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Schools' Forum

Date: Friday, 26 September 2025
Time: 2.00 pm
Venue: Online (MS Teams)

All members and named observers of the Dorset Schools Forum are requested to attend this meeting of the Forum. A full list of the current membership and any vacancies can be found here.

A full list of the Schools Forum's powers and responsibilities can be found here

For more information about this agenda please contact Tom Easterbrook, Schools Forum Officer on 10305 224567 or by email to tom.easterbrook@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Members of the public are welcome to attend this meeting as a silent observer by giving 5 working days' notice to the Schools Forum Officer using the information above.

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Agenda

		Page No
1.	**APOLOGIES, MEMBERSHIP ISSUES & CURRENT VACANCIES INCLUDING:**	
	To receive any apologies for absence, noting current vacancies.	
2.	**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**	
	To receive any declarations of interest.	
3.	**MINUTES AND ACTIONS FROM THE LAST MEETING**	3 - 14
	To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 4th July 2025, raise any matters arising and review the Action Log.	
4.	**CORRESPONDENCE**	15 - 20
	To note correspondence from:	

Minutes of Dorset Schools' Forum Meeting
4th July 2025

Attendance Record

Sector	***Name***	***Role and Establishment***	27-Sep	8-Nov	17-Jan	28-Mar	4-Jul
		SCHOOLS' MEMBERS (voting)					
Secondary Maintained	Phil Jones (Chair)	Head Teacher Ferndown Upper School	P	P	P	P	P
	Keith Hales (Vice Chair)	Head Teacher Beaminster School	P	P	P	P	P
	Luana Girling	Governor Lytchett Minster School	P	P	P	P	P
Primary Maintained	Simon Smith	Head Teacher Parrett & Axe CE VA Primary School	P	P	P	P	A
	Andrew Johnson	Head Teacher Conifers Primary School	-	-	A	-	-
	Andrew Boggis	Governor Salway Ash Primary School	-	P	P	P	A
	Peter Marsden	Chair of Governors Bincombe Valley Primary School	P	-	-	-	-
Special Maintained	Clive Padgett	Head Teacher Yewstock School & College	A	P	P	P	P
Learning Centre Maintained	David Dinsmore	Head Teacher Dorchester Learning Centre	P	P	P	P	A
Secondary Academy	Brian Boyes	Director of Secondary Education Initio Learning Trust	-	A	A	P	A
	Nick Rutherford	Head Teacher Thomas Hardye School, Wessex Multi-Academy Trust	P	P	P	A	A
	Caroline Spearing	Governor Sturminster Newton High School, SAST	P	A	P	P	A
	Vacancy		-	-	-	-	-
	Vacancy		-	-	-	-	-
Primary Academy	Ross Bowell	Director of Resources Initio Learning Trust (notionally St John's CE First School)	P	-	-	-	-
	Adam Gough	Head Teacher Burton Bradstock CE Primary School, Initio Learning Trust	P	P	P	A	P
	Giles Pugh	Trustee Diocese of Salisbury Academy Trust	A	A	P	A	P
	Debbie Shutts	Chief Financial Officer Wessex Multi-Academy Trust	P	P	P	P	P
	Vacancy		-	-	-	-	
Special Academy	Katherine Seymour	Head Teacher Wyvern Academy	P	P	P	A	P
Learning Centre Academy	Kelly Knight	Head Teacher Harbour Vale School, Sherborne Area Schools Trust	P	P	P	P	P
Early years	Debbie Appleby	Nursery Director Orchard Day Nursery	P	A	P	A	-
	Lorraine Clark	Proprietor Hopscotch Pre-school	P	P	P	P	P
Post-16	Rob Cole	Vice Principal – Finance and HR Weymouth College	P	A	-	-	-
	Nicky Porter	Assistant Principal Kingston Maurward College	A	A	A	A	A
Trade Unions	Jessica Powell	Schools Convenor, Unison Dorset Branch Dorset Teachers' & Support Staff Council	P	A	A	A	-

Key		
	P	Present
	A	Apologies
	-	Absent without apologies (members) or not due to attend (officers/observers)
	n/a	Not applicable e.g., not a member at that time

Sector	Name	Role and Establishment	27-Sep	8-Nov	17-Jan	28-Mar	4-Jul
		NAMED OBSERVERS					
Maintained Learning Centres	Kieren Hasler	Governor Forum Centre	P	A	A	A	A
Maintained Special Schools	Bruce Bonwell	Governor Westfield Arts College	A	A	A	P	P
Local Authority	Clare Sutton	Portfolio Holder for Children's Services, Education & Skills, Dorset Council Cabinet	P	P	A	P	P
Church Schools	Giles Pugh	Deputy CEO Salisbury Diocesan Board of Education	A	A	P	A	P
Local Authority	Bridget Bolwell	Elected Member, Dorset Council Cabinet	P	P	A	P	P
Maintained Special Schools	Karen Caile	Finance and Business Manager Mountjoy School	-	P	-	P	P
		OBSERVERS in attendance					
Local Authority	Kerrie Courtaux	Finance Officer, School & Early Years Funding Team, Education Services, People – Children Directorate	P	P	P	P	P
Maintained Learning Centres	Lisa Cracknell	School Business Leader, Compass	-	-	-	P	P
Local Authority	Lucy Cropp	Finance Officer, School & Early Years Funding Team, Education Services, People – Children Directorate	-	-	P	P	-
Local Authority	Catherine Dunkley-Jones	Governor Services Officer, Schools, Finance & Support, People – Children Directorate	P	-	-	-	-
Local Authority	Paul Kimber	Elected Member, Dorset Council Cabinet	-	-	P	-	-
Local Authority	Vikki Murphy	SAFSO, Schools Finance & Support, Education Services, People – Children Directorate	P	P	P	P	P
Local Authority	Tracy Privett	Finance Officer, School & Early Years Funding Team, Education Services, People – Children Directorate	-	-	P	P	-
Maintained Special Schools	Vicky Reed	HR Manager and PA to Head Teacher, Mountjoy School	-	-	-	P	-
Local Authority	Ruth Sivarajah	Education Challenge Lead, Dorchester & West Locality, Learning & Belonging, People – Children Directorate	-	-	P	-	-
Local Authority	Jane Somper	Elected Member, Dorset Council Cabinet	P	-	A	P	-
Secondary Maintained	Niamh Vercoe	School Business & Finance Manager, The Woodroffe School	-	-	P	-	-
		OFFICERS in attendance					
Local Authority	Hannah Chapple	Senior Accountant - Finance, Finance & Commercial Directorate	-	A	P	P	P
Local Authority	Sean Cremer	Corporate Director, Finance & Commercial Directorate	P	-	-	P	-
Local Authority	Liz Curtis-Jones	Principal Lead for Best Start in Life, Strategic Commissioning, People – Children Directorate	P	P	P	-	-
Local Authority	Amanda Davis	Corporate Director for Education & Learning, People – Children Directorate	P	P	P	-	-
Local Authority	Ed Denham	School Place Sufficiency Manager, Education Services, People - Children Directorate	-	-	-	P	-
Local Authority	Paul Dempsey	Executive Director of Children's Services	-	P	-	-	P
Local Authority	Ellen Eager	Accountant, Schools, Finance and Support Team, Education and Learning, People – Children Directorate	P	P	P	P	[
Local Authority	Tom Easterbrook (Clerk)	Schools' Forum Officer, Schools, Finance & Support, Education Services, People – Children Directorate	P	P	P	P	P
Local Authority	Vanessa Eddey	Team Manager, Schools, Finance & Support, Education Services, People – Children Directorate	A	P	P	P	P
Local Authority	Lisa Gray	Education Challenge Lead, Chesil Locality	-	-	-	P	P
Local Authority	Lee House	Service Manager - Finance, Finance & Commercial Directorate	P	P	A	P	P
Local Authority	Richard Howes	Education Challenge Lead, Chesil Locality	-	P	-	-	-
Local Authority	Heather Lappin	Head of Strategic Finance, Finance & Commercial Directorate	-	P	P	-	-
Local Authority	Margaret Judd	Manager (HNB Finance), Education & Learning, People – Children Directorate	P	P	P	P	P
Local Authority	Kim Saint	Project Manager, Strategic Commissioning	-	A	-	-	P
Local Authority	Louise Taylor	Relationship Manager, Education & Learning	-	P	-	-	-
Local Authority	Claire Webb	Strategic Commissioner, Sufficiency & Education	P	P	-	-	
Local Authority	Beth Whittaker	Principal Lead, Best Education for All, Education & Learning	P	P	P	P	A

ACTION

1. Apologies, membership issues & current vacancies

1.1 Apologies were received from:

Brian Boyes
Beth Whittaker
Simon Smith
Caroline Spearing
Nick Rutherford
Nicky Porter

1.2 **Membership issues**

1.3 **Draft minutes of the meeting on 28th March 2025**

1.3.1 The draft minutes of the meeting held on 28th March 2025 were reviewed and approved.

1.4 **Matters Arising**

None

1.5 **Declarations of Interest**

None

1.6 ***Correspondence***

The Chair noted that correspondence had been received regarding SEND funding mechanisms. This had been discussed with officers, and a response is being coordinated.to bring a paper to a future meeting, and the item will be added to the forward plan.

1.7 ***The Schools Forum Action log***

1.7.1 **A number of actions were rolled over. The action log is attached overleaf with dates set for the next meeting**

2. WORK OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM 25/26

2.1 To consider a report from Tom Easterbrook, Schools Forum Officer, Schools, Finance and Support, Commissioning and Partnerships, People – Children Directorate
For consultation

2.2 Key points of discussion

2.2.1 Forum noted the updated membership following recent elections and appointments. It was highlighted that the Primary Maintained sector election had been contested for the first time since 2019, with four candidates standing. Members welcomed the level of engagement and interest shown.

2.2.2 The following members were confirmed as elected or reappointed:

- Barbara Southcott (Primary Maintained Governor)
- Kieran Hasler (Learning Centre Maintained Governor Named Observer)
- Paul Lavis (Primary Academy)
- Dani Mark (Early Years)
- Bruce Bonwell (Maintained Special School Governor Named Observer)
- Lorraine Clark (Early Years)
- Luana Girling (Secondary Maintained Governor)

2.2.3 Efforts are ongoing to fill remaining vacancies, particularly in the academy sectors, and engagement with trust leaders is continuing.

2.2.4 The forward plan for 2025/26 was reviewed and agreed.

2.2.5 The proposed meeting dates and formats were also confirmed

ACTION

3. TRADE UNION FACILITIES

3.1 To consider a report from Vanessa Eddey, Team Manager – Schools, Finance & Support and Chris Matthews, Head of Human Resources, Corporate Development Directorate
For Information

3.2 Key points of discussion

3.2.1 The paper was brought following questions raised at the March meeting. Officers explained that the purpose of this paper was to take a step back and clarify the legal responsibilities of schools and academies as employers in relation to trade union facilities time, and to provide an overview of the current arrangements. It was noted that this discussion was not about funding levels or de-delegation decisions, which would be addressed in a future meeting.

3.2.2 Officers outlined the statutory obligations on schools to provide facilities time for union representatives. It was explained that the current model — which includes full-time secondment for a representative covering non-teaching unions — is designed to be a more efficient and equitable way of meeting these obligations across all schools.

3.2.3 Members acknowledged the efficiency of the current model but raised concerns about the perception that schools are effectively funding a full-time union officer. Some members felt that this blurred the line between employer obligations and union responsibilities.

3.2.4 It was noted that the current arrangement allows for timely and consistent support to school staff, which would be difficult to replicate if each school were required to release their own representative. Members recognised the value of having well-trained, experienced union officers available to support staff across the county.

3.2.5 However, several members expressed concern about the financial impact on individual schools, particularly where reimbursement rates do not fully cover the cost of release. One member highlighted a shortfall of approximately £6,000 in their trust's support staff budget and noted that a proposed increase in teaching union release time would result in a further funding gap.

3.2.6 Members queried the basis for reimbursement rates, and whether they accurately reflect the actual costs incurred by schools. Officers confirmed that this issue would be reviewed in the autumn term as part of the wider consultation on de-delegation.

3.2.7 There was discussion around the length of secondment for union representatives. Members questioned the appropriateness of long-term secondments — in some cases extending over several years — and raised concerns about the implications for job evaluation, pay parity, and redundancy risk if a representative were to return to a lower-graded substantive post.

3.2.8 Officers acknowledged that a previous agreement had resulted in a representative being paid at a higher grade than their substantive role. It was confirmed that there is no clear audit trail for how this arrangement was agreed, and that this has contributed to the current funding pressures.

ACTION

3.2.9 Members suggested that future secondments should be time-limited, with clearer expectations around duration, pay, and return-to-role arrangements. It was also suggested that unions should contribute more directly to the cost of full-time release, particularly where the representative is no longer undertaking duties within a school setting.

3.2.10 A union officer in attendance as an observer was invited to speak and shared their perspective on the challenges of balancing union duties with teaching responsibilities. They emphasised the importance of having sufficient release time to provide effective support and noted that financial pressures on schools are making this increasingly difficult.

3.2.11 Officers confirmed that a full review of the scheme, including funding levels and reimbursement arrangements, will be brought to Forum in the autumn term.

3.2.12 Engagement will take place with schools currently hosting union representatives to understand the true cost of release and inform future proposals.

3.2.13 Members were encouraged to continue providing feedback to help shape a fair and sustainable model.

4. **<u>REVIEW OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT OFFER</u>**

4.1 To consider a report from and Lisa Gray, interim Principal Lead – Best Education for All, Education and Learning, People – Children Directorate
<u>For information</u>

4.2 <u>Key points of discussion</u>

4.2.1 The proposed School Improvement Service for next academic year has been shaped by feedback from schools, the new Ofsted focus areas, national priorities from the RISE team, Dorset's Education and Belonging Strategy, and reflections on the impact of the 2024/25 offer. A full impact report is due to be shared in September.

4.2.2 The offer is structured around three tiers of support: core, additional, and specific. It is differentiated for primary, middle, and secondary phases. Officers acknowledged that a bespoke offer for special schools is not yet in place but committed to consulting with those settings during the year ahead.

4.2.3 Key elements of the offer include:

- Continued support for headteacher appraisal, which has received positive feedback.
- Access to the PSHE Association membership, taken up by 41 of 48 maintained schools.
- Support for the DfE's Climate Ambassador programme.
- Introduction of an online single central record system to support safeguarding compliance.

4.2.4 Forum members welcomed the clarity and coherence of the offer, particularly its alignment with national and local priorities.

4.2.5 The response from secondary representatives was particularly positive. Members from this phase, who have previously expressed concerns about the relevance and impact of the local authority's school improvement work, praised the progress made over the past year. Members felt the 2024/25 offer was really strong and noted that it had provided equitable support for secondary schools, which had not always been the case in the past.

ACTION

4.2.6 Members also welcomed the strategic direction of the offer, with some indicating that they were now streamlining their external support in favour of the local authority's provision. This was seen as a significant shift and a reflection of growing confidence in the offer's quality and impact.

4.2.7 There was a query from members regarding the inclusion of statutory assessment support within the school improvement offer. Officers agreed to confirm the funding source and clarify this in future communications, particularly in the context of upcoming de-delegation discussions

5. CAPITAL FUNDING FOR MAINTAINED SCHOOLS UPDATE

5.1 To consider a report from Paul Scothern, Service Manager Capital Commissioning, Health Education & SEND Commissioning, People – Children Directorate
For Information

5.2 Key points of discussion

5.2.1 The paper provided an overview of capital expenditure on maintained non-VA schools during the 2024/25 financial year outlining the various budget streams used to support capital works, including:

- Strategic maintenance, with over £2 million spent across schools.
- School Access Initiative, totalling over £211,000, primarily for adaptations to support individual pupils in mainstream settings.
- Minor works, with £128,000 committed, largely focused on safeguarding improvements such as fencing.
- School Organisation Capital and Admissions (SOCA) projects, with over £7 million committed since January 2023. These include feasibility studies and early-stage projects that may lead to larger capital investments.

5.2.2 The paper also highlighted the significant investment in SEND capital projects, with £40 million committed by Dorset Council and a further £28 million received from the Department for Education. Of this, £10.6 million was allocated to named projects following a successful bid. The total SEND capital programme now stands at £68 million.

5.2.3 Forum members welcomed the scale and direction of the investment, noting that it aligns with the broader strategy to increase local provision and reduce reliance on independent placements. Members emphasised the importance of ensuring that capital spend reflects areas of greatest need, particularly in relation to high-cost placements and travel.

5.2.4 There was a specific focus on post-16 provision, where members noted a lack of visibility in the current capital programme. Officers confirmed that early conversations are underway with Weymouth College and Kingston Maurward College, which may lead to future capital projects or expanded provision. It was noted that one of the previously approved DfE-funded projects had included £2 million for post-16 provision at Weymouth College, though this may now be spread across both Weymouth and Kingston Maurward colleges following the merger earlier this year

5.2.5 Members also raised concerns about the condition and suitability of buildings in maintained special schools. It was noted that many of these settings are operating in facilities that are not fit for purpose for pupils with

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complex needs. Forum members stressed the need for a strategic capital plan that includes investment in sensory spaces, changing facilities, and outdoor access, to ensure that local provision remains viable and inclusive.

5.2.6 Officers confirmed that the SEND capital strategy is currently under review and will be aligned with the wider SEND sufficiency strategy. Members welcomed this and asked that the needs of special schools be clearly reflected in future planning.

5.2.7 Forum also discussed the use of School Condition Allocation (SCA) funding. Officers clarified that Dorset Council uses SCA to sustain the SOCA programme, while funding the strategic maintenance programme separately to the same level. This approach ensures that both streams are maintained without overlap.

6. DEDICATED SCHOOLS' GRANT (DSG): A: OUTTURN FOR 2024-25 B: INDIVIDUAL SCHOOLS' BUDGET (ISB) OUTTURN FOR 2024-25

6.1 To consider a report from Lee House, Service Manager (Finance) – Children's Services, Finance and Commercial, Corporate Development Directorate and Vanessa Eddey, Team Manager – Schools, Finance & Support
For Information

6.2 Key points of discussion

6.2.1 The DSG outturn showed an overspend of £37.3 million, increasing the cumulative DSG deficit to £95.6 million. The High Needs Block continues to be the driver of the overspend, with a net pressure of £38.2 million, partially offset by underspends in other blocks.

6.2.2 Officers highlighted that the DSG deficit remains one of the most significant financial risks facing the local authority. While the statutory instrument allowing DSG deficits to be held outside of the council's reserves has been extended to March 2028, this was described as a temporary measure that does not resolve the underlying structural issues.

6.2.3 Forum noted that the Department for Education (DfE) has resumed Safety Valve discussions with Dorset Council. Unlike previous rounds, the current approach focuses on demonstrating that the authority is delivering best value in its use of High Needs funding, rather than simply achieving an in-year break-even position. Officers reported that a DfE advisor will visit Dorset in July to review progress and explore the authority's approach to managing demand and cost.

6.2.4 Members were reminded that Dorset's SEND services had recently received the highest possible rating in the ILACS inspection, and that the SEND Local Area Partnership inspection in 2024 had also been positive. Officers expressed cautious optimism that this would support constructive engagement with the DfE.

6.2.5 Forum discussed the continued growth in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), which have risen from approximately 1,400 in 2014 when they were converted from the original system of Statements of Special Educational Needs to over 4,400 today. Officers noted that this growth, combined with increasing complexity of need and rising placement costs, continues to place unsustainable pressure on the High Needs Block.

