pupils within the school. The fund is not to pay for teacher redundancies.
- 3.5 **Business Case required for funding request prior to coming academic year.** No school is automatically entitled to this funding. The Director of Education and School Effectiveness team along with School Finance will assess a business case on how the school plan to use the funding before any agreement has been put in place. This will involve conversations between the school and the School Finance and School Effectiveness teams. In some cases, this may also be accompanied by a Licensed Deficit application if the school is budgeting a deficit balance.
- 3.6 **Minimum Per Pupil funding (2026/27 Rate £5,115 primary) fund up to 80% of PAN with a maximum pay-out of £100k**
- We acknowledge that every school is unique and needs and circumstances can vary. Schools Funding guidance from the ESFA suggests that 80% of total PAN is on average the level that schools should be able to have the minimum required resources to educate the national curriculum. We do accept that the need can be very different in each school, but as a general limit we have proposed this rate. We have also limited the total pay-out for one school in one year to £100k due to the affordability. Schools' Forum and Reading Borough Council reserve the right to change levels due to business case discussions and the overall level of funding.
- 3.7 **Funding awarded for maximum of 5 consecutive years.** In line with the mandatory DfE element for SCAP to show a need within three to five years, a school may need support until the expected need occurs. We believe this funding will support and provide time for the school and local authority to manage the situation.
- 3.8 **Falling rolls will only apply to Primary phase schools.** The issue of declining numbers of school age pupils is, at the moment, confined to the primary sector both within Reading and nationally. As the criteria is reviewed annually the opportunity to extend or move to the secondary phase will occur each year.
- 3.9 **Schools' Forum and Director of Education reserve the right to change levels of funding or supply discretionary funding based on in-year applications (business cases) and regarding the overall level of funding.** . Any expenditure over this allocation will be taken from the growth fund carried forward from 2025/26.

4. Review of 2025-2026

- 4.1 Caversham Park, St Anne's, Moorlands, Micklands and St Martin's were the only schools to meet the criteria for this fund. No other requests or payments were made in 2025-2026.
- 4.2 The policy was introduced due to the number of primary schools with falling numbers of reception class children. This could leave the school in financial difficulty whilst trying to maintain education standards for all year groups. Particularly after seeing a bulge of pupils come through Primary education and have now reached Secondary education. Many reasons can be attributed to this and are not always within a school's direct control but is critical as funding is connected to pupil numbers.
- 4.3 There is particular concern over the Caversham Park area (bordering Oxfordshire County Council) where the numbers of children/young families have dropped and there is limited space for new homes which has caused a low growth area for children and young families. This is not uncommon as other LAs have also experienced similar patterns in communities and it can take up to a generation or growth in the economies to change the need. LAs must plan for the long-term future in school places.

5. Proposed 2026-2027 Criteria for Falling Rolls Fund.

- 5.1 The proposal is to keep the criteria for 2026-27. The total funding will be limited to £300k across the schools.
- 5.2 Schools' Forum built a Growth Fund reserve to ease the future pressures of new schools. Especially Green Park and Rivers Academy. The Council believe that the current reserve can pay out an 300k for 2026-2027 financial year regarding Falling Rolls but due to the reserve decreasing the likelihood of a Falling Rolls Fund 2027-2028 is looking very unlikely. Therefore, this will be the last year it will be applied unless the government announce any additional funding for this exact purpose.

6. Impact

- 6.1 The table 1 below shows which schools would be eligible to submit a business case to access funding based on the criteria above. This only shows the maximum funding that can be supplied, and the actual funding agreed would be based on the business case and approval of the Director of Education.

Table 1: School	Total School Capacity	Current NOR	Surplus Capacity	Spaces occupied	Eligible for funding	80% of PAN @MppF rate	Re-allocated Funding
Moorlands	420	267	153	64%	Yes	£352,935	£84,490
Caversham Park	210	91	119	43%	Yes	£393,855	£94,286
Micklands	390	294	96	75%	Yes	£92,070	£22,040
St Anne's	210	147	63	70%	Yes	£107,415	£25,714
St Martin's	210	128	82	61%	Yes	£204,600	£48,980
Thameside	420	316	104	75%	Yes	£102,300	£24,490
Total cost						£1,253,175	£300,000

Only six schools have a surplus capacity below 76% of their PAN and where the Pupils will be required within three to five years.