6.2.6 It was also noted that the average cost per placement had exceeded budgeted assumptions across all top-up bands, as shown in the appended

ACTION

data. Members acknowledged that both volume and price are contributing to the overspend.

6.2.7 Officers cautioned that the announcement of potential reforms to the SEND system may lead to a surge in EHCP requests, as families seek to secure support before any changes take effect.

6.2.8 Forum welcomed the update and noted the importance of continuing to invest in local provision and inclusive practice to reduce reliance on high-cost independent placements.

6.2.9 In relation to Individual Schools Budgets (ISBs), officers reported that overall school balances had increased to just over £8 million. This was attributed in part to cautious spending by schools in response to uncertainty around pay awards and future funding levels.

6.2.10 Forum discussed the importance of ensuring that funding is used to support pupils currently in school. Officers noted that some governing bodies are holding back on recruitment or investment due to concerns about future deficits, and encouraged schools to review contingency reserves regularly and align spending with school development priorities.

6.2.11 It was noted that while schools are required to plan over a three-year period, they should also be mindful of the principle that funding is for children in school today.

6.2.12 Forum also discussed the impact of falling rolls on school budgets. Officers acknowledged that pupil-led funding reductions can create significant challenges, particularly for smaller schools, and confirmed that the local authority continues to work with schools to manage these pressures.

6.2.13 A request was made for the next DSG outturn report to include a breakdown of the demographic profile of pupils in post-16 independent specialist provision, to support understanding of the nature of the overspend and inform future planning.

6.2.14 In related discussion, members noted that Westfield School had been required to reduce its post-16 cohort from 55 to 40 pupils in order to accommodate increasing demand from younger pupils with complex needs. This was cited as an example of the wider system pressures and the need for strategic investment in post-16 provision.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

7.1 Key points of discussion

7.1.1 Forum took the opportunity to formally thank Margaret Judd, Sufficiency and Funding Manager, for her 24 years of dedicated service to Dorset Council and to Schools Forum. Members expressed their appreciation for her expertise, professionalism, and long-standing commitment to supporting inclusive education across the county.

7.1.2 Forum wished her well in her retirement and acknowledged the significant contribution she has made to the work of the Forum and to the wider education community in Dorset.

8. Dates, Times and Venues for Future Meetings

Date	Venue	Type
2025/26		
Friday, 26th September 2025	Online (MS Teams)	Regular
Friday, 7th November 2025	In Person (County Hall, Dorchester)	Workshop
Friday, 16th January 2026	Online (MS Teams)	Regular
Friday, 27th February 2026	Online (MS Teams)	Regular
Friday, 27th March 2026	In Person (County Hall, Dorchester)	Workshop
Friday, 3rd July 2026	Online (MS Teams)	Regular

Date	Venue	Type
2026/27		
Friday, 25th September 2026	Online (MS Teams)	Regular
Friday, 6th November 2026	In Person (County Hall, Dorchester)	Workshop
Friday, 15th January 2027	Online (MS Teams)	Regular
Friday, 26th February 2027	Online (MS Teams)	Regular
Friday, 26th March 2027	In Person (County Hall, Dorchester)	Workshop
Friday, 2nd July 2027	Online (MS Teams)	Regular

ACTION

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Action No.	Meeting at which Action Originated	Minute	Actions (in bold GREY) Latest Update in Burgundy box KEY	Person Responsible	Expected Completion Date
85	05-Nov-21	2.3.2	**Provide updates on post-16 capacity** 27-Sep-25	Beth Whittaker	TBC
108	09-Jun-23	Workshop	**Gather data on the trend of AlternativeProvision (AP) and assess the suitability of utilising the Learning Centre for the 70% students in turnaround placements who have an extended stay beyond a single term.** 04-Jul-25	Dorset Officer	TBC
206	05-Jul-24	5.2.8	**Provide an update on short breaks and post 19 provision for those with complex SEND needs** TBC	Paul Dempsey	TBC
214	27-Sep-24	7.2.4	**Rework inclusion incentives paper** TBC	Margret Judd	TBC
218	17-Jan-25	1.3.1.1	**Review Voting arrangements for school improvement once new guidance is published** 07-Nov-25	Tom Easterbrook	TBC
220	28-Mar-25	2.2.9	**Provide Combe House Student Profile** 27-Sep-25	Beth Whittaker	TBC
221	28-Mar-25	8.1.1	**Provide list of ISP providers** 04-Jul-25	Beth Whittaker	TBC

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July 16, 2025

The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

Dear Secretary of State

f40 calling for an urgent review of the whole education funding system and investment and bold reform to SEND

I am writing to you on behalf of the f40 group, which represents 43 local authorities from across England that are campaigning for fairer education funding, along with major investment and reform to help solve the crisis in special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Many of our members are among the lowest funded for education in the country, so while all schools and local authorities are struggling to meet the needs of pupils in both mainstream and specialist provision right now, the challenges are far exacerbated for our members.

The current education system distributes funding unfairly, meaning some schools receive £5,000 less per pupil than others, whilst for High Needs, the lowest funded authority receives just £969 per pupil, in comparison to the highest funded area, which receives £3,600 per pupil.

We know you feel strongly that no child should be worth less than another – and all children should have access to the same resources and opportunities, regardless of where they live and their level of need. We urge you to carry out a review of the whole education funding system to ensure it is fair and needs-based.

We appreciate there will always be a difference in funding, based on specific school and pupil need and the difference in area living costs, but there can be no justification for the disparity we currently see.

f40 welcomes your commitment to solving the SEND crisis and is in support of the Government's direction of travel towards greater inclusive support in mainstream schools and a focus on Early Years and early intervention, with specialist provision for those with the greatest need.

We urge you to undertake a fundamental review of the current statutory SEND system – including the role and purpose of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) – to ensure it is totally focused on delivering the best outcomes for children and young people.

This should include steps to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy and costly adversarial processes, while maintaining strong protections for those with the highest levels of need.

We believe EHCPs can be a vital tool for those who need greater support. However, their use should be more clearly defined, with a renewed emphasis on early support and effective provision within mainstream settings wherever appropriate, so that more children can thrive without the need of a statutory plan.

We know that major reform will not be easy to achieve and will not happen overnight, causing anxiety to some in the process. It's important, therefore, that the reforms are preceded by full consultation, so everyone feels confident that better outcomes for children are at the heart of the changes.

We urge Government to be bold and brave in its reform of SEND, and to invest significant additional funding to ensure the reforms are embedded and successful, so a whole generation of children does not suffer any further.

Without investment to support greater inclusion and early intervention, we feel the rise in the number of pupils leaving mainstream for specialist and alternative provision will continue.

We are at a crucial moment in time, where we can make a huge difference to the life chances of our children, including those with the greatest needs. Tinkering around the edges will not be sufficient to turn the tide or address the existential financial risk faced by many local authorities, so we implore Government to take this opportunity to reset the system, focusing on early support and outcomes instead of process and red tape, to ensure it works for children, families, schools and local authorities.

We urge you to:

- Review the whole education funding system to ensure it is fair and needs-based
- Review the statutory SEND system – including the role and purpose of EHCPs
- Invest significantly more funding in mainstream, Early Years, and local specialist SEND provision
- Provide clarity on the agreed level of mainstream SEND support, along with accountability through Ofsted
- Equip schools with the right curriculum, resources, training and guidance to support inclusion
- Better regulate the independent specialist SEND sector to ensure value for money
- Commit to paying off the cumulative local authority SEND deficits – estimated to be £5bn by March 2026.

I have attached some materials from f40, which illustrate the unfairness in funding, and would welcome an opportunity to meet with you to discuss these issues further, and to work with the Department for Education to ensure we have a fair, inclusive education system for all.

Yours faithfully

Cllr Alex Dale
Chair of f40

CC Karen Westcott
Secretary of f40

Email: Karen@dtw.co.uk
Tel: 07545 210067

Department for Education

2025-0026717

Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister for School Standards

Councillor Alex Dale
Chair of f40
By email: karen@dtw.co.uk

11 August 2025

Dear Councillor Dale,

Thank you for your correspondence of 16 July, addressed to the Secretary of State, regarding special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provision. I am replying as the minister responsible for this policy area.

We are aware of the challenges in the SEND system, and we understand how urgently they need to be addressed. You will appreciate that these are complex issues that require a considered approach to deliver sustainable change. The department is committed to improving support for all children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, including pupils with ADHD, autism and other neurodiverse conditions.

We are working closely with experts on reforms, recently appointing a strategic advisor for SEND, who will play a key role in convening and engaging with the sector, including leaders, practitioners, children and families as we consider the future of SEND reform.

As part of our Plan for Change, we are determined to fix the SEND system and restore the trust of parents by ensuring schools have the tools to better identify and support children before issues escalate to crisis point. The government is committed to ensuring excellence for everyone, so that all children have the support, skills and opportunities they deserve.

Regarding the funding system, the funding announced at the Spending Review means a significant investment in the support available for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities within mainstream schools, as well as protecting effective support currently in place.

We are taking the time needed to review the high needs national funding formula that allocates funding for children and young people with complex special educational needs and disabilities, as well as other aspects of the operation of the high needs funding system. Our aim is to establish a fair education funding system that directs funding to where it is needed, and to enable improved support for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. This is in line with the reforms that we intend to set out in a white paper in the autumn.

We have also created an Expert Advisory Group (EAG) for Inclusion, led by Mr Tom Rees, that consists of experts across the SEND sector. They are advising the Secretary of State for Education and me on how to drive inclusive practice and how to improve mainstream education outcomes and experiences for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

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tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/contactus/dfe

This work forms part of the government's Opportunity Mission, which will break the unfair link between background and opportunity – starting with giving every child, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, the best start in life.

We want to ensure that, where required, education, health and care (EHC) plan assessments are progressed promptly and, if needed, plans are issued as quickly as possible so that children and young people can access the support they need. The department knows that local authorities (LAs) have seen an increase in the number of assessment requests and that more needs to be done to ensure that local areas deliver effective and timely services. This includes better communication with schools and families.

More widely, the department is committed to improving inclusivity and expertise in mainstream schools, as well as ensuring that special schools cater to those with the most complex needs. We will strengthen accountability on mainstream settings to be inclusive including through Ofsted, support the mainstream workforce to increase their SEND expertise, and encourage schools to set up resourced provision or SEN units to increase capacity in mainstream schools. We are actively working with parents and experts on solutions, including more early intervention to prevent needs from escalating and £740 million to encourage councils to create more specialist places in mainstream schools.

We want to drive a consistent and inclusive approach to supporting children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities to achieve and thrive in mainstream settings through early identification, effective support, high-quality teaching and effective allocation of resources.

In regard to inspection, effective inspection is important, to keep children safe and to help them reach and maintain high standards. Settings will be held to account for their support for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities through Ofsted, who are focusing on inclusion in their new approach to inspection.

We know that effective early identification and intervention is critical in improving the outcomes of children and young people with a special educational need or disability. An inclusive education system requires moving away from the current reliance on labels, plans and diagnoses before support materialises. In a reformed system, children and young people's needs will be assessed and identified early, so that evidence-based support can be provided at the earliest opportunity.

We know that many settings already have mechanisms in place to assess needs – we want to build on best practice and use further research to develop and support settings with evidence-based approaches for identifying needs early, whenever those needs may emerge, from the early years through to post-16.

Regarding the independent specialist sector, we know that many children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities struggle to find a suitable school placement that is close to their home and meets their needs. We recognise the important role independent special schools can play in the special educational needs and disabilities system, particularly in meeting low-incidence needs. However, independent special schools have higher costs than their maintained equivalent, and we need to ensure that placements are used appropriately and LAs should work with the sector as part of their strategic planning of SEND provision.

We recognise that local authorities are under pressure as a result of their spending on SEND. The departmental Spending Review settlement confirmed funding for reform of the current SEND system, details of which, alongside the government's intended approach to SEND reform, will be set out in a white paper in the autumn. We will work with the sector as essential and valued partners to deliver our shared mission and restore parents' trust.

I note your invitation to the Secretary of State to discuss matters further. As I am sure you will appreciate, diary pressures mean that the Secretary of State and I are unfortunately unable to accept at this time. Nevertheless, we will keep this in mind as we continue our work in this area.

Thank you for writing on this important matter.

Yours,

Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister for School Standards

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Dorset Council

Dorset Schools' Forum

Date of Meeting:	**26 September 2025**
Report Title:	**Update to the Scheme for Financing Schools**
Executive Director:	**Paul Dempsey, Executive Director for People - Children**
Corporate Director:	**Alice Deacon, Corporate Director for Commissioning and Partnerships**
Report Author: Title: Tel: Email:	Tom Easterbrook Schools' Forum Officer Schools, Finance & Support 01305 224567 tom.easterbrook@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk
Presenting Officer:	**Tom Easterbrook, Schools' Forum Officer Schools' Forum Officer Schools, Finance & Support**
Report Status:	**Public**
Reason for Submission to Schools' Forum:	**For APPROVAL** **Under Forum power/responsibility**: 1(e) Changes to the Scheme for Financing Schools
Recommendation(s):	That the maintained members of the Schools' Forum approve the updates to the Dorset Scheme for Financing Schools.
Reason for Recommendation(s):	To ensure the Council is compliant with latest statutory guidance and that the Dorset Scheme remains in line with Government best practice.
DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST	Schools' Forum members are reminded of their responsibility to make a declaration of interest in any agenda item in which they have an interest, to the Chair or the Clerk, preferably in advance of the meeting.

1. Executive Summary

Local authorities are required to publish schemes for financing schools setting out the financial relationship between them and the schools they maintain, to meet the provisions of Section 48 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, and Schedule 14 to that Act.

When making any changes to their schemes, they must consult all maintained schools in their area and then obtain the approval of the members of their schools' forum representing maintained schools, except in the case of presentational changes and changes known as 'directed revisions' requested by the Secretary of State. There are no directed revisions in this issue.

We last updated the scheme in July 2023 following approval from Forum, since then the DfE has issued updated guidance, so we are seeking approval for an updated scheme in the light of the new guidance.

We consulted maintained schools on three proposed changes to the scheme from 10 September 2025 – 18 September 2024. 10 out of 47 maintained schools responded.

The changes consulted on were:

•Section 4.2 has been updated to add requirement for schools to use the Dorset Council published chart of accounts for financial reporting. Introduced a prohibition on the use of internal trading codes to ensure data compatibility and integrity.
•Section 8.3 has been updated in line with the new regulations to ensure that the cost of an undisputed invoice for energy where a school has entered into an agreement with the Secretary of State for the supply of energy and failed to pay such an invoice school budget shares can be charged to recover the debt.

Overall, the response was Overwhelmingly positive with only one objection relating to the changes to section 8.3. A full response to this objection is provided below

Response to Consultation Feedback on Clause 8.3 – Energy Invoice Charging

Comment received:

"I would not agree to this as there may be circumstances that are preventing the payment of that invoice which could cause a detrimental effect to the school's finances. It would be better to consult with the school regarding the reason for non-payment."

Response:

We acknowledge the concern raised regarding the potential financial impact on schools and the importance of understanding the context behind any non-payment. The clause added to Section 8.3 reflects a requirement under Regulation 23 of the School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations, which permits local authorities to charge a school's budget share in cases where an undisputed energy invoice under an agreement with the Secretary of State remains unpaid.

This provision is intended to ensure that public funds are managed responsibly and that liabilities arising from national energy contracts are settled promptly. However, we agree that communication and transparency are essential. While the regulation allows for direct charging, in practice, the local authority will seek to engage with the school prior to any deduction to understand the reasons for non-payment and explore possible resolutions.

This approach aims to balance regulatory compliance with a fair and supportive process for schools.

2. Financial Implications

n/a

3. Climate Implications

n/a

4. Other implications

n/a

5. Risk Assessment

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:
Current Risk: low
Residual Risk: low

6. Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA)

n/a

7. Appendices

Appendix A: Dorset Scheme for Financing Schools (September 2026 version)

8. Background Papers

n/a

Footnote:

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.

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Policy Document
Children's Services' Education Services Team

Scheme for Financing Schools

September 2025

For further information contact
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Contents

1. Summary

1.1 About this document

This is the November 4 version of the Dorset Scheme for Financing Schools, (formerly known as the Scheme of Financial Management). It has been amended following guidance from the Secretary of State for Education and following consultation with all Dorset maintained schools to make the changes summarised in paragraph 1.5 below.

Local authorities are required to publish schemes for financing schools setting out the financial relationship between them and the schools they maintain, to meet the provisions of Section 48(4) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, and Schedule 14 paragraph 2A(2) to that Act.

When making any changes to their schemes, they are required to consult all maintained schools in their area and then obtain the approval of the members of their schools' forum representing maintained schools, except in the case of changes known as 'directed revisions' requested by the Secretary of State.

1.2 Directed revisions

The power of 'directed revision' is used by the government either to remove outdated provisions or insert new provisions to reflect latest legislation or policy. In this instance, local authorities are directed by the Department for Education to incorporate within, or remove from, their schemes specific wording and no consultation with maintained schools or approval of the Schools' Forum is necessary.

Before making a directed revision to schemes, the Secretary of State is required, by provisions in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, to consult the relevant local authorities and other interested parties.

1.3 Expiry or review date

This scheme is reviewed annually and updated as necessary.

1.4 Contact information for Dorset Schools' Forum members

This is available online should you wish to discuss any aspects of this Scheme with a member of the Schools' Forum.

1.5 Changes from the November 2024 version of this scheme

Following guidance from the Secretary of State the changes summarised below have been made to reflect current policy positions and changes in legislation.

Summary of changes:

- There are no new directed revisions in this issue.
- “the regulations” definition has been updated to the School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2025
- Section 4.2 has been updated to add requirement for schools to use the Dorset Council published chart of accounts for financial reporting. Introduced a prohibition on the use of internal trading codes to ensure data compatibility and integrity.
- Section 8.3 has been updated in line with the new regulations to ensure that the cost of an undisputed invoice for energy where a school has entered into an agreement with the Secretary of State for the supply of energy and failed to pay such an invoice school budget shares can be charged to recover the debt.

2. The outline scheme

The following references are made throughout this scheme:

- “the act” is the School Standards and Framework Act 1998
- “the authority” is Dorset Local Authority
- “the council” is Dorset Council
- “the regulations” are the School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2025

The regulations state that schemes must deal with the following matters:

- the carrying forward from one funding period to another of surpluses and deficits arising in relation to schools’ budget shares;
- amounts which may be charged against schools’ budget shares;
- amounts received by schools which may be retained by their governing bodies and the purposes for which such amounts may be used;
- the imposition, by or under the scheme, of conditions which must be complied with by schools in relation to the management of their delegated budgets and of sums made available to governing bodies by the authority which do not form part of delegated budgets, including conditions prescribing financial controls and procedures;
- terms on which services and facilities are provided by the authority for schools maintained by them;
- the payment of interest by or to the authority;
- the times at which amounts equal in total to the school’s budget share are to be made available to governing bodies and the proportion of the budget share to be made available at each such time;
- the virement between budget heads within the delegated budget;
- circumstances in which a local authority may delegate to the governing body the power to spend any part of the authority’s non-schools’ education budget or schools budget in addition to those set out in section 49(4)(a) to (c) of the 1998 act;
- the use of delegated budgets and of sums made available to a governing body by the local authority which do not form part of delegated budgets;
- borrowing by governing bodies;
- the banking arrangements that may be made by governing bodies;
- a statement as to the personal liability of governors in respect of schools’ budget shares having regard to section 50(7) of the 1998 act;
- a statement as to the allowances payable to governors of a school which does not have a delegated budget in accordance with the scheme made by the authority for the purposes of section 519 of the 1996 act;
- the keeping of a register of any business interests of the governors and the head teacher;

- the provision of information by and to the governing body;
- the maintenance of inventories of assets;
- plans of a governing body's expenditure;
- a statement as to the taxation of sums paid or received by a governing body;
- insurance;
- the use of delegated budgets by governing bodies to satisfy the authority's duties imposed by or under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974;
- the provision of legal advice to a governing body;
- funding for child protection issues;
- how complaints by persons working at a school or by school governors about financial management or financial propriety at the school will be dealt with and to whom such complaints should be made;
- expenditure incurred by a governing body in the exercise of the power conferred by section 27 of the 2002 act.

3. Introduction

3.1 The Funding Framework

The funding framework which replaced Local Management of Schools is set out in the legislative provisions in section 45 to 53 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

Under this legislation, local authorities determine for themselves the size of their Schools' Budget and their Non-Schools Education Budget, although at a minimum the LA must appropriate its entire Dedicated Schools Grant to their Schools' Budget.

The categories of expenditure which fall within the two budgets are prescribed under regulations made by the Secretary of State, but included within the two, taken together, is all expenditure, direct and indirect, on the Authority's maintained schools except for capital and certain miscellaneous items.

Local authorities may deduct funds from their Schools' Budget for purposes specified in regulations made by the Secretary of State under section 45A of the Act (the centrally retained expenditure).

The amounts to be deducted for these purposes are decided by the authority concerned, subject to any limits or conditions, including gaining the approval of the Schools' Forum or the Secretary of State in certain instances, as prescribed by the Secretary of State.

The balance of the Schools' Budget left after deduction of the centrally retained expenditure is termed the Individual Schools Budget (ISB). Expenditure items in the Non-Schools Education Budget must be retained centrally, although earmarked allocations may be made to schools.

Local authorities must distribute the ISB amongst their maintained schools using a formula which accords with regulations made by the Secretary of State, and enables the calculation of a budget share for each maintained school.

This budget share is then delegated to the governing body of the school concerned, unless the school is a new school which has not yet received a delegated budget, or the right to a delegated budget has been suspended in accordance with section 51 of the Act.

Upon approval of the Individual Schools Budget by the Authority and it being allocated in accordance with the formula, the Governors, or the Head teacher if authorised on their behalf, is empowered to incur expenditure for the purposes and up to the amount specified in the estimates as approved.

The financial controls within which delegation works are set out in a scheme made by the LA in accordance with section 48 of the Act and regulations made under that section. All proposals to revise the scheme must be submitted for consultation with all schools (both head teachers and governing bodies) and approved by the Schools' Forum, though the authority may apply to the Secretary of State for approval in the event of the Forum rejecting a proposal or approving it subject to modifications that are not acceptable to the authority.

Subject to any provision made by or under the scheme, governing bodies of schools may spend such amounts of their budget shares as they think fit for any purposes of their school[1]. They may also spend budget shares on any additional purposes prescribed by the Secretary of State in regulations made under section 50 of the Act.

Section 50 has been amended to provide that amounts spent by a governing body on providing community facilities or services under section 27 of the Education Act 2002 are treated as if they were amounts spent for the purposes of the school (section 50(3A) of the act).

Dorset LA may suspend a school's right to a delegated budget if the provisions of the Scheme for Financing Schools, or rules applied by the Scheme, have been substantially or persistently breached, or if the budget share has not been managed satisfactorily. A school's right to a delegated budget share may also be suspended for other reasons, under schedule17 to the Act. There is no right of appeal.

Each authority is obliged to publish each year a statement setting out details of its planned Schools' Budget and other expenditure on Children's Services, showing the amounts to be centrally retained and funding delegated to schools. The formula used to calculate the budget share for each school will be published by the LA separately from this Scheme.

The detailed publication requirements for financial statements are set out in directions issued by the Secretary of State.

A copy of each year's budget and outturn statement should be made easily accessible to all schools.

3.2 The role of the scheme

The scheme defines the financial relationship between the Authority and the maintained schools which it funds.

The requirements of the scheme relating to financial management and associated issues are binding on both the Authority and schools. They ensure compliance with statutory requirements, accounting and auditing standards and codes of practice which are established by the professional accounting bodies and shall apply to all staff employed at the school, including consultants.

Section 48(3) of the School Standards and Framework Act provides that where there is any inconsistency between the scheme and any other rules or regulations made by the LA relating to the funding or financial management of schools which they maintain, the terms of the scheme shall prevail.

3.3 Application of the scheme to the authority and maintained schools

The scheme applies to all community, nursery, special, voluntary, foundation (including trust), foundation special schools and PRUs maintained by the LA, whether they are situated in the area of the Authority or located elsewhere. It does not apply to schools situated in the LA's area which are maintained by another authority. Nor does it apply to academies. A list of schools to whom this scheme applies is published at Annex A to this scheme.

3.4 Publication of the scheme

A copy of the scheme and any subsequent revisions will be accessible to the public and supplied to the head teacher and governing body of each school covered by the scheme via the Dorset Council website by the date that any revisions come into force, together with a statement that the revised scheme comes into force on that date. It will also be available at LA offices if required.

3.5 Revision of the Scheme

Any proposed revisions to the scheme will be the subject of consultation with the governing body and head teacher of every school maintained by the authority before they are submitted to the Schools Forum for approval by members of the Forum representing maintained schools. Where the Schools' Forum does not approve them or approves them subject to modifications which are not acceptable to the Authority, the Authority may apply to the Secretary of State for approval.

It is also possible for the Secretary of State to make directed revisions to the scheme after consultation. Such revisions become part of the scheme from the date of the direction.

The Authority undertakes to provide schools with a summary of the responses to consultations on amendments to the Scheme via the Dorset Council website.

3.6 Delegation of powers to the head teacher or subcommittees of the governing body

Governing bodies are required to consider, within statutory limitations, the extent to which they wish to delegate any power granted to them by this Scheme to a subcommittee of governors or to the head teacher. These considerations should be undertaken annually and formally recorded in the minutes of the first formal meeting of the full governing body for that year.

It is recommended that governing bodies give head teachers delegated power to spend within budget headings set by the governing body, and that in turn, the head teacher formally sets out levels of delegation and financial limits for staff with budgetary and procurement responsibilities at local level. Expenditure should not be incurred where there is no budgetary provision, and contracts should not be agreed where Contract Procedure Rules have not been adhered to. The first formal budget plan of each financial year (as submitted to the LA in accordance with para 4.3) must be approved by the full governing body, and termly financial forecasts by the full governing body or a subcommittee thereof.

Provided a governing body has made provision for discharging its statutory duties in any financial year, it may vire funding between budget headings within the delegated budget share. The governing body may also approve virements to, but not from budgets earmarked by the Authority for specific purposes, and the Head Teacher may be authorised to vire between budget heads up to a maximum value approved by a resolution of the full governing body. Any virements authorised by the Head Teacher must be reported at the next meeting of the governing body.

When the head teacher deals with a matter arising from delegated functions and does so in accordance with this scheme, then they shall be deemed to have taken delegated action on behalf of the Governors. The governing body of a school may delegate any of its financial functions to a subcommittee or individual with the exception of:

a) setting the budget;
b) determining the terms of reference for subcommittees or individuals;
c) planning and conducting its affairs to remain solvent;
d) establishing proper arrangements for financial management and internal control of budgets;
e) providing such information as the LEA may reasonably require to enable it to ascertain that the governing body is able to fulfil its financial obligations;
f) ensuring that funding is used only for the purposes for which it was intended.

The head teacher is responsible to the governing body for the financial management of the school including:

g) the management of the school's finances at a strategic and operational level;
h) the management of effective systems of internal control;
i) preparation of income and expenditure estimates for approval by the governors as required by this Scheme;
j) ensuring that the governing body is provided with proper training, guidance and advice on financial matters;
k) ensuring that accounts are prepared in a proper manner as specified by the LA.

3.7 Maintenance of Schools

The Local Authority is responsible for maintaining the schools covered by the Scheme, and this includes the duty of defraying all the expenses of maintaining them (except in the case of a voluntary school where some of the expenses are, by statute, payable by the governing body). Part of the way an authority maintains schools is through the funding system put in place under Sections 45 to 53 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

4. Financial controls

4.1 General procedures

Application of financial controls to schools

In managing their delegated budgets schools must abide by the Authority's requirements on financial controls and monitoring as set out in the scheme and in detailed publications referred to in the scheme but outside and compatible with it. These additional publications include the Dorset Council Contract Procedure Rules.

Where a school has delegated powers concerning payment it is required to comply with all relevant legislation (e.g. tax and national insurance).

Provision of financial information and reports

Schools are required to provide the Authority with details of anticipated and actual expenditure and income, in a form and at times to be determined by the Authority and notified to schools at appropriate times (see section 4.3). Requirements may vary according to the financial system and banking arrangements adopted by the school.

Reports may not be required more often than once every three months except where:

a) the Authority has notified the school in writing that in its view the schools financial position requires more frequent submission;
b) the school is in its first year of operation;
c) returns are for the purpose of tax or banking reconciliation;
d) schools are part of an on-line accounting system operated by the LA.

Payment of salaries and payment of bills

Schools are required to comply with the administrative procedures for payment of salaries and invoices published separately by the Local Authority. Where payments are not from central systems, schools will need to provide such additional information as is needed for statutory returns and appropriate monitoring.

Control of assets

Schools are required to maintain an inventory of moveable, non-capital assets, excepting goods sold generally as a normal day to day school activity, and must follow the Authority's procedure for the sale or disposal of surplus goods.

Moveable property surplus to the school's requirements must not be disposed of except by sale on the authority of the governors. The sale must normally be by public auction or competitive tender but, where neither is appropriate, the governors must adopt the method which best serves the interests of the school. Where the sale is to a governor or an employee of the school or the Authority, the written authority of the Chief Executive must first be obtained.

Schools may determine their own arrangements for keeping a register of assets worth less than £1,000. This should include anything that is portable and attractive, such as a camera.

The governing body must ensure that all inventories are reviewed at least once a year and all discrepancies reported to the governing body. A record of all items written off must be maintained.

Each governing body is responsible for the custody and control, and maintaining proper security arrangements for buildings, stock, equipment, cash, personnel and financial records under its control. All moveable property of the school shall as far as practical be marked as school property.

If it appears to the Head Teacher that there are deficiencies of equipment or stores, a report must be made immediately to the governors and the Chief Financial Officer, who may authorise the items to be written off. The Governors must maintain a record of all items written off. Where it is suspected that money or property of the school has been stolen or otherwise misappropriated, or that a financial irregularity has occurred see paragraph 4.17 below.

Accounting policies, including end of year procedures

Schools are required to abide by the Authority's accounting policies and procedures, including end-of-year procedures which will be issued annually to schools.

Writing off debts

Debts owing to schools may be written off in accordance with paragraph 7.6 below.

4.2 Basis of accounting and Financial Systems

Schools are required to report to the Authority on a cash basis with year-end accruals being made separately for outstanding debtors and creditors.

Schools must use the Dorset Council published chart of accounts to ensure that financial data can be processed correctly and accurately. This requirement is essential for consistency across the Authority's financial reporting. The use of internal trading codes is strictly prohibited, as these interfere with the integrity and compatibility of submitted data.

Schools are free to operate their own internal system but are required to report to the Authority in the form specified above.

Schools are required to maintain a financial system that integrates with Dorset Council finance systems so that it successfully complies with Making Tax Digital legislation in the Finance (No.2) Act 2017. The local authority maintains a list of supported systems that it encourages schools to use.

Use of alternative financial systems are permitted, however, all costs incurred in building an interface that complies with Making Tax Digital legislation will be borne solely by the school.

Any change to a school's financial system must be notified in writing to the local authority a minimum of 12 months before the scheduled change. Schools are required to run the new financial system alongside previous systems to allow for a period of successful transition.

4.3 Submission of budget plans and financial forecasts

Each school is required to submit budget plans and financial forecasts in accordance with the timetable below.

Submission Date	Financial Return	Reason Required
1 May, or 28 days after budget data has been made available to schools by the LA, whichever date is the later.	3-year budget plan including income and expenditure for the current financial year with explanatory notes on the assumptions underpinning the budget, plus budget plans for the following two financial years.	To provide a budget in the financial accounts and to show that the Governing Body can meet expenditure requirements within the resources available to them, or their best estimate of the resources available to them.
30 June, 30 November, 28 February	Forecast income and expenditure to the end of the year in comparison with the budget plan, with explanatory notes on the assumptions underpinning those projections.	To show that the budget set at the beginning of the year is being met and to allow the LA to discuss spending with the school where it appears not to be as shown in the budget, or where it looks as if the budget will end up in deficit.

The Local Authority will consider the extent to which 3-year budget plans may be used for more than just confirming schools are undertaking effective financial planning, for example, as evidence to support the LA's assessment of schools' financial value standards or to support the LA's balance control mechanism, and will confirm the intended use to schools annually in the budget setting letter issued in February each year.

The format of financial returns will be compatible with the Consistent Financial Reporting framework and may vary from year to year according to the requirements of the Authority. Detailed requirements are included in the statements sent out annually for completion and issued separately to this scheme.

The governing body must take the following into account when considering their budget proposals:

a) the progress of spending against budget in the current year;

b) known and estimated future commitments including inflation, which may be either external or internal in origin;

c) actual and projected pupil numbers;

d) likely changes in the allocation formula or the school's budget share;

e) priorities set out in the School's Development Plan;

f) the full year impact of any proposals implemented after the start of the financial year;

g) estimated surpluses/deficits at the previous 31 March;

h) any agreed repayment schedule.

The budgeted spend for any given year may not exceed the delegated budget for the school for that year plus or minus any accumulated surplus or deficit. This requirement may only be waived in accordance with the provisions of paragraphs 6.9, 6.10 of this Scheme.

The LA will make available to schools such information as it holds on income and expenditure by schools which is necessary for efficient planning by them. This information will be made available in the budget guidance issued each year by the Schools Accountancy Support Team.

4.4 School resource management

Schools must seek to achieve effective management of resources and value for money, to optimise the use of their resources and to invest in teaching and learning, taking into account the Authority's purchasing, tendering and contracting requirements.

It is for heads and governors to determine at school level how to optimise the use of resources and maximise value for money. There are significant variations in effective management of resources between similar schools, and so it is important for schools to review their current expenditure, compare it to other schools and think about how to make improvements.

4.5 Virement

After discharging its statutory duties, the governing body has the power to vire between budget headings in the expenditure of their budget shares. In so doing the governing body must take into account the long-term effects of those virements.

The head teacher may be authorised to vire between budget headings but such virements must be approved by a resolution of the full governing body and be in accordance with this Scheme.

4.6 Audit: General

All schools covered by this Scheme are subject to the Authority's audit regime, which covers both internal and external audit. The Authority will determine the audit regime on an annual basis and may require different arrangements for those having external bank accounts than those schools having bank accounts that are sub-accounts of the Local Authority.

Schools are required to:

a) provide access to records, documents and correspondence to both internal and external auditors;

b) allow access for audit purposes at all reasonable times to any premises or land owned by the Council, or the governing body of an Aided or Foundation school maintained by the LA;

c) allow the copying and/or removal of prime documents for audit purposes.

4.7 Separate external audits

A governing body may use funds from the school's budget share to fund external audits. Such audits will be separate and in addition to any audit requirements of the Authority and are entirely at the discretion of the governing body. No funds will be delegated specifically for this purpose.

4.8 Audit of voluntary and private funds

Each school must retain valid audit certificates in respect of any voluntary and private funds it holds. Schools should provide the audit certificates to the local authority on request. Such funds include those held by trading organisations controlled by the school. Audit of Community Facilities funding is separately covered in section 15.6.

The document "Voluntary Fund Guidance for Schools & Governors" states that "the voluntary fund should be regarded as public money and accounted and treated as such. It is not a private discretionary fund". The purpose of requesting the audit certificates is to allow the local authority to satisfy itself that public funds are not being misused.

A school refusing to provide audit certificates to the local authority as required by this scheme is in breach of the scheme and the authority can take action on that basis.

4.9 Register of business interests

The governing body of each school must have a register listing the business interests of each member of the governing body and the head teacher. This register must also include:

- the business interests of the immediate family of members of the governing body and the head teacher;
- details of any other educational establishments they govern;

- any relationships between school staff and members of the governing body.

This register must be maintained and updated regularly, be subject to minuted annual review, be available for inspection by governors, staff, parents and the LA, and be published on a publicly accessible website. It must also comply with any more detailed guidance on the maintenance of such a register issued by the authority.

4.10 Purchasing, tendering and contracting requirements

Schools must abide by the Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Regulations within the Constitution of Dorset Council as applied to schools. This duty includes the requirement to assess in advance, where relevant, the health and safety competence of contractors, taking account of the LA's separately published policies and procedures.

All members of staff authorised to issue official orders must be familiar with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.

Orders for the supply of goods or services shall be issued only when authority exists to incur that expenditure. They shall be in writing on serially numbered forms except that, in an emergency, orders may be given orally, but the order shall be confirmed in writing on the appropriate order form.

Orders may not be raised on behalf of or for the benefit of private individuals including members of staff, or organisations which are not part of the Council.

The requirement to abide by the Authority's Contract Procedure Rules applies in all cases except where this would require schools to:

a) do anything incompatible with any provisions of this scheme, or any statutory provision;

b) seek LA officer countersignature for any contracts for goods or services for a value below £60,000 in any one year;

c) select suppliers only from an approved list;

d) seek fewer than three tenders or quotations in respect of any contract with a value exceeding £10,000 in any one year, subject to the specific listed exceptions in section 2 of the Authority's Contract Procedure Rules.

Notwithstanding (a) – (d) above, the type of procurement process, including the minimum number of quotes or tender that should be sought or invited dependent on the total value over the life of the contract, is set out within the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.

The fact that an authority contract has been let in accordance with procurement procedures does not in itself make it possible to bind a school into being part of that contract. For the purposes of the procurement directives schools are viewed as discrete contracting authorities.

Schools may seek advice on a range of compliantly procured deals via Buying for schools.

Any payment from a school's delegated budget to a self-employed person who is engaged specifically to provide an education service e.g. tuition, demonstration or performance must be made through the payroll system and not by cheque or cash. This is to ensure that the requirements of HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) are adhered to (see 9.2 below).

4.11 Application of contracts to schools

Schools have the right to opt out of Local Authority arranged contracts.

Although governing bodies are empowered under paragraph 3 of Schedule 1 of the Education Act 2002 to enter into contracts, in most cases they do so on behalf of the LA as maintainer of the school and owner of the funds in the budget share. On occasions, the governing body may enter into contracts on its own behalf. In these circumstances the governing body will have clear statutory obligations e.g. the employment of staff in aided or foundation schools.

4.12 Central funds and earmarking

The Authority is authorised to make sums available to schools from central funds in the form of allocations which are additional to and separate from a school's budget share.

Such allocations, for example, sums for SEN or other initiatives funded from the central expenditure of an authority's Schools Budget or other authority budget should be subject to conditions setting out the purpose or purposes for which the funds may be used. These conditions will normally preclude virement and prohibit their inclusion in the school's budget share.

Schools will be required to demonstrate that funds allocated for a specific purpose have been spent appropriately and in accordance with specified conditions and have not been vired into the school budget share.

The Authority may require earmarked funds to be returned to the LA if not spent in the period for which they were intended.

The LA is specifically prohibited from making any deduction in respect of interest costs to the authority, from advances made in respect of earmarked centrally provided funds that have been devolved to schools.

4.13 Spending for the purposes of the school

Section 50(3) of the SSAF Act 1998 allows governing bodies to spend budget shares for the purposes of the school subject to regulations made by the Secretary of State and any provisions of this scheme. By virtue of Section 50 (3A) amounts spent by governing bodies on community facilities or services under section 27 of the Education Act 2002 will be treated as if spent for any purposes of the school.

Section 50(3)(b) of the SSAF Act 1998 also provides for the Secretary of State to determine additional purposes for which spending of the budget share may occur. For example, under the School Budget Shares (Prescribed Purposes)(England) Regulations 2002, which have been amended by the School Budget Shares (Prescribed Purposes)(England)(Amendment) Regulations 2010 schools are permitted to spend their budgets on pupils who are on the roll of other maintained schools or academies.

Schools must ensure that all payments to staff are in line with centrally agreed terms and conditions namely, the School Teachers Pay and Conditions Document for teaching staff, and the local authority Green Book (including amendments by the authority) for school support staff. The governing body has no discretion to make payments to staff outside of these arrangements.

4.14 Capital spending from budget shares

To help meet responsibilities with the School Premises (England) Regulations 2012, the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992, the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, the Equality Act 2010, and the Building Regulations 2010,Governing bodies are permitted to use their budget share to meet the cost of capital expenditure on school premises. This includes expenditure by a governing body of a voluntary aided school on work which is their responsibility under paragraph 3 of Schedule 3 of the SSAF Act 1998. The governing body of a school must notify the Authority of any capital expenditure in excess of £15,000 in any one financial year and is required to take account of any advice from the Director of Children's Services as to the merits of the proposed expenditure. If the premises are owned by the LA or the school has voluntary controlled status, then the governing body must obtain the permission of the LA before commencing any capital work, but such consent can only be withheld on health and safety grounds.

4.15 Notice of Concern

The LA may issue a notice of concern to the governing body of any school it maintains where, in the opinion of the Chief Finance Officer and the Director of Children's Services, the school has failed to comply with any provisions of the scheme, or where actions need to be taken to safeguard the financial position of the local authority or the school.

Such a notice will set out the reasons and evidence for it being made and may place on the governing body restrictions, limitations or prohibitions in relation to the management of funds delegated to it.

These may include:

a) insisting that relevant staff undertake appropriate training to address any identified weaknesses in the financial management of the school;

b) insisting that an appropriately trained/qualified person chairs the finance committee of the governing body;

c) placing more stringent restrictions or conditions on the day to day financial management of a school than the scheme requires for all schools – such as the provision of monthly accounts to the local authority;

d) insisting on regular financial monitoring meetings at the school attended by local authority officers;

e) requiring a governing body to buy into a local authority's financial management systems;

f) imposing restrictions or limitations on the manner in which a school manages extended school activity funded from within its delegated budget share – for example by requiring a school to submit income projections and/or financial monitoring reports on such activities; and

g) requiring a school to return to using the Dorset Council banking arrangements.

The notice will clearly state what these requirements are and the way in which and the time by which such requirements must be complied with in order for the notice to be withdrawn. It will also state the actions that the authority may take where the governing body does not comply with the notice.

4.16 Schools Financial Value Standard (SFVS)

All local authority maintained schools (including nursery schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) that have a delegated budget) must demonstrate compliance with the SFVS and complete the assessment form on an annual basis. It is for the school to determine at what time in the year they wish to complete the form.

Governors must demonstrate compliance through the submission of the SFVS assessment form signed by the Chair of Governors. The form must include a summary of remedial actions with a clear timetable, ensuring that each action has a specified deadline and an agreed owner. Governors must monitor the progress of these actions to ensure that all actions are cleared within specified deadlines.

All maintained schools with a delegated budget must submit the form to the Local Authority before the end of the financial year.

The Chief Financial Officer will sign a declaration each year assuring the Education and Skills Funding Agency that the Local Authority has a system of audit for schools in place which gives adequate assurance over their standards of financial management and the regularity and propriety of their spending, and remedies any shortfalls. If requested, the LA will provide the names of schools not meeting the standard to the ESFA.

4.17 Fraud

All schools must have a robust system of controls to safeguard themselves against fraudulent or improper use of public money and assets.

The governing body and head teacher must inform all staff of school policies and procedures related to fraud and theft, the controls in place to prevent them, and the consequences of breaching those controls. This information must also be included in induction for new school staff and governors.

Where it is suspected that money or property of the school has been stolen or otherwise misappropriated, or that a financial irregularity has occurred, the Head Teacher must immediately report the matter to the Chief Financial Officer and the Director for Children's Services.

5. Instalments of the budget share and banking arrangement

5.1 Frequency of instalments

The Authority will make available budget share instalments, on a monthly basis to schools which request it, provided that the request is made by December 31st prior to the start of the relevant financial year.

A non-bank account school may draw on its entire budget share from the start of the financial year.

For schools that opt to take their full budget share in cash, instalments will be made available on a monthly basis and will be paid by the Banks' Automated Credit System (BACS) to schools on or shortly before the 28th day of each month.

For the purposes of this section, budget share includes any place-led funding for special schools or pupil referral units. Top up payments for pupils with high needs will be made on a monthly basis unless alternative arrangements have been agreed with the provider.

5.2 Proportion of budget share payable at each instalment

This applies only to schools that have chosen to receive their funding in cash.

The Authority will make funds available to schools as set out in the table below.

Date	Proportion of total budget share
First banking day of April	1/36
Each month end from April to February	1/12
End March	1/18

Where schools have signed up in Nexus to receive Dorset Council annual support services by 31st March in any year and have been charged a one off fee up front for those services at the beginning of the year, an equivalent amount of cash will be made available on the first banking day of April in addition to the 1/36 proportion of their total budget share, and month end instalments from April to February will be reduced accordingly.

5.3 Interest Clawback

The Education budget set each year may include an estimate of interest to be earned through the temporary investment of unspent cash.

When the budget is distributed each school may receive within its delegated budget an element of interest from the total budget for education.

Where schools receive their budget shares into local accounts on a monthly basis interest is lost by the Council. In order not to disadvantage all schools for this loss of interest the Authority may deduct from each school's budget an amount equal to their share of the estimated loss of interest that could be incurred by the LA as a result of these arrangements. Schools remaining within the Council's banking arrangements can expect to be paid back this top-slice from the LA.

Details of the deduction mechanism will be published prior to its implementation.

5.4 Interest on late budget share payments

The LA may add interest to any late payments of budget share instalments where the reason for late payment is LA error. The interest rate and method of calculation will be the same as that used to clawback interest.

5.5 Budget shares for closing schools

Where approval for discontinuation of a school has been obtained, its budget share may be made available until closure on a monthly basis net of estimated pay costs, irrespective of the method previously used by the Authority.

5.6 Bank and building society accounts

Subject to the conditions set out below, schools may choose to operate their own bank or building society accounts into which their budget share instalments (as determined by other provisions) will be paid. Where schools have such accounts they will be allowed to retain all interest payable on the account unless they choose to have an account within an LA contract which makes other provision. Alternatively, they may choose to operate a subsidiary account within the Local Authority's accounts. The Chief Financial Officer is responsible for making arrangements with the Council's bankers for the operation of subsidiary accounts.

Conditions relating to the operation of bank or building society accounts:

a) external accounts must always operate in surplus unless a deficit has been authorised in accordance with the provisions of paragraphs 6.9 or 6.10 of this scheme or unless borrowing is expressly authorised by the Secretary of State. The Authority must be formally consulted before any application to borrow is made to the Secretary of State;

b) subject to © below, schools must give the period of notice specified in paragraph 5.1 of an intention to operate an external bank or building society account;

c) the Authority must give written confirmation that it has assured itself of the financial standing of any bank or building society selected by a school before an account is opened by the school;

d) the procedure for the operation of bank accounts must be in accordance with any instructions issued by the Chief Financial Officer.

5.7 Restrictions on accounts

Accounts held by schools for budget share purposes may be held in the name of the school rather than the authority. Funds paid to the school by Dorset LA and held in external accounts remain LA property until spent (s.49(5) of the SSFA 1998) and are subject to the conditions of this scheme. If the school operates an external account for budget share purposes and the account is held in the name of the school, the account mandate must provide that the LA is the owner of the funds in the account; that it is entitled to receive statements, and that it can take control of the account if the school's right to a delegated budget is suspended by the LA.

The Authority may negotiate arrangements with certain banks whereby the accounts are in the name of the Authority but specific to each school, and offer such arrangements to schools.

There are no restrictions on the use of direct debits or standing orders for a bank account operated by a school, except where the account is part of an authority contract.

5.8 Borrowing by Schools

Governing bodies may only borrow money), with the written permission of the Secretary of State. Schools should consult the Authority before making an application to borrow money to the Secretary of State and must inform the Authority of the outcome of such an application. The Secretary of State's general position is that schools will only be granted permission in exceptional circumstances, although they may, from time to time, introduce limited schemes to meet broader policy objectives. Schools may use any such schemes which the Secretary of State has said are available to schools without obtaining specific approval.

Schools are not permitted to use credit cards or overdrafts as these are regarded as borrowing. However, the Authority encourages the use of Government Procurement Cards (P-cards) by schools as these can reduce transaction costs and can enable schools to benefit from significant discounts. They are also a useful means of facilitating electronic purchases. P-cards must be paid off in full each month by direct debit, and include an LA officer as account manager.

This provision does not apply to loan schemes run by the Authority (see section 6.10 below) or to borrowing by Trustees and Foundations, where borrowing, as private bodies, makes no impact on Government accounts. Debts incurred by Trustees and Foundations may not be serviced directly from the delegated budget, but schools may agree charges for services which the Trustees or Foundation are able to provide as direct consequences of their own borrowing provided that acceptance of such charges does not contravene the Authority's Scheme of Financial Management or Contract Procedure Rules. Governing bodies do not act as agents of the authority when repaying loans.

The introduction of IFRS16 for local authorities from 1 April 2024 ends the distinction between operating and finance leases at maintained schools for accounting purposes. Under the Education Act 2002, all leases will be classed as borrowing and will require the Secretary of State for Education's consent.

The Secretary of State has, however, agreed to provide blanket consent to a range of the most common leasing activities, as set out in the IFRS16 Maintained Schools Finance Lease Class Consent 2024. Leases not included in this Order will still require the written consent of the Secretary of State, and it remains the general position that schools will only be granted permission for other types of borrowing in exceptional circumstances. From time to time, however, the Secretary of State may introduce limited schemes to meet broader policy objectives.

6. The treatment of surplus and deficit balances arising in relation to budget shares

6.1 Right to carry forward surplus balances

Each school is allowed to carry forward from one financial year to the next any shortfall in expenditure relative to the school's budget share for the year plus or minus any balance brought forward from the previous year, subject to the following restrictions:

a) the authority shall calculate by 30 June each year the surplus balance, if any, held by each school as at the preceding 31 March. For this purpose the balance will be the recurrent balance as defined in the Consistent Financial Reporting Framework;

b) if the surplus balance is a sum greater than whichever is the greater of 5% of the previous year's budget share (secondary schools) or 8% (primary and special schools, and pupil referral units), or £30,000 (where that is greater than either percentage threshold) then the Authority may deduct from the current year's budget share an amount equal to the excess.

Funds deriving from sources other than the Authority will be taken into account in this calculation if paid into the budget share account of the school, whether under provisions in this scheme or otherwise.

Funds held in relation to a school's exercise of powers under s.27 of the Education Act 2002 (community facilities) will be taken into account.

The total of any amounts deducted from schools' budget shares by the Authority under this provision are to be applied to the Schools Budget of the Authority.

Each school's surplus balance at 1 April is equal to that at 31 March of the preceding financial year.

Payment on account of 90% of balances at 31 March will be made to schools choosing to open bank accounts with approved external providers into which their budget share will be paid for the first time in April. This balance will be adjusted by 31 July in the subsequent financial year. Any interest due on the outstanding amount will be calculated at the rate currently provided under the Council's banking arrangements from 1 April up to that date.

6.2 Controls on surplus balances

The Authority retains the right to a mechanism to control surplus balances by clawing back excess surpluses in accordance with 6.1 above where there is no agreement with the LA over their proposed use.

Schools are required to comment to the Director of Children's Services, on the proposed use of excess surplus balances as follows:

<u>Primary and special schools, and pupil referral units:</u>
Where balances are in excess of 8% of the total delegated budget or £30,000 (where that is greater), for an individual school for the financial year in question.

Secondary schools:
Where balances are in excess of 5% of the total delegated budget or £30,000 (where that is greater) for an individual school for the financial year in question.

Comments must be subject to a formal minute by the Governing Body, made in writing and be submitted when the final balance for the school is known. Schools will be asked to demonstrate how the planned use of excess surpluses will be linked to the School Development Plan and 3 year budget plans. The Authority will consider these proposals and determine any clawback of excess surplus balances from schools.

For the purposes of determining the percentage threshold for excess surplus the total delegated budget will comprise:

Primary & secondary schools:
all grant funding paid to the school by the LA, excluding funding from the High Needs Block except place and top up funding for pupils in special units.

Special schools:
all grant funding paid to the school by the LA, excluding funding from the High Needs Block except place and top up funding.

Pupil Referral Units:
all grant funding paid to the school by the LA (including any funding recouped from other schools or academies for dual registered or excluded students) and excluding funding from the High Needs Block except place and top up funding.

6.3 Interest on balances

Schools whose bank account is within the Dorset Council banking arrangements may be credited or charged with interest on the difference between their budget to date and spending to date, including any balances carried forward. This will be reviewed annually in the light of interest rates, and the basis of the calculation, detailed in separate guidance issued at the time as appropriate. The LA reserves the right not to pay interest where schools do not meet the timetables for submission of financial returns required by the Local Authority.

6.4 Obligation to carry forward deficit balances

Schools with budget deficits will have these carried forward. These will be a first charge on the delegated budget share of the school for the following financial year.

Any school to which this scheme applies, and which is operating a deficit on 31 March will have that deficit carried forward to 1 April of the following financial year.

The Authority will require all schools with deficit budgets on 31 March to schedule repayments from the following year's budget share.

6.5 Planning for deficit budgets

Schools may not run or plan to run a deficit budget, except where they have a licensed recovery plan in place, and must notify the Local Authority immediately if they become aware of any unplanned deficit, or risk thereof, so that an agreed recovery plan can be put in place where necessary (see section 6.9 below).

6.6 Charging of interest on deficit balances

The LA may charge interest on all deficit balances operated by maintained schools.

Where they are operating within Dorset Council's banking arrangements and the LA is charging interest on deficit balances, schools with budget deficits or loans under the provisions of paragraphs 6.9 and 6.10 will be charged interest at a rate related to the Bank of England base rate. The initial rate and any change in the relationship with base rate will be notified separately to schools, but it will not be more than 1% above base rate. Interest will be calculated on a monthly basis on the average balance relating to each school during that month.

6.7 Writing off deficits

The Authority is not permitted to write off the deficit balance of any school.

However, the LA may give assistance towards the elimination of a deficit balance through the allocation of a cash sum from within the Schools' Budget (from a centrally held budget specified for the purpose of expenditure on special schools and pupil referral units in financial difficulty or, in respect of mainstream maintained schools, from a de-delegated contingency budget where this has been agreed by the Schools Forum).

6.8 Balances of opening, closing and replacement schools

Where a school opens or closes during a financial year, it will have its budget share calculated on a pro-rata basis for the school terms that it operates.

Where a school opens or is replaced it may receive a payment in addition to its delegated budget for the financial year in question in respect of revenue based setting up costs as calculated by the Authority in accordance with the Pupil Growth Policy published separately from this Scheme.

Any balance of a closing school (whether surplus or deficit) reverts to the authority, other than where a school converts to academy status under section 4(1)(a) of the Academies Act 2010.

Where in the funding period, a school has been established or is subject to a prescribed alteration as a result of the closure of a school, a local authority may add an amount to the budget share of the new or enlarged school to reflect all or part of the unspent budget share (including any surplus carried over from previous funding periods) of the closing school for the funding period in which it closes.

6.9 Licensed deficits

The Authority will work with schools currently in deficit to agree a recovery plan to repay that deficit in line with the procedures of the Authority's Financial Efficiency in Schools Policy (normally within a 3 year period).

In circumstances where a school requires a budget share advance in order not to be to be overdrawn at their bank, this should be treated as a cash advance and not a loan. This will have no effect on the school's budget and outturn statements.

6.10 Loan Schemes

The Authority may exceptionally operate a loan scheme in agreement with individual schools. However, loans will only be used to assist schools in spreading the cost over more than one year of large one-off individual items of a capital nature that have a benefit to the school lasting more than one financial or academic year.

Loans will not be used as a means of funding a deficit that has arisen because a school's recurrent costs exceed its current income.

If loans are made to fund a deficit and a school subsequently converts to academy status, the Secretary of State will consider using the power under paragraph 13(4)(d) of Schedule 1 to the Academies Act 2010 to make a direction to the effect that such a loan does not transfer, either in full or part, to the new Academy school.

Credit union approach

If schools wish to group together to use externally held balances to loan funds through a credit union type of operation the Authority must be satisfied that these externally held balances are sufficient to support such a scheme. The Authority will therefore require audit certification proving that such funds are available and must give written authorisation for such schemes to operate. The Authority will have to take account of the impact on other arrangements for licensed deficits and loans before giving authorisation to such schools.

7. Income

7.1 Income from lettings

Schools are allowed to retain income from the letting of school premises which would otherwise accrue to the LA, subject to any alternative provisions arising from any joint-use or Private Finance Initiative (PFI) agreement.

Income from lettings should not be paid into voluntary or private funds held by the school. However, where land is held by a charitable trust, it will be for the school's trustees to determine the use of any income generated by the land.

Schools may cross-subsidise lettings for community and voluntary use with income from other lettings provided the governing body is satisfied that this will not interfere to a significant extent with the performance of any duties imposed on them by the Education Acts, including the requirement to conduct the school with a view to promoting high standards of educational achievement.

Schools are required to have regard to any advice and guidance issued by the LA as to the use of the school premises, as permitted under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 for various categories of schools.

7.2 Income from fees and charges

Schools are permitted to retain income from fees and charges except where a service is provided by the LA from centrally retained funds.

In setting their fees and charges schools are required to have regard to any policy statements on charging and remission of charges for school activities produced by the Authority. Income from boarding charges is collected on behalf of the authority and should not exceed that needed to provide board and lodging for the pupils concerned.

All income scales for the purposes of assessing amounts due to, or entitlement to benefits from, the school shall be determined by the governors having regard to LA policy and guidelines.

7.3 Income from fund-raising activities

Schools are permitted to retain all income from fund-raising activities.

7.4 Income from the sale of assets

Schools are permitted to retain the proceeds from the sale of assets except where the asset was purchased from non-delegated funds in which case it is for the Authority to decide whether the school should retain the proceeds. Schools are not allowed to retain income from the sale of land or buildings that form part of the school premises and are owned by Dorset Council. Any retention of funds from the sale of land assets is subject to the consent of the Secretary of State, and any conditions the Secretary of State may attach to that consent relating to use of proceeds.

The retention of proceeds of sale for premises not owned by the local authority will not be a matter for the scheme.

7.5 Collection of income

Schools must have regard to advice or guidance issued by the LA.

The Governors may remit in advance, all or part of any charges made for chargeable activities from its delegated budget. Once a charge has been raised, no debtor shall be excused a payment due, other than with the approval of the governing body or the head teacher where power of approval to write off has been delegated. The school will maintain a record of such write offs, which will be available for inspection by the Local Authority.

7.6 Purposes for which income may be used

Income from the sale of assets purchased with delegated funds may only be spent for the purposes of the school.

7.7 Conditional gifts or grants greater than £5,000

The governors must provide the Director for Children's Services and the Chief Financial Officer, with full details of any conditional gift or grant greater than £5,000, before any such gift or grant is accepted.

8. The charging of school budget shares

8.1 General provision

The budget share of a school may be charged by the LA without the consent of the governing body only in the circumstances set out in 8.3 below.

Dorset LA will consult schools on the intention to so charge, the basis of the calculation of such charge and inform schools when such a charge has been made. Whenever possible, prior advice of the charge will be given to the governing body. Such charge shall normally only be made as a last resort as good practice requires that agreement should be sought with schools about the nature of any charge made against the school budget (the authority cannot act unreasonably in the exercise of any power given by the scheme, or it may be the subject of a direction under s.496 of the Education Act 1996).

For the avoidance of doubt, the authority may de-delegate funding for permitted services without the express permission of the governing body, provided this has been approved by the appropriate phase representatives of the Schools' Forum.

8.2 Charging of salaries at actual cost

The authority is required to charge the salaries of school-based staff at actual cost against school budget shares.

8.3 Circumstances in which school budget shares may be charged without the consent of the governing body

1. Where premature retirement costs have been incurred without the prior written agreement of the LA to bear such costs (the amount chargeable being only the excess over any amount agreed by the LA).

2. Other expenditure incurred to secure resignations where there is good reason to charge this to the school (see Annex B).

3. Awards by courts and industrial tribunals against the LA, or out of court settlements arising from action or inaction by the governing body contrary to the LA's advice.

4. Expenditure by the LA in carrying out health and safety work, or capital expenditure for which the LA is liable where funds have been delegated to the governing body for such work, but the governing body has failed to carry out the required work; this includes circumstances in which the LA's expenditure would have been avoided if the governors had undertaken work for which they had delegated responsibility in a timely manner.

5. Expenditure by the LA incurred in making good defects in building work funded by capital spending from budget shares, where the premises are owned by the LA or the school has voluntary controlled status.

6. Expenditure incurred by the LA in insuring its own interests in a school where funding has been delegated but the school has failed to demonstrate that it has arranged cover at least as good as that which would be arranged by the LA.

7. Recovery of monies due from a school for services provided to the school, where a dispute over the monies due has been referred to a disputes procedure set out in a service level agreement and the result is that monies are owed by the school to the LA.

8. Recovery of penalties imposed on the LA by HM Revenue and Customs, Teachers' Pensions, the Environment Agency or other regulatory authorities as a result of school negligence.

9. Correction of LA errors in calculating charges to a budget share (eg pension deductions). Before applying any such provision the authority will consider whether it is reasonable to do so. If the error dates back several years it may be questionable whether such charging is reasonable.

10. Additional transport costs incurred by the LA arising from decisions by the governing body on the length of the school day or opening times (including term dates), or failure to notify the LA of non-pupil days resulting in unnecessary transport costs.

11. Legal costs which are incurred by the LA because the governing body did not accept the advice of the LA.

12. Costs of necessary health and safety training for staff employed by the LA, where funding for training had been delegated but the necessary training not carried out.

13. Compensation paid to a lender where a school enters into a contract for borrowing beyond its legal powers, and the contract is of no effect.

14. Cost of work done in respect of teacher pension remittance and records for schools using non-LA payroll contractors, the charge being the minimum needed to meet the cost of the Authority's compliance with its statutory obligations.

15. Costs incurred by the LA in securing provision specified in an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) as a result of the governing body of a school failing to secure such provision despite the delegation of funds in respect of low cost, high incidence SEND and/or specific funding for a pupil with high needs.

16. Costs incurred by the LA due to submission by the school of incorrect data.

17. Recovery of amounts spent from specific grants on ineligible purposes.

18. Costs incurred by the LA as a result of a governing body being in breach of the terms of a contract.

19. Costs incurred by the LA or schools in ending or withdrawing from a partnership arrangement with other schools, for example, where redundancy costs are incurred in respect of staff providing services across the partnership.

20. Costs incurred by the authority in administering admissions appeals, where the local authority is the admissions authority and the funding for admission appeals has been delegated to all schools as part of their formula allocation.

21. Budget share adjustments relating to pupils excluded from the school.

22. Adjustment to reflect actual cost where this is part of the formula.

23. Expenditure incurred by the LA as a result of a school defaulting on a payment.

24. Charges incurred by the governors as a result of signing a Service Level Agreement with the LA. These may be deducted from a school's budget share before this is paid to the school. The phasing of these deductions is subject to agreement between each school and the LA.

25. Ad hoc charges for support services provided by the LA following a request from the school for the service.

26. Costs incurred by the LA arising from the school's failure to comply with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules or LA Scheme of Financial Management

27. The cost of an undisputed invoice for energy where a school has entered into an agreement with the Secretary of State for the supply of energy and failed to pay such an invoice (Regulation 23 of the regulations).

9. Taxation

9.1 Value Added Tax (VAT)

Dorset Council will reclaim Value Added Tax (VAT) on expenditure relating to non-business activity. HM Revenue & Customs have agreed that VAT incurred by schools when spending any funding made available by the LA will be treated as being incurred by the LA and qualifies for reclaim by the LA. This does not include expenditure by the governors of a voluntary aided school when carrying out their statutory responsibilities to maintain the external fabric of their buildings, nor capital works at foundation schools funded directly by the DfE.

Schools will not require a refund for VAT paid on local transactions if they use an accounting system supported by Dorset Council (ESS), because VAT will be accounted for centrally. Dorset Council will continue to refund VAT monthly to schools using other accounting systems (e.g. SIMS, LRM, Sage).

Further guidance may be obtained by contacting the Authority's Corporate Accountant (VAT).

9.2 Construction Industry Scheme (CIS)

Schools are required to abide by the procedures issued by the Authority in connection with the Construction Industry Scheme and payments to self-employed individuals. Such guidance will be published separately from the Scheme. This clause also applies to schools when exercising the community facilities power.

10. The provision of services and facilities by the local authority

10.1 Provision of services from centrally retained budgets

Dorset LA will determine on what basis services from centrally retained funds will be provided to schools. Such services include existing premature retirement costs (PRC) and redundancy payments.

The authority will not discriminate between categories of school in its provision of services to schools except in cases where this would be allowable under the school and early years finance regulations or the dedicated schools grant (DSG) conditions of grant.

10.2 Provision of services bought back from the authority using delegated budgets

Any arrangements, with the exception of centrally funded premises costs and liability insurance, by which schools buy back services from the Authority shall be limited to a maximum of three years from the date of the agreement between the school and the Authority.

Any subsequent agreement to buy the same services from the Authority will be limited to a maximum length of five years.

However, schemes for contracts for supply of catering services may be limited to a maximum of 5 years, with a maximum agreement of 7 years if the contract is extended.

When a service is provided for which expenditure is not retainable centrally by the authority under the Regulations made under section 45A of the act, it should be offered at prices which are intended to generate income which is no less than the cost of providing those services. The total cost of the service should be met by the total income, even if schools are charged differentially.

It is recognised that absolute break-even or profit is not always achievable over fixed financial years; it is for the authority to show during audit tests that the charging policy can reasonably be expected to avoid central subsidy of services.

10.3 Packaging services for buyback

Any service which the authority is providing on a buyback basis will be offered in a way that does not unreasonably restrict schools' freedom of choice among the services available, and where practicable, will allow for schools to buy back on a service-by-service basis as well as in packages of services.

10.4 Service level agreements

The terms relating to any services or facilities provided by the authority under a service level agreement, whether free or on a buyback basis, will be reviewed at least every three years.

Where services are provided by the authority they will be made available on a basis which is not related to an extended agreement wherever reasonable as well as on the basis of such an agreement. Where services are provided on an ad hoc basis it is permissible for the authority to charge for these services at a different rate than if provided on the basis of an extended agreement.

To be effective for the following financial year, service level agreements with schools for the provision of services must be in place by 28 February in the preceding financial year. Schools must have at least one month to consider the terms of such service level agreements. In exceptional circumstances the dates may be varied by mutual agreement.

Centrally arranged premises and liability insurance are excluded from the above requirements for service supply, as the limitations envisaged may be impracticable for insurance purposes.

10.5 Teachers' Pensions

In order to ensure that the performance of the duty on the authority to supply Teachers' Pensions with information under the Teachers' Pension Scheme Regulations 2014, the following conditions are imposed on the authority and governing bodies of all maintained schools covered by this Scheme in relation to their budget shares.

The conditions only apply to governing bodies of maintained schools that have not entered into an arrangement with the authority to provide payroll services.

A governing body of any maintained school, whether or not the employer of the teachers at such a school, which has entered into any arrangement or agreement with a person other than the authority to provide payroll services, shall ensure that any such arrangement or agreement is varied to require that person to supply salary, service and pensions data to the authority which the authority requires to submit its monthly return of salary and service to Teachers' Pensions and to produce its audited contributions certificate.

The authority will advise schools each year of the timing, format and specification of the information required. The governing body shall also ensure that any such arrangement or agreement is varied to require that Additional Voluntary Contributions (AVCs) are passed to the authority within the time limit specified in the AVC scheme. The governing body shall meet any consequential costs from the school's budget share.

A governing body of any maintained school which directly administers its payroll shall supply salary, service and pensions data to the authority which the authority requires to submit its monthly return of salary and service to Teachers' Pensions and to produce its audited contributions certificate.

The authority will advise schools each year of the timing, format and specification of the information required from each school. The governing body shall also ensure that Additional Voluntary Contributions (AVCs) are passed to the authority within the time limit specified in the AVC scheme. The governing body shall meet any consequential costs from the school's budget share.

11. Private Finance Initiatives (PFI) and public private partnerships (PPP)

Schools may only enter into a Private Finance Initiative/Public-Private Partnership with the prior written approval of the authority.

The authority may charge to a school's budget share amounts calculated under a PFI/PPP arrangement entered into by the authority and the governing body of that school. Sums charged will reflect the extent to which funding delegated to the school relates to services covered by the PFI/PPP contract fee and will be subject to indexation in accordance with the agreement between the authority and the governing body.

12. Insurance and risk management

Where funds for insurance are delegated to any school, the LA will require the school to demonstrate that cover relevant to the LA's insurable interests under a policy arranged by the governing body, is at least as good as the relevant minimum cover arranged by the authority if the authority makes such arrangements, either paid from central funds or from schools' delegated budgets.

The evidence required to demonstrate the parity of cover should be reasonable, not place an undue burden upon the school, nor act as a barrier to the school exercising their choice of supplier.

Such insurance is to be in the joint names of the school and the Council. In fixing this minimum level of cover the LA must have regard to the actual risks which might reasonably be expected to arise in the school in question in operating such a requirement, rather than applying an arbitrary minimum level of cover for all schools.

Instead of taking out insurance, a school may join the Secretary of State's Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA) for risks that are covered by the RPA. Schools may do this individually when any insurance contract of which they are part expires. Where primary and /or secondary maintained schools are concerned they may opt to join the RPA collectively by agreeing through the Schools' Forum to de-delegate funding.

Head teachers must notify the Local Authority of:

a) any alteration in risks which may affect existing insurances;

b) any indemnity which may be requested of the Authority;

c) any accident, fire or other event which may involve the school or the Council in liability or a claim for loss.

Head teachers and governing bodies must ensure that all reasonable action is taken to minimise risks.

The Chief Financial Officer has overall responsibility for insurance and risk management and schools must adhere to the insurance and risk management requirements published by the authority.

13. Miscellaneous

13.1 LA right of access to information

Governing bodies are required to supply to the Authority all financial information and other information which might reasonably be required to enable the Authority to satisfy itself as to the school's management of its delegated budget share, or the use made of any central expenditure by the Authority (e.g. earmarked funding) on the school. This includes providing such information about programmes of development, including capital requirements, as the Authority considers necessary to facilitate discussions with the governors about school policies and the degree of development appropriate to the school.

Governing bodies shall provide information in a form and at times which shall be determined by the Authority.

13.2 Liability of governors

The governing body of each school is a corporate body. Under the terms of section 50(7) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, governors of maintained schools will not incur personal liability in the exercise of their power to spend the delegated budget share provided they act in good faith.

Note: An example of behaviour which is not in good faith is the carrying out of fraudulent acts.

13.3 Governors' expenses

The Authority may delegate to the governing body of a school yet to receive a delegated budget share, such funds as it shall determine appropriate to meet governors' expenses.

Under section 50(5) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, only allowances in respect of purposes specified in regulations made under section 19 of the Education Act 2002 may be paid to governors from a school's delegated budget share. Schools are prohibited from paying any other allowances to governors and from duplicating payment of expenses by the Secretary of State to additional governors appointed by them to schools under special measures.

For schools with delegated budgets, authorities may publish separately from the scheme, a guide to what it considers to be reasonable expenses.

13.4 Responsibility for legal costs

The costs of legal actions incurred by the governing body are the responsibility of the LA as part of the cost of maintaining the school, (unless they relate to the statutory responsibility of voluntary aided school governors for buildings). These may be charged to the school's budget share unless the Governing Body acts in accordance with the advice of the Authority. This includes any costs awarded against an LA, but not the cost of any legal advice provided.

It may very occasionally be the case that there is a conflict of interest between a governing body and the LA where the governing body would wish to obtain separate legal advice and in such a situation the solicitors to the Authority would be available to advise the governing body as to practitioners with the necessary expertise.

A school cannot expect to be reimbursed with the cost of legal action against the authority itself (although there is nothing to stop the authority making such reimbursement if it believes this to be desirable or necessary in the circumstances).

13.5 Health and safety

In expending the school's budget share, governing bodies are required to have due regard to the duties placed on the Authority in relation to health and safety, and the Authority's policy on health and safety matters published separately from this Scheme. Section 39(3) of the School Standards and Framework Act provides that the LA may issue directions to the governing body and head teacher of a voluntary controlled, community, foundation, foundation special or community special school on health and safety matters. These directions are enforceable via Section 497 of the Education Act 1996 if not complied with.

13.6 LA right of attendance at governing body meetings

Governing bodies are required to permit the Chief Finance Officer of the Authority, or any officer of the Authority nominated by the Chief Finance Officer, to attend and speak, but not to vote, at meetings of the governing body at which any agenda items are relevant to the exercise of his or her responsibilities.

The Chief Finance Officer's attendance should normally be limited to items which relate to issues of probity or overall financial management; such attendance should not be regarded as routine. The authority should give prior notice of such attendance unless this is impracticable.

13.7 Special educational needs

Governing bodies must use their best endeavours in spending their delegated budget share to secure appropriate provision for children assessed as having special educational need. In doing so they must give due regard to advice and guidance published by the Authority. The LA reserves the right to suspend delegation where a situation is serious enough to warrant it (this would not normally relate to an individual pupil).

Where funding is delegated governing bodies must ensure that all the provision specified in the Education, Health and Care Plan of special educational need for a child is made from the delegated budget in accordance with those duties under Section 66 of Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014.

13.8 Whistleblowing

Schools are required to follow the Authority's scheme published separately for dealing with staff or governors who wish to complain about financial management or financial propriety at the school.

13.9 Child Protection

Schools are required to release staff to attend child protection case conferences and other related events. Funding for the cost of attendance is deemed to be part of the delegated school budget share.

13.10 Redundancy and early retirement costs

Costs of early retirements or redundancies may only be charged to the central part of the Schools Budget where the expenditure is incurred as a result of decisions made before 1st April 2013. Costs may not exceed the amount budgeted in the previous financial year.

A de-delegated contingency for schools in financial difficulty can be provided, if Schools' Forum agrees, to support individual schools where a governing body has incurred expenditure which it would be unreasonable to expect them to meet from the school's budget share.

The Authority's policy on funding for premature retirement and redundancy is determined in discussion with the Schools Forum and published separately on the Council's website for schools.

Costs are normally funded as set out in the 2002 Education Act as summarised at Annex B. The policy in Dorset as agreed with the Schools' Forum is published separately from this scheme.

13.11 Data Protection

Head teachers are responsible for ensuring compliance with data protection legislation and controlling access to all data covered by such legislation.

13.12 Appointment and dismissal of staff

The arrangements for the appointment and dismissal of staff of the School shall be in accordance with the provisions of Schedules 13 and 14 of the Education Act 1996 or subsequent legislation but, subject to the provisions of the Act, the following regulations shall apply to the appointment of School staff.

Every vacant post shall be advertised, except where the Governors decide otherwise. In discharging this responsibility Governors must give regard to local and national requirements.

Applicants for posts, other than existing members of staff, shall be required to submit the names and addresses of two people to whom reference should be made. One of these must be from their current, or most recent employer, and must be in writing and should ask specifically about a candidate's suitability to work with children, as well as their suitability for the post, and should be obtained prior to interview.

Canvassing any Governor of the School for any appointment shall disqualify a candidate for appointment. This regulation shall be made known in all particulars issued for a vacant post.

A Governor shall not solicit for any person an appointment with the School.

Governors are empowered to approve:

a) the selection and appointment of permanent and temporary staff in all schools; working of paid overtime; additional increments for holders of existing posts; incentive allowances within any limits imposed by legislation;
b) the giving of lectures by staff during working hours and the retention of any fees received by the member of staff concerned;
c) provision of protective clothing;
d) payment of fees, financial assistance and attendance for non-teaching staff post entry training;
e) subject to the provisions contained in the relevant enactments, dismissal or termination of a contract of employment; the undertaking of disciplinary or grievance procedures; special leave without pay.

13.13 LA right to institute legal proceedings and public enquiries

The Local Authority shall be empowered to institute legal proceedings for the recovery of sums due to the Council and for the possession of Council property, to lay information, to make complaints, to institute, defend or settle proceedings, to take legal action to enforce rights or obligations, to appear at public enquiries where it is considered by the LA to be in the Council's interest, and to engage counsel.

13.14 Arrangements for the assets and liabilities of school partnerships

Where a pair or group of schools/academies enter into partnership arrangements (including informal arrangements), all partners must agree in writing, in advance of entering into the partnership, a statement providing for the sharing of costs incurred during the partnership period, and how the assets and liabilities will be distributed upon dissolution of the partnership. This must include the arrangements to be made for sharing out employment costs if staff are engaged (including redundancy payments), or for any other financial arrangements that have been entered into. In the event of disagreements, this statement will be followed where possible, or the LA will charge schools in accordance with paragraph 8.3 (19) of this Scheme as it sees fit.

14. Responsibility for repairs and maintenance

All revenue funding for repairs and maintenance is now delegated, therefore the governing body is responsible for costs of all revenue funded repairs and maintenance.

The LA will retain capital funding for programmed strategic repairs and maintenance items. This definition includes works costing more than the amount published on the Dorset Council website financial pages as the limit of strategic repairs and maintenance.

For voluntary aided schools. The liability of the Authority for repairs and maintenance (albeit met by delegation of funds through the budget share) is the same as for other maintained schools, and no separate list of responsibilities is necessary for such schools. However, eligibility for capital grant from the Secretary of State for capital works at voluntary aided schools depends on the *de minimis* limit applied by the DfE to categorise such work, not the *de minimis* limit used by the Authority.

The Authority may operate a mutual insurance scheme on behalf of schools to cover the cost of delegated repairs and maintenance items. If such a scheme is organised on behalf of schools by the authority it will be subject to such terms and conditions published separately from this Scheme.

15. Community facilities

15.1 Introduction

Under section 27 (1) of the Education Act 2002, the governing body of a maintained school shall have power to provide any facilities or services whose provision furthers any charitable purpose for the benefit of:

a) pupils at the school or their families, or

b) people who live or work in the locality in which the school is situated.

Under section 27 of the Education Act 2002 at least once in every school year the governing body of a maintained school in England shall consider whether, and if so how, they should exercise the power under subsection (1).

Schools which choose to exercise the power conferred by section 27 (1) of the Education Act 2002 to provide community facilities will be subject to a range of controls. Regulations made under section 28 (2), if made, can specify activities which may not be undertaken at all under the main enabling power.

Section 88 of the Children and Families Act 2014, has removed the requirements in section 28(4) and section 28(5) of the Education Act 2002 for maintained schools in England. Under section 28(4) a school was obliged to consult its authority and under section 28(5) a school must have regard to advice or guidance from the Secretary of State or their local authority when offering this type of provision.

Under section 28 (1) the main limitations and restrictions on the power will be:

a) those contained in schools' own instruments of government, if any; and

b) any contained in this scheme for financing schools (as made under section 48 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, as amended by paragraph 2 of Schedule 3 to the Education Act 2002 which extends the coverage of schemes to include the exercise of powers of governing bodies to provide community facilities.

Schools are therefore subject to prohibitions, restrictions and limitations in this scheme for financing schools.

This section of the scheme does not extend to joint-use agreements; transfer of control agreements, or agreements between the authority and schools to secure the provision of adult and community learning.

15.2 Consultation with the authority: financial aspects

Whilst there is no requirement for a school to consult or obtain advice from the local authority on decisions regarding establishing community facilities, as public bodies, they are expected to act reasonably, and this includes consulting those affected by the decisions that they make.

If it is found that there has been mismanagement of the community facilities funds, the LA may suspend the right for the school to receive a delegated budget.

15.3 Funding agreements – Local Authority powers

Where a third party is involved with supplying funding and/or taking part in the provision, an agreement in writing must be made between the school and the third party(s). The proposed agreement must be provided to the LA and will be considered along with the plan. The LA will have up to one month to consider and provide advice regarding the agreement. The LA may not veto the agreement or acquire a right to countersign an agreement. Note: If the third party requires authority consent to the agreement for it to proceed, such a requirement and the method by which authority consent is to be signified is a matter for that third party, not for the scheme.

However, if the LA considers that an agreement is against the wishes of the LA, has been concluded without the complete knowledge of the LA, or is in the view of the LA, seriously prejudicial to the interests of the school or the authority, this may constitute grounds for suspension of the right to a delegated budget.

15.4 Other prohibitions, restrictions and limitations

If the LA considers that risks associated with the project in question require the protection of the authority's financial interests, the governing body shall follow the advice of the LA to obtain indemnity insurance, or carry out the activity through the vehicle of a limited company, as specified by the authority.

If Governing Bodies choose or are advised to carry out the activity through the vehicle of a limited company, they must follow any advice published separately by the LA in setting up of companies.

The Governing Body may not do anything which they are unable to do by virtue of any prohibition, restriction or limitation on their powers which is contained in the school's instrument of government.

15.5 Supply of financial information

The governing body of a school exercising the community facilities power may be required, at the request of the Authority taking into account the risk and financial liabilities of the facility, to provide a statement of income and expenditure to the authority for the previous six months, and an estimate for the following six months. The format of the statement will vary depending upon the type of facility provided.

If the school believes that the income will be insufficient to meet expenditure without moving into deficit, the school must inform the LA of this in writing to the Director of Children's Services immediately.

If the LA believes that the financial management or general management of the facility is causing concern, it may give notice to the governing body whereupon financial statements may be required every three months. In such circumstances, a recovery plan will be required to be produced in consultation with the Authority.

If it is found that there has been mismanagement of the community facilities funds, the LA may suspend the right for the school to receive a delegated budget.

The governing body should note that schools (including companies set up by schools) may not borrow money without the written consent of the Secretary of State, (unless lent to the school by Dorset Council under the licensed deficit or loan scheme).

15.6 Audit

In managing a community facility, schools must abide by the Authority's requirements on financial controls and monitoring as set out in the scheme and in detailed publications referred to in the scheme but outside and compatible with it, including the Authority's Contract Procedure Rules and budget and expenditure reporting requirements.

Where a school has powers concerning payment it is required to comply with all relevant legislation (e.g. tax and national insurance).

All schools covered by this scheme, and exercising the community facilities power are subject to the Authority's audit regime, which covers both internal and external audit. The Authority will determine the audit regime on an annual basis and may require different arrangements for those having external bank accounts than those schools having bank accounts that are sub-accounts of the Local Authority.

Schools are required to:

i) provide access to records, documents and correspondence to both internal and external auditors;

ii) allow access for audit purposes at all reasonable times to any premises or land owned by the Council, or the governing body of an Aided or Foundation school maintained by the LA;

iii) allow the copying and/or removal of prime documents for audit purposes.

Paragraphs 4.1, 4.2, and 4.10 of this scheme also apply to community facilities accounts. School resource management principles should also be applied.

Virement may take place between the community facilities budget and the schools delegated budget or any other budgets specifically to be used for the purposes of the school where the approval of the Governing Body has been gained.

Where schools conclude funding agreements with other persons pursuant to the exercise of the community facilities power, they must ensure that such agreements contain adequate provision for access by the Authority to the records and other property of those persons held on the school premises, or held elsewhere insofar as they relate to the activity in question, in order for the Authority to satisfy itself as to the propriety of expenditure on the facilities in question.

15.7 Treatment of Income or surpluses

Net income derived from the community facilities may be retained by the school, except where otherwise agreed with a funding provider (whether that be the LA or some other person).

Such retained net income may be carried over from one financial year to another as a separate community facilities surplus, or subject to the agreement of the Authority be transferred all or in part to the budget share balance of the school.

If the Authority ceases to maintain a community or community special school, any accumulated retained income obtained from the exercise of the community facilities power reverts to the Authority unless otherwise agreed with a funding provider or subject to the Academies Act 2010.

15.8 Health and safety

Section 13.5 of this scheme also applies to any community facility arrangements.

Governing Bodies must ensure that Disclosure Barring Service clearance has been obtained for all adults involved in community activities taking place during the school day. The costs of such clearance are the responsibility of the Governing body, unless passed on to a funding partner as part of an agreement with that partner.

15.9 Insurance

It is the responsibility of the Governing body to ensure that adequate arrangements are made for insurance against risks arising from the exercise of the community facilities power, taking professional advice as necessary. The arrangements must be agreed with the Authority before finalisation of the insurance arrangement for community facilities.

The LA may make an assessment of the insurance arrangements, and if it judges those arrangements to be inadequate, may make arrangements itself and charge the resultant cost to the school in order to protect itself against possible third party claims.

Instead of taking out insurance, a school may join the Secretary of State's Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA) for risks that are covered by the RPA.

15.10 Taxation

Schools must seek the advice of the LA on any matters relating to VAT, taxation, income tax (PAYE) and National Insurance. Schools should be aware that they may need to register with HM Revenue & Customs as an employer and follow all regulations in force relating to the employment and payment of staff.

15.11 Banking

Schools may choose to operate their own bank or building society accounts for the purpose of the community facility subject to the conditions set out below. Alternatively, they may choose to operate separate accounts of the Local Authority's accounts. Any interest paid on the account will be retained by the school community facilities account.

Conditions relating to the operation of bank or building society accounts:

a) external accounts must always operate in surplus, unless a deficit has been authorised by the Chief Finance Officer, or unless borrowing is expressly authorised by the Secretary of State. The Authority must be formally consulted before any application to borrow is made to the Secretary of State;

b) subject to (c) below, schools must give the period of notice specified in paragraph 5.1 of an intention to operate an external bank or building society account;

c) the Authority must give written confirmation that it has assured itself of the financial standing of any bank or building society selected by a school before an account is opened by the school.

Funds paid to the school by Dorset LA and held in external accounts remain LA property until spent and are subject to the conditions of this scheme and the Authority's associated Scheme of Financial Management. If the school operates an external account for community facility purposes, the account mandate should not imply that the LA is the owner of the funds in the account except insofar as those funds have been provided by the LA itself. However, the mandate must make clear that if following proper process, the LA has suspended the school's right to a delegated budget, the LA make take control of the account.

15.12 Payments in respect of redundancy and dismissal

Section 37.7 of the Education Act 2002 states that:

"Where a local education authority incurs costs-

(a) in respect of any premature retirement of any member of staff of a maintained school who is employed for community purposes, or

(b) in respect of the dismissal, or for the purpose of securing the resignation of any member of the staff of a maintained school who is employed for those purposes,

they shall recover those costs from the governing body except in so far as the authority agree with the governing body in writing (whether before or after the retirement, dismissal or resignation occurs) that they shall not be so recoverable."

And section 37.7(A) states that:

"Any amount payable by virtue of subsection (7) by the governing body of a maintained school in England to the local authority may be met by the governing body out of the school's budget share for any funding period if and to the extent that the condition in subsection (7B) is met.

Section 37.7(B) states that:

“The condition is that the governing body are satisfied that meeting the amount out of the school's budget share will not to a significant extent interfere with the performance of any duty imposed on them by section 21(2) or by any other provision of the Education Acts.”

And section 37.9:

“Where a person is employed partly for community purposes and partly for other purposes, any payment or costs in respect of that person is to be apportioned between two purposes; and the preceding provisions of this section shall apply separately to each part in the payment of costs.”

And Section 37.10:

“Regulations may make provision with respect to the recovery from governing bodies of amounts payable by virtue of subsection (7).”

Annex A: List of schools to whom this scheme applies

Primary Phase

All Saints CE VC Primary School
Bincombe Valley Primary School and Community Nursery
Broadmayne First School
Broadwindsor CE VC Primary School
Cerne Abbas CE VC First School
Charmouth Primary School
Cheselbourne Village School
Conifers Primary School
Downlands Community Primary School
Greenford CE Primary School
Hampreston CE VA First School
Hazelbury Bryan Community Primary School
Holy Trinity CE VC Primary School and Nursery Unit
Lulworth & Winfrith CE Primary School
Milton-on-Stour CE VA Primary School
Parrett & Axe CE VA Primary School
Pimperne CE VC Primary School
Powerstock CE VA Primary School
Radipole Primary School
Rushcombe First School
Salway Ash CE VA Primary School
Sandford St Martin's CE VA Primary School
Southill Primary School
St George's CE Primary School, Langton Matravers
St George's Primary School, Portland
St Georges CE VA School, Bourton
St Gregory's CE Primary School, Marnhull
St Mary's CE First School, Charminster
St Michael's CE Primary School, Lyme Regis
St Nicholas CE VA Primary School, Child Okeford
Stalbridge CE Primary School
Sticklands CE Primary School
Stoborough CE Primary School
Stower Provost Community School
Sturminster Marshall First School
Swanage Primary School
Symondsbury CE Primary School
The Abbey CE VA Primary School
The Prince of Wales School
Thorner's C of E School, Litton Cheney
William Barnes Primary School
Winterbourne Valley CE (Aided) First School
Wyke Primary School, Gillingham
Wyke Regis CE Junior School
Wyke Regis Infant School and Nursery

Middle Schools
Cranborne Middle School
West Moors Middle School

Secondary Schools
Beaminster Technology College
Ferndown Upper School
Gillingham VC School
Lytchett Minster School
Sturminster Newton High School
The Blandford School
The Woodroffe School

Special Schools
Beaucroft Foundation School, Colehill
Mountjoy School, Beaminster
Westfield Technology College, Weymouth
Yewstock School, Sturminster Newton

Learning Centres
The Compass Centre
Dorchester Learning Centre
The Forum Centre

Annex B: Responsibility for redundancy and early retirement costs

This guidance note summarises the position relating to the charging of voluntary early retirement and redundancy costs. It sets out what is specified in legislation and provides some examples of when it might be appropriate to charge an individual school's budget, the central Schools Budget or the local authority's non-schools budget.

Section 37 of the 2002 Education Act says:

> (4) costs incurred by the local education authority in respect of any premature retirement of a member of the staff of a maintained school shall be met from the school's budget share for one or more financial years except in so far as the authority agree with the governing body in writing (whether before or after the retirement occurs) that they shall not be so met.
>
> (5) costs incurred by the local education authority in respect of the dismissal, or for the purpose of securing the resignation, of any member of the staff of a maintained school shall not be met from the school's budget share for any financial year except in so far as the authority have good reason for deducting those costs, or any part of those costs, from that share.
>
> (6) The fact that the authority have a policy precluding dismissal of their employees by reason of redundancy is not to be regarded as a good reason for the purposes of subsection (5); and in this subsection the reference to dismissal by reason of redundancy shall be read in accordance with section 139 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 (c. 18).

The default position, therefore, is that premature retirement costs must be charged to the school's delegated budget, while redundancy costs must be charged to the local authority's budget. In the former case, the local authority has to agree otherwise for costs to be centrally funded, while in the latter case, there has to be a good reason for it not to be centrally funded, and that cannot include having a no redundancy policy. Ultimately, it would be for the courts to decide what was a good reason, but the examples set out below indicate the situations in which exceptions to the default position might be taken.

Charge of dismissal/resignation costs to delegated school budget:

- if a school has decided to offer more generous terms than the authority's policy, then it would be reasonable to charge the excess to the school;
- if a school is otherwise acting outside the local authority's policy;
- where the school is making staffing reductions which the local authority does not believe are necessary to either set a balanced budget or meet the conditions of a licensed deficit;
- where staffing reductions arise from a deficit caused by factors within the school's control;
- where the school has excess surplus balances and no agreed plan to use these;
- where a school has refused to engage with the local authority's redeployment policy.

Charge of premature retirement costs to local authority non-schools budget

- where a school has a long-term reduction in pupil numbers and charging such costs to their budget would impact on standards;
- where a school is closing, does not have sufficient balances to cover the costs and where the central Schools Budget does not have capacity to absorb the deficit;
- where charging such costs to the school's budget would prevent the school from complying with a requirement to recover a licensed deficit within the agreed timescale;
- where a school is in special measures, does not have excess balances and employment of the relevant staff is being/has been terminated as a result of local authority or government intervention to improve standards

Costs of early retirements or redundancies may only be charged to the central part of the Schools Budget where the expenditure is to be incurred as a result of decisions made before 1st April 2013. Costs may not exceed the amount budgeted in the previous financial year.

The local authority can retain a central budget within the schools budget to fund the costs of new early retirements or redundancies by a deduction from maintained school budgets (excluding nursery schools) only, where the relevant maintained school members of the schools forum agree.

It is important that the local authority discusses its policy with the Schools Forum. Although each case should be considered on its merits, this should be within an agreed framework. It may be reasonable to share costs in some cases, and some authorities operate a panel to adjudicate on applications.

A de-delegated contingency could be provided, if Schools Forum agree, to support individual schools where "a governing body has incurred expenditure which it would be unreasonable to expect them to meet from the school's budget share".

For staff employed under the community facilities power, the default position is that any costs must be met by the governing body, and can be funded from the school's delegated budget if the governing body is satisfied that this will not interfere to a significant extent with the performance of any duties imposed on them by the Education Acts, including the requirement to conduct the school with a view to promoting high standards of educational achievement. Section 37 now states:

(7) Where a local education authority incur costs:

(a) in respect of any premature retirement of any member of the staff of a maintained school who is employed for community purposes, or

(b) in respect of the dismissal, or for the purpose of securing the resignation, of any member of the staff of a maintained school who is employed for those purposes, they shall recover those costs from the governing body except in so far as the authority agree with the governing body in writing (whether before or after the retirement, dismissal or resignation occurs) that they shall not be so recoverable.

(7A) Any amount payable by virtue of subsection (7) by the governing body of a maintained school in England to the local authority may be met by the governing body out of the school's budget share for any funding period if and to the extent that the condition in subsection 7(B) is met.

(7B) The condition is that the governing body are satisfied that meeting the amount out of the school's budget share will not to a significant extent interfere with the performance of any duty imposed on them by section 21(2) or by any other provision of the education Acts.

(8) Where a person is employed partly for community purposes and partly for other purposes, any payment or costs in respect of that person is to be apportioned between the two purposes; and the preceding provisions of this section shall apply separately to each part of the payment or costs.

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Dorset Schools' Forum

Date of Meeting:	**26 September 2026**
Report Title:	**Section 19 policy 2025/26**
Executive Director:	**Paul Dempsey, Executive Director for People - Children**
Corporate Director:	**Alice Deacon, Corporate Director for Commissioning and Partnerships**
Report Author: Title: Tel: Email:	Miriam Leigh (Head of Children Thriving in Education) miriam.leigh@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk Ellen Eager (Sufficiency & Funding Manager)
Presenting Officer:	**Miriam Leigh (Head of Children Thriving in Education)**
Report Status:	**Public**
Reason for Submission to Schools' Forum:	**For CONSULTATION** **Under Forum power/responsibility**: 2D)III Such other matters concerning the funding of schools which the LA sees fit, including: 1. high needs block provision; 2. central licences negotiated by the Secretary of State; 3. funding of brought forward deficits.
Recommendation(s):	That, members take note of the following. A. The legal responsibilities of the LA and schools B. The funding arrangements for alternative provision

Reason for Recommendation(s):	To provide clarity about the roles and responsibilities for schools, families, and professionals. Ensure transparency and consistency in decision-making. Demonstrate compliance with statutory guidance from the Department for Education (DfE). Provide a framework for managing referrals, funding, and reintegration.
DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST	**Schools' Forum members are reminded of their responsibility to make a declaration of interest in any agenda item in which they have an interest, to the Chair or the Clerk, preferably in advance of the meeting.**

1. Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction/Background

Dorset Council's Section 19 Policy outlines its statutory and strategic commitment to ensuring that children and young people who cannot attend school due to health needs, permanent exclusion, or other exceptional circumstances receive suitable education. This policy supports the Council's ambition for inclusive education as set out in the **Children, Young People and Families Plan 2023–33** and the **Education Strategy: Best Education For All 2024–2027**.

1.2 Why is it important?

There has been a growing number of children and young people where families are reporting emotionally based school avoidance or other family circumstances resulting in anxiety or school-based trauma.

Children unable to attend school face significant risks to their education, wellbeing, and social development. These include:

- Long-term or intermittent physical and mental health conditions.
- Exclusion from school.
- Situations where existing schooling is inaccessible.
- Children not currently on a school roll.

The policy identifies a need for **early intervention**, **multi-agency collaboration**, and **tailored educational support** to address these challenges.

1.3 Local Authority Responsibilities

Under **Section 19 of the Education Act 1996**, Dorset Council must:

- Arrange suitable full-time or part-time education for affected children.
- Act promptly when notified of absences exceeding 15 days.
- Provide education via Learning Centres or alternative provision.
- Safeguard children and promote reintegration.
- Coordinate with schools, health services, and families.
- Manage funding transfers and commissioning.
- Support children not on roll and those with EHCPs.

1.4 School Responsibilities

Schools are expected to:

- Support pupils with medical needs under statutory duties.
- Use a graduated approach to assess and meet needs.

- Develop and review **Individual Healthcare Plans (IHPs)**.
- Refer cases to the Council with appropriate medical evidence.
- Host and lead review meetings with alternative providers.
- Maintain pupils on roll and ensure continuity of education.
- Collaborate with external agencies and contribute to reintegration plans.
- Notify the Council via the **ACE portal** when long-term absence is anticipated.

1.5 Funding Implications

Funding arrangements include:

- Budget reductions for excluding schools under Section 47 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.
- Pro-rata funding transfers from home schools to alternative provision.
- Use of EHCP banding and other funding factors (e.g. FSM, EAL, IDACI) to calculate support costs.

Dorset Council **may** assume full financial responsibility if reintegration is not possible after a full academic year.

1.6 Conclusion

Dorset Council's Section 19 Policy provides a comprehensive framework to ensure that children unable to attend school receive high-quality, inclusive education. It emphasizes **shared accountability**, **timely intervention**, and **collaborative planning** to minimize disruption and support successful reintegration into education settings.

2. Financial Implications

The table below shows the mainstream school contribution for Dual Registered pupils wef September 2024 as communicated on 28 March 2024. The updated columns for 2025-26 include the comparable amounts for 2025-26 with NFF uplift and pay grants included. There is no proposal to increase school contribution for September 2025, but this will be reviewed for September 2026.

	2025-26		2024-25		
Mainstream school funding formula element per pupil	**Primary £**	**Secondary £**	**Primary £**	**Secondary £**	**Notes**
Basic Entitlement (Age Weighted Pupil Unit / AWPU)	3,833	5,878	3,532	5,385	36% of pupils placed in learning centres across Dorset are KS3 and 64% are KS4 (average Jan & May 23 census), therefore secondary contribution is 36% of £4,980 KS3 Basic entitlement value plus 64% of £5,613 KS4 Basic entitlement value.
English as an additional language	-	-	-	-	Dorset secondary schools <1% EAL
Low prior attainment	1,175	1,785	1,170	1,775	100% of mainstream values
FSM	312	312	328	328	67% of pupils on average across Dorset learning centres per Jan & May 2023 census are entitled to a free school meal, therefore 67% of the FSM/FSM6 formula values are applied. 63% for May 2025 census.
FSM6	668	980	549	804	
IDACI Band E	285	450	285	450	100% IDACI E as previously applied
TOTAL	**6,273**	**9,404**	**5,865**	**8,742**	
TOTAL school contribution	-	-	**5,800**	**8,700**	
Per day	-	-	29.74	44.62	

3. Well-being and Health implications

N/A

4. Climate Implications

N/A

5. Other implications

-

6. Risk Assessment

N/A

7. Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA)

N/A

8. Appendices

Appendix A: Approved section 19 policy 2025/2026

9. Background Papers

Education Act 1996 section 19

Arranging education for children who cannot attend school because of health needs

Arranging Alternative Provision - guide for LAs and schools

Footnote: Please do not delete this footnote

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.

Note: it is the report author's responsibility to ensure the report satisfies the above conditions.

Section 19 Policy

Supporting Children and Young People who cannot attend school due to health needs, permanent exclusion or otherwise

September 2025
Executive Director Paul Dempsey

1. Introduction and Aims of the Policy

1.1 Dorset Council's shared ambition with our partners is stated in the Children, Young People and Families Plan 2023-33:

"We want Dorset to be the best place to be a child, where communities thrive, and families are supported to be the best they can be."

This policy is aligned with our Education Strategy Best Education For All 2024 to 2027 priority 4. We have a shared ambition for all our children to:

- belong
- be included
- be safeguarded from harm
- have access to opportunities to promote social mobility
- successfully take their next steps into adulthood.

1.2 When a child of school-age is unable to access their school due to illness, exclusion or otherwise, the Council must consider whether it has a duty under section 19 of the Education Act 1996 to make suitable support for them.

1.3 This policy sets out Dorset Council standards for the education of children who are unable to attend school because of health needs, permanent exclusion or otherwise. The authority recognises that all children are entitled to an education of high quality and is committed to ensuring that the needs of this group of learners are met.

1.4 We recognise that there is a shared responsibility between the Council, Education Settings, NHS Dorset – Integrated Care Board and partner agencies to successfully implement this policy. It is centred on high quality, integrated service support in order to promote better outcomes for this cohort of children, and to commit to providing high-quality, inclusive and accessible education.

2 The Statutory Framework

2.1 This policy has considered the following official guidance: -

- The Education Act 1996
- The Equality Act 2010
- The Children and Families Act 2014
- Arranging Alternative Provision A Guide for Local Authorities and Schools (2025)
- Arranging education for children who cannot attend school because of health needs Statutory Guidance (2023)

- Suspension and Permanent Exclusions Statutory Guidance (2023)
- Working together to improve school attendance Statutory Guidance (2024)
- Summary of responsibilities where a mental health issue is affecting attendance' Guidance (2023)
- Supporting pupils at school with health issues Statutory guidance for governing bodies of maintained schools and proprietors of academies in England. (2015)
- Special educational needs Code of Practice (2014)

3. Legal obligations

3.1 Section 19 of the Education Act 1996 requires local authorities to make arrangements to provide "appropriate education at school, or otherwise than at school, for those children of school-age who, by reason of illness, exclusion from school or otherwise, may not for any period receive suitable education unless such arrangements are made for them". Suitable education is defined as "efficient education suitable to the age, ability, aptitude and to any special educational needs", the child (or young person) may have.
The December 2023 Guidance; 'Arranging education for children who cannot attend school because of health needs' relates to local authorities' legal responsibilities under Section 19 of the Education Act 1996.

3.2 **Illness**

- Children and young people who have additional health needs are, by the nature of their difficulties, at risk of failing to reach their true potential within a school environment. This is particularly the case for children whose health needs prevent them from attending school for an extended period, or for those who are restricted by their health needs to attending school on a part time or sporadic basis.

- What support is required for a child who is too ill to attend school is ultimately for the Council to decide after considering medical advice and information provided by parents and schools. Evidence can include appointment cards, prescriptions, or notes of previous consultations (including from the NHS App) provided by the parent/carer.

- Securing alternative support for children who are too ill to attend school falls within the Section 19 duty. The Council also has to consider the official guidance 'Education for children with health needs who cannot attend school'; the Council discharges its duty through our Locality teams specifically the inclusion officers and team managers.

3.3 **Exclusion**

- If a school is considering the use of exclusion as a response to a child's behaviour, it is Dorset Council's expectation that schools should consider support available to maintain a child's placement in school.

- Suspension or Permanent Exclusion should be used as a last resort and only as a protective consequence, in response to serious or persistent breaches of a school's behaviour and relationship policy and when allowing the child to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the child and others in the school.

- Advice and support for schools regarding appropriate strategies to maintain a child's placement at school is available through the Local Offer, and from the Inclusion leads, Outreach and Dual Registration from the Learning Centres and support and advice from Specialist Teachers and Educational Psychologists.

- For permanent exclusions, schools should provide work for the first 5 school days of any exclusion. Parents or carers are responsible for ensuring that their children are supervised during school hours on these days and complete the work which has been set. This will ensure that they will have the best chance to keep up with their learning and be less at risk of becoming involved in anti-social activities. The local authority is responsible for providing provision on the sixth day for permanently excluded pupils. As soon as notified of a permanent exclusion the inclusion lead will seek to make arrangements for the equivalent of full-time school or suitable provision to start as soon as possible.

- This will be the child's 'home authority' in cases where the school is maintained by (or located within) a different local authority.

3.4 **Or Otherwise**

- "Or otherwise" is a broad category which covers circumstances outside illnesses and exclusions in which it is not reasonably possible for a child to take advantage of any existing suitable schooling.

- If it is not reasonably possible for a child to take up any existing schooling and there is evidence in support of this, section 19 policy will apply. All the circumstances must be considered, and Dorset Council will take an objective perspective. Dorset Council will consider the individual circumstances of each child in partnership with the school, family and child. Dorset Council will take account of all available evidence and make sure the reason for the decision is recorded and reported.

3.5 This duty and policy apply to any child living within Dorset Council's Council area. Where a student attends a Dorset school, but lives in a neighbouring authority, the home authority will be responsible for arranging education.

3.6 The Children and Families Act Section 100 places a duty on governing bodies of maintained schools, proprietors of academies and management committees of PRUs to make arrangements for supporting children at their school with medical conditions.
Statutory_guidance_on_supporting_pupils_at_school_with_medical_conditions.pdf

3.7 The special educational needs Code of Practice, para 10.39 states that 'Local authorities must make arrangements where, for any reason, a child of school-age would not otherwise receive appropriate education.

3.8 Provision for children who are not attending school due to their health needs, and the framework surrounding it, should offer good quality education equivalent to that provided in schools, as far as the child's health needs allow. It must be suitable to the child's age, ability and aptitude, and any special educational needs they have.

3.9 Parents should be aware that it is their duty under Section 7 of the Education Act 1996, to secure an education for children of school-age.

3.10 All schools (including independent schools) are required to make a 'sickness return' to their local authority when a pupil of school-age is recorded in the attendance register using code I (unable to attend because of sickness) and they have reasonable grounds to believe the pupil will miss 15 days consecutively or cumulatively because of sickness.

3.11 There is no absolute legal deadline by which local authorities must start to arrange education for children with additional health needs. However, as soon as the local authority has been informed by the home school that the child will be absent for 15 days or more, they should begin the process of arranging suitable alternative support

3.12 The local authority will not provide education for children whose families are in dispute with the home school, children who have been withdrawn from the school because of a dispute with the LA about a school placement or where family and social care issues are preventing the child from attending school.

4. School/Governing body, and Council responsibilities

4.1 The December 2023 Guidance states;

'Where possible, schools should continue to provide education to children with health needs who can attend school. When a child is already attending school, there is a range of circumstances where their health needs can and should be managed by the school so that they can continue to be educated there without the need for the intervention of the local authority'.

School responsibilities	Local Authority responsibilities
Schools should provide support for their pupils with medical needs under their statutory duties as set out in 'Supporting pupils with medical conditions at school' (DfE, 2014) and 'Arranging education for children who cannot attend school because of health needs(DfE 2023)	Dorset Council will, in line with their Section 19 duty, arrange suitable full-time education (or as much education as the child's health condition allows) for children of compulsory school age who, because of illness, would otherwise not receive suitable education.
Schools should use the graduated approach to assess, meet and review the needs of their children. When the child's medical condition becomes too complex, or the risks are too great to manage, the school should make a referral to a relevant outside agency for additional support.	Dorset Council's Learning & Belonging Team will support implementation of the graduated approach through joint planning meetings, and Targeted Support Meetings/Inclusion Panels.
Schools must be aware of their responsibilities when mental health issues are impacting on a child's attendance. It is their responsibility to develop and adopt a whole-school approach to emotional wellbeing and mental health	Dorset Council has responsibility for promoting and protecting public physical and mental health and safeguarding children and young people.
Under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act, all schools must have an Accessibility Plan, and this could include medical conditions. Schools should have a policy for supporting children or young people with medical conditions and ensure there is a named person who is responsible for the effective implementation of the policy within the school.	Dorset Council's Physical and Medical Needs Advisory Service provide guidance on writing an accessibility strategy https://www.dorsetnexus.org.uk/Page/7308 In addition Dorset Council's Education Challenge Leads will provide advice and guidance to support schools in implementing their statutory duties.

Shorter term illnesses or chronic conditions are best met by school support and resources, some of which are outlined in Dorset's graduated approach. Such conditions that might meet this definition include short term post-operative support and periods of reduced immunity. Where possible, schools should continue to provide education to children with health needs who can attend school.	Dorset Council commission a continuum of provision for children with physical and medical health needs. This includes advice and guidance from the Physical and Medical Needs Advisory Service, educational tuition, and provision at Dorset County Hospital.
Focus on the needs of each individual child and how their medical condition impacts on their school life, developing Individual Healthcare Plans (IHP) where needed. An IHP should be developed with the child's best interests in mind and ensure that the school assesses and manages risks to the child's education, health and social wellbeing, and minimises disruption.	Dorset Council has a responsibility for ensuring our children and young people thrive and have a duty to safeguard them. NHS Dorset - Integrated Care Board (ICB) has a duty to support the LA and partners in meeting the needs of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. The Designated Clinical Officer (DCO) supports the Local Authority in meeting its statutory responsibilities for children and young people with SEN and disabilities by providing a point of contact for local partners seeking health advice on children and young people who may have Special Educational Needs and disabilities.
Review IHPs at least annually, or earlier if evidence is presented that the child's needs have changed.	Dorset Council's Learning & Belonging Team will support implementation of the graduated approach through joint planning meetings, and Targeted Support Meetings/Inclusion Panels.
Consider whether any reasonable adjustments are needed and use a graduated approach, liaising with the Learning & Belonging Teams, Physical & Medical Needs Service or Health colleagues.	The Local Authority provides the Alternative Provision Framework which includes a range of therapeutic education and reintegration providers. In addition, the LA commissions the Teaching Alliance of Special Schools (TADSS) and Learning Centres to provide an outreach offer. The four Learning centres also provide medical dual-registration short-stay placements
All children or young people will remain on roll of their home school and the prime responsibility for their education lies with that school.	

Where an absence is planned, for example for a stay or recurrent stays in hospital, local authorities must make suitable, timely arrangements, unless exceptional circumstances apply, in advance to allow support to begin from day one.

5. Number of hours of education

5.1 Children and young people with health issues are entitled to the equivalent of full-time education (typically 25 hours) and have the same rights of admission to school as other children. This means that no child with a health issue can be denied admission or prevented from taking up a place in school because arrangements for their health issue have not been made. In line with their safeguarding duties, governing bodies should ensure that pupils' health is not put at unnecessary risk from, for example, infectious diseases. They therefore do not have to accept a child in school at times where it would be detrimental to the health of that child or others to do so.

5.2 Under the Section 19 duty, Council will arrange full-time schooling. "Full-time education" is not defined in law, but it should equate to what the pupil would normally have in school - for example, for children in Key Stage 4 full-time education would typically be 25 hours a week. If alternative support is delivered by one-to-one tuition, for example, the hours of support could be fewer as the support is more focused on the one child.

5.3 It may not be in the child's best interests to receive full time support for reasons which relate to their physical or mental health. In these cases, the Council will arrange part-time support based on what it considers to be in the child's best interests in consultation with the child, child's parents/carers, school, and medical professionals.

6. Notifying the Council

6.1 Schools should involve the Learning & Belonging Team in their locality to obtain support, advice and guidance in relation to medical needs support, both generally and in relation to specific cases. Initial discussions will occur through Targeted Support Meetings, and/or Education planning meetings.

6.2 The Learning & Belonging Team in each locality will also liaise with professionals and colleagues within both health and education as appropriate to ensure child with additional health needs are able to access an appropriate education.

6.3 If a school is concerned about a child:

- with a potentially long-term health issue or a recurrent condition leading to intermittent, extensive periods of absence
- who is in hospital or is due to go into hospital and is likely to be absent from school following this for a significant period of time

They must notify the local authority through the All Children in Education site: https://ace-dorsetcc.msappproxy.net/ace/ which will be passed to the relevant Locality Inclusion Lead.

6.4 If the concern is about a child who is refusing to attend school without supporting clinical advice, then the school should refer to the Learning & Belonging Inclusion Lead who will support with strategies and advise about the way forward for the particular child and may advise seeking a GP's opinion and the involvement of the relevant Child Health Service. If medical evidence is not provided, then attendance procedures would be followed.

6.5 If the medical advice supports alternative provision, then the school or Inclusion Lead will then need to complete the medical request form as soon as possible, firstly obtaining parent/carer, and child consent. (If the child is a Child in Care, the child's Social Worker and Virtual School Lead must be included in all decision making for the young person. The Personal Education Planning meeting process can be used as part of the support plan for a Child in Care who may have a potentially long-term health issue or a recurrent condition leading to intermittent, extensive periods of absence or who is in hospital or is due to go into hospital and is likely to be absent from school following this for a significant period of time).

6.6 All requests (and permanent exclusions) will be discussed at the Central Learning Centre Panel which takes place every Monday afternoon at 1 pm, a school representative will be expected to attend.

  - For children unable to attend due to health reasons schools will be expected to evidence that they have implemented the graduated approach in supporting the child and use the Emotionally Based School Avoidance guidance and resources. https://dorsetnexus.org.uk/Page/42899
  - If a child is permanently excluded, or is unable to attend due to health needs, education will be provided through one of Dorset Council's Learning Centres. Where this is not deemed suitable, or where there is no available place, alternative support will by sought by the Inclusion Lead using the approved Alternative Provision Framework. This could include online, remote learning, tutoring, mentoring or attendance at a provider which offers therapeutic, or return to school support. Provision will be for 12 weeks, with a review at 6 weeks.

6.7 If a placement is offered, the relevant Learning Centre will respond to the request and plan with the home school and parents for support to start and the child will be invited to attend an induction visit.

6.8 If the placement at the Learning Centre is refused by the parent and/or child/young person, then this will be referred back to the school to source alternative support.

7. Objectives of the alternative support, and responsibilities

7.1 Educational support for child, who are permanently excluded, physically ill, injured or who have clinically defined mental health problems is the responsibility of all schools and education services.

7.2 The aim of this support is to:

- Minimise disruption to learning
- To deliver an appropriate and customized education and in consultation with parents/carers and medical professionals
- Successfully reintegrate child back into school or another setting at the earliest opportunity when they are well enough to return. How this will be decided is referred to later in the document.

7.3 In the case of a child with an Education, Health and Care Plan who normally attends specialist support, education will normally be provided by their current education provider. Decisions about change to support and placement with me made at the weekly Locality Special Educational Needs Panel.

7.4 We recognise that, whenever possible, a child should receive their education within their school and the aim of the support will be to reintegrate the child into school at the earliest opportunity or as soon as they are well enough. Arrangements for return to school will be discussed with school staff and each child will have a customized return to school plan. For permanently excluded pupils, the In Year Fair Access process must be followed to identify a suitable mainstream school.

7.5 The child will remain on the school roll and the school must arrange regular review meetings at an agreed frequency. Continuity is important for children and knowing they are still on roll maintains a sense of belonging, this can support recovery and learning progress. As with an Education, Health and Care Plan, the guidance states that Individual Healthcare Plan (Individual Healthcare Plan) must be reviewed at least annually, alongside the Education, Health and Care Plan, or when the condition changes. Parents and/or the healthcare professional must initiate this as parents/carers will hold all the information regarding the child's health. Where support is agreed, there is an expectation that all parties will engage with and contribute to the agreed plan. The customized return to school plan should form part of any individual healthcare plan developed by the school.

School responsibilities	Alternative provider responsibilities
Refer the pupil in an appropriate time frame completing a referral form and sending to the named LA officer with medical evidence from a consultant / specialist and evidence of the graduated approach in supporting the child or young person and use of the Emotionally Based School Avoidance guidance and resources. https://dorsetnexus.org.uk/Page/42899	Maintain a Support and Reintegration plan, where necessary, which records progress towards a return to school and attend the initial meeting hosted by school and subsequent regular review meetings.
Host, chair and minute the meetings with the Learning Centre to include the items below: • Venue for provision • Estimated duration • Expected contribution from school • Additional needs to be met • Plan for reintegration • Review meeting dates • Appropriate planning discussed • Inform the authority regarding part-time timetable • Keep attendance records Invite representatives from other agencies, in partnership with the Learning Centre, such as Educational Psychologists, Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service, Medical Practitioner/s, Family Help and Social Services, SEND provision lead or case worker, as appropriate	Provide as much provision and education as the child's health allows and support the delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum in partnership with school Support learners to access and complete key stage tests and public examinations
Inform the Learning Centre of any safeguarding issues prior to contact	Include the child or young person and parent/carers in reviews and decisions

Ensure top-up funding (EHCP banding, PP etc) is used to support the pupil	Liaise with the school and Inclusion Lead in order to provide accurate attendance records
Plan for regular review meetings (every 6 weeks)	Work with school, and following medical advice implement a programme of reintegration
Continue to take all the actions expected for any child/young person on roll at the setting, including following appropriate attendance procedures.	.
If the CYP's needs persist which requires special educational provision which may be in accordance with an EHCP the SEND Code of Practice process should be followed as stated on the Local Offer	If the CYP's needs persist which requires special educational provision which may be in accordance with an EHCP the SEND Code of Practice process should be followed as stated on the Local Offer

8. Children or Young People with an Education, Health and Care Plan

8.1 If a child with an Education, Health and Care Plan experiences health difficulties which impact their attendance, their setting should involve external experts who can provide advice and support to settings such as:

- Educational Psychology Service (EPS).
- Specialist Teachers
- Health Services e.g. School Nursing Service, Forward Thinking Birmingham.
- Social Care.

8.2 Children and young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan and attendance concerns should be discussed at the joint planning meetings with the specialist teacher and educational psychologist. Requests to external experts must be made in a timely manner and the school must work together with those services to deliver any subsequent support.

8.3 The setting must also inform the child's special educational needs Provision Lead so that the special educational needs team can then support and advise the setting. It may be appropriate for settings to request an earlier review of the child's Education, Health and Care Plan where there has been a significant change in the child's needs and the support they require.

8.4 If a child of school-age with an Education, Health and Care Plan is unable to access their school due to illness for 15 days or more, whether consecutive or cumulative, their school must work in partnership with the special educational needs Provision Lead, young person and family. Any arrangements for alternative support will need to be done taking account of the child's identified special educational needs and the special educational support they require as outlined in their Education, Health and Care Plan.

9. Children or young people who are not on a school roll

9.1 Dorset Council retain responsibility for supporting Dorset children who are not on a roll at a school whose health needs prevent them from accessing education. These may include children who are awaiting placement. For example, children who have recently moved to Dorset whose illness has prevented them from accessing school support.

9.2 In these instances, parents, carers or professionals working with a child who falls into this category must contact the named LA officer to discuss education support. This may include interim support through alternative providers. Where a child is not on a school roll, the Council will expect the main healthcare provider to liaise with all professionals involved. If it is felt that a request for alternative support under Section 19 should be submitted, the main healthcare provider will submit this to their locality Inclusion Lead.

9.3 Children and Young people who are electively home educated will need to be on roll at a school before a request for a place at a Learning Centre can be made.

9.4 Under the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006, a school can only remove the name of a pupil who is unable to attend school because of additional health needs from its register in certain circumstances. These include where:

- the pupil has been certified by the school medical officer as unlikely to be in a fit state of health to attend school, before ceasing to be of school-age; and

- neither the pupil nor their parent has indicated to the school the intention to continue to attend the school, after ceasing to be of school-age. This applies even if the local authority has become responsible for the child's education. Note, however, that in some cases another of the grounds of deletion from the school roll under the 2006 Regulations may apply.

10. Medical needs evidence

10.1 Medical evidence from the main healthcare provider will need to be provided to consider their medical needs and how these impact on their ability to access education at their school. This is required to ensure the Council can identify the most appropriate educational support, and that any agreed alternative providers have accurate medical information to ensure the safety of the child, and their wellbeing.

10.2 The Council will only seek additional or continuing evidence where this is necessary. As outlined above, parents/carers are expected to advise the Council, school and alternative provider if there is any change in the child's health.

11. Funding alternative support

11.1 Where a child is permanently excluded, under Section 47 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 the Council must reduce the budget share of the excluding school.

11.2 When the child remains on the roll of their home school but requires a period of time in alternative provision due to their health or other agreed needs, the home school and Council will recoup a proportion of the school's funding 'associated with that child/young person to the alternative support, to ensure that the funding follows the child/young person.

11.3 The Council will calculate the amount of any such transfer by identifying those allowable funding factors (as found in Part 26 of the Schools Operational Guide and used in the allocation of Schools Block funding to individual schools) relating to the age and personal circumstances of the child. The proportion of funding to be transferred will be pro-rated to the number of complete weeks that the child spends in dual-registration or alternative support in the academic year, until the child either returns to their home school or is removed from its roll.

11.4 Dorset Council reserves the right to withdraw or reclaim a child's EHCP Banding where Dorset Council is commissioning provision under its' Section 19 'otherwise' duty.

11.5 If after a full academic year, it is evident that a return to the home school is not possible, the Council will consider full responsibility for costs. In these circumstances the child will remain on the roll of the home school until another suitable setting has been agreed as part of the child's plan.

11.6 The funding factors identified by Dorset Council as associated with an individual child include:

a. Basic entitlement (AWPU);
b. English as an additional language ("EAL")
c. Prior attainment;
d. Free school meals ("FSM")
e. Free school meals Ever6 ("FSM6")
f. IDACI Band E (a deprivation measure).

These figures may change from time to time in accordance with future editions of the Schools Operational Guide or upon review by the Council and Schools Forum.

12. Family Help

12.1 For further advice and guidance in relation to Family Help, please contact our Family Support and Advice Line Family help in Dorset - Dorset Council

Dorset Council

School Improvement Impact Report 2024 - 2025

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Executive Summary

Purpose

This report is written to present to Schools' Forum members to evidence and evaluate the impact of the School Improvement service in raising educational standards and providing a range of support.

The report will provide detail and evidence of impact pertaining to the key areas of leadership, governance, belonging and inclusion, curriculum and finance as set out in the Best Education for All plan. In addition, it will outline specialist projects and other work led by the School Improvement team. The offer has been delivered by the Education Challenge Leads (ECLs) and Schools Finance team with additional support to include Governor Services.

Key Findings

There is evidence of impact linked to the following areas:

- Bespoke Professional Development – training for Schools and Governors
- Coaching and mentoring for subject and school leaders
- Headteacher and Senior Leader recruitment and development
- Development and implementation of specialist projects and utilisation of LAG funding
- A range of meetings and events
- Continuous professional development
- Curriculum specific reviews and development work with schools, alongside a Maths and English offer working in partnership with external providers
- Ofsted support for schools
- Finance support for schools
- Governor services support for governing bodies and schools
- Headteacher appraisal service
- Specialist projects

Recommendations

- Continue to review and improve our Dorset Council School Improvement offer and functions from September 2026.
- Ensure that staff working within the School Improvement sector have the relevant expertise and up-to-date training to successfully implement all elements of the school improvement offer.
- Explore the possibility of delivering a Dorset led headteacher mentorship programme.
- Create a mechanism for collecting annual feedback from our maintained schools so that this can inform our planning moving forward.

Headteacher and SLT Recruitment

ECLs work with school leadership teams and governing bodies to provide support during recruitment windows.

Context

ECLs have participated in and supported schools in the recruitment of new Headteachers, providing examples of activities, support with interview questions and the full process of recruitment. ECLs have offered continual support to the Chair of Governors and governing body throughout this process (to include closely liaising with the Diocese). This ensured that governors were well-informed and prepared, and that relevant guidelines and legal recruitment processes were followed.

Examples of work

- **West:** Successful recruitment of a new primary school Headteacher which will bring stability to a school experiencing significant challenges. The headteacher was recruited with the support of the ECL and they will work closely together to continue to drive the school out of RI to good and beyond.
- **Dorchester:** Successful recruitment of a new first school Headteacher. The headteacher was recruited with the support of the ECL and they will work closely together to continue to drive the school out of RI into good and beyond.
- **North:** Successful recruitment of a new Secondary Headteacher.
- **Chesil:** Successful recruitment of two new primary Headteachers. Support for two primary schools with the appointment of new Deputy Headteachers.
- An ECL presented to governors regarding Headteacher recruitment within the maintained sector during the Chairs Briefing at Kingston Maurward (Autumn Term).

Impact

- “Thank you so much, both of you, for your support and wise advice today and all through this process - not least for all producing the paperwork we needed. I have especially valued having you at the 'end' of an email.”
- “From the early days of letting us know what we needed to do, from candidate walk arounds through to the interview process, you all have been so supportive. The governing board have enjoyed your time, humour, and professional support over this period to enable us to recruit a fantastic headteacher. We are very grateful.”

Team Around the School meetings

ECLs continue to implement and lead Team Around the School (TAS) meetings, necessary to support schools in several different contexts.

Context

ECLs take responsibility for setting up and leading TAS meetings. A TAS is put in place to provide high support and high challenge where needed.
The purpose of the TAS meeting is to regularly bring together all the professionals supporting a school’s improvement journey, to ensure that actions are rapid and there is a clear line of sight on the impact of improvements. The governing body and members of the Diocese (where appropriate) are an essential part of the TAS alongside other key stakeholders.

Examples of work

East: TAS meeting in place to support a school based around their decline in performance noted during their 2025 Section 8 inspection. This TAS is to support identified key areas and to ensure effective partnership with the school, leaders, governors and the ECL. This support has been valued and appreciated by the Headteacher. TAS meeting in place to support a school where there have been ongoing challenges. Extensive support was provided to the Chair of Governors, and additional school support provided from a visiting head.

West: TAS meetings for three schools. Two of the schools have a TAS in place because of an RI rating at Ofsted, the remaining school has one in place linked to finance.

Dorchester: TAS meetings have been in place for two schools. One due to a building project (now finished due to completion of the work) and one due to an Ofsted RI judgement and financial deficit.

North: Regular TAS meeting to support a school with ongoing challenges (Ofsted RI judgement and financial deficit) at one primary school.

Case Study

Context: A primary school was graded RI in November 2024. In January 2025 the HT was off sick until Easter. An Interim HT was appointed in the short term.

Support Provided: TAS meetings were re-established. Additional support and time were given to the school to plan the priorities for the Spring Term. The school's development plan was re-written alongside the interim HT to gain focus and momentum for the remainder of the year. English support was given to the English Lead to unpick the progress made since the Ofsted inspection (English was a key focus). This involved a subject discussion with Governor support and Learning walks/book monitoring/pupil voice. Support was provided to appoint a new Headteacher for the school. Collaboration with the SEND team to support the school with funding for pupils with high levels of need.

Impact: The school received support and advice regarding funding for SEND pupils to ensure identified pupils had sufficient funding. A new headteacher was interviewed and appointed and work has taken place to induct and support them.

Impact

- "Thank you for the minutes - they have captured the conversations well and I appreciate the thought that has gone into this. It was great to see you and chat through different ideas. The new HT feels really reassured having met you and is looking forward to working with you over the coming months."
- "Thank you for the report and the meeting. It felt really productive and I'm looking forward to getting out of the office more on your next visit to talk to pupils."

Ofsted support

ECLs provide support to Headteachers and wider school leadership teams in the lead up to, and during, Ofsted inspections.

Context

ECLs work with school leaders to ensure that they are well supported during the lead up to Ofsted, during the inspection itself and then following, including supporting with the creation of post-Ofsted Action Plans (where deemed necessary).

ECLs ensure that school leaders are kept abreast of updates and developments, using the Education Bulletin, LEADS touchdowns and LEADS in-person meetings to disseminate key messaging and information.

Examples of work

West: One maintained school supported through Ofsted. A SEND and Maths review was conducted through ECL visits. Both leaders in these areas were involved in deep dives throughout the inspection. They said that they felt prepared due to the prior reviews and were able to draw on this to facilitate their conversations. The school achieved Outstanding in 2 areas and good in the remaining.

Dorchester: One maintained school supported through Ofsted. Work conducted in the lead up to the Ofsted inspection included History and Geography curriculum reviews, a Behaviour Policy review (after a new policy

was implemented) and collation of staff and pupil voice. The school achieved Outstanding in three areas (Behaviour and attitudes, Personal Development and Early years provision). **Chesil:** There has been a successful Ofsted inspection at an infant school. The school's curriculum was praised, the SEND provision and their personal development. In the feedback Ofsted also mentioned the school's successful approach to writing (and the school has been accessing the LA English training to support this). **North:** Ofsted support provided to a school who moved from RI to Good. **East:** Ofsted support provided to a school going through significant change.
Impact
ECLs provide additional capacity to leadership teams and governors, and they are interviewed as part of the Ofsted inspection, enabling them to provide additional evidence and perspective. ECLs digest and analyse policy change and information and share with our schools in a timely fashion. School leaders feel supported through the inspection process.

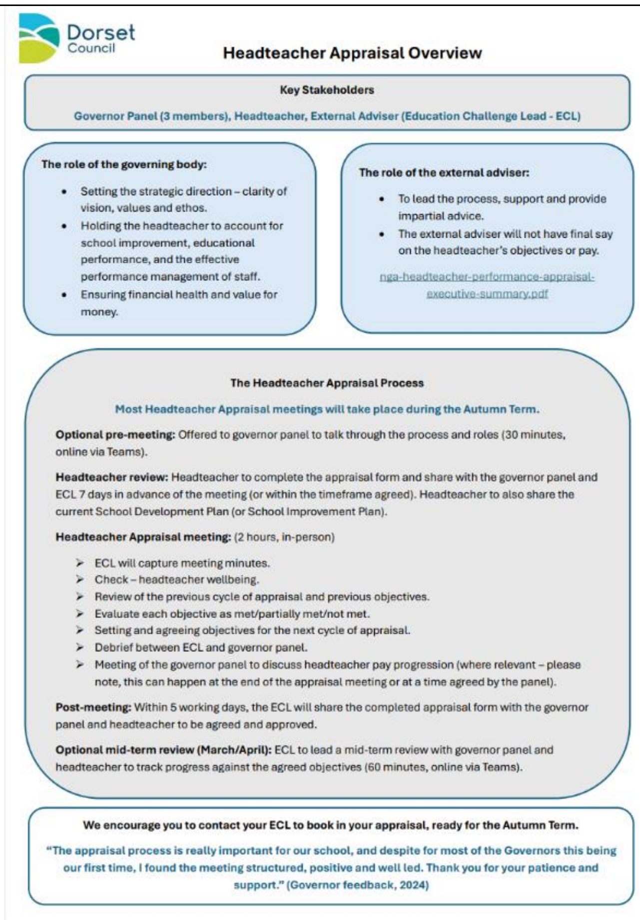
Headteacher Appraisal

This was a new offer introduced in September 2024 in response to the need to further improve our services and to meet demand.

Context

Officers recognised that some schools were paying for external support to lead Headteacher Appraisals, and we wanted to be able to provide this as part of our School Improvement Offer. External training was arranged by Richard Howes (ECL) from a Local Authority who were well established in providing this service.
This is a growth area for the school improvement team moving forward aligned with additional updates.
Appraisals remain a key measure in driving forward school improvement in our settings.

Examples of work



Dorset Council

Headteacher Appraisal Overview

Key Stakeholders

Governor Panel (3 members), Headteacher, External Adviser (Education Challenge Lead - ECL)

The role of the governing body:

- Setting the strategic direction – clarity of vision, values and ethos.
- Holding the headteacher to account for school improvement, educational performance, and the effective performance management of staff.
- Ensuring financial health and value for money.

The role of the external adviser:

- To lead the process, support and provide impartial advice.
- The external adviser will not have final say on the headteacher's objectives or pay.

nga-headteacher-performance-appraisal-executive-summary.pdf

The Headteacher Appraisal Process

Most Headteacher Appraisal meetings will take place during the Autumn Term.

Optional pre-meeting: Offered to governor panel to talk through the process and roles (30 minutes, online via Teams).

Headteacher review: Headteacher to complete the appraisal form and share with the governor panel and ECL 7 days in advance of the meeting (or within the timeframe agreed). Headteacher to also share the current School Development Plan (or School Improvement Plan).

Headteacher Appraisal meeting: (2 hours, in-person)

- ECL will capture meeting minutes.
- Check – headteacher wellbeing.
- Review of the previous cycle of appraisal and previous objectives.
- Evaluate each objective as met/partially met/not met.
- Setting and agreeing objectives for the next cycle of appraisal.
- Debrief between ECL and governor panel.
- Meeting of the governor panel to discuss headteacher pay progression (where relevant – please note, this can happen at the end of the appraisal meeting or at a time agreed by the panel).

Post-meeting: Within 5 working days, the ECL will share the completed appraisal form with the governor panel and headteacher to be agreed and approved.

Optional mid-term review (March/April): ECL to lead a mid-term review with governor panel and headteacher to track progress against the agreed objectives (60 minutes, online via Teams).

We encourage you to contact your ECL to book in your appraisal, ready for the Autumn Term.

"The appraisal process is really important for our school, and despite for most of the Governors this being our first time, I found the meeting structured, positive and well led. Thank you for your patience and support." (Governor feedback, 2024)

- ECLs act as the meeting lead and record keepers for the appraisal process and work with the governing body to ensure the appraisal follows due procedure. The process is rigorous and thorough.
- Headteacher appraisals have been conducted across all locality areas, mid-term reviews were also offered and carried out during the Spring term for those who requested them.

Impact

- ECLs conducted 15 Headteacher Appraisals during the Autumn Term 2024. This offer is now being taken up more widely and we already have 26 Headteacher Appraisals booked in for Autumn 2025.
- "Many thanks for today and all your input, it was much appreciated."
- "The appraisal process is really important for our school, and despite for most of the Governors this being our first time, I found the meeting structured, positive and well led. Thank you for your patience and support."
- "Thank you for your time last week. I found the meeting really insightful, and it was really nice to take the time to reflect on all of the great work that ---- is doing."
- "I would like to thank you for your time yesterday and in our initial meeting. I have found our discussions really informative and supportive. Having this type of appraisal meeting for the first time, I appreciated the structure, experience and personal touch you brought."

Leadership

ECLs work closely with our maintained headteachers and wider school leadership teams.

Context

In supporting school leaders, the Education Challenge Leads have provided Self-Evaluation Form (SEF) and School Development Plan (SDP) reviews, informal coaching for headteachers, visits to other schools, website compliance checks and strategies for improving outcomes for specific pupils groups such as FSM, SEN support and SEND, based on national and local research, along with organising and delivering bespoke training.

- **Examples of work**

- LEADS touchdowns and termly LEADS in-person meetings provide a forum for information sharing and discussion. We have worked to refine our LEADS in-person meetings to ensure they are purposeful and strategic, and we hope to improve attendance at these during the next academic year.
- The weekly digital education bulletin provides up-to-date information for our schools.
- An ECL was invited to speak to members of Dorset Association of Secondary Heads in the Spring term to provide a comprehensive update on changes to the national landscape.
- One ECL continues to attend all ASCL National and Regional conferences which allows for significant learning and networking opportunities.
- ECLs have been the key driver in the establishment/growth of several collaborations. The evolving LA Secondary Collaboration remains a work in progress, but we have seen encouraging impact from our work to date, particularly through the Peer Review Model. This model not only supports settings with quality assurance but allows for the sharing of best practice. The lead ECL continues to have a vision for how this work will grow organically over time and the potential this has moving forward. Other successful collaborations who work closely with ECLs are the West Dorset Schools Collaboration (WDSC), Chesil Collaboration, Learning First Alliance (Dorchester First maintained schools), Purbeck Collaboration and North collaboration.
- New headteachers (first headships or new to Dorset maintained sector) have received additional support to form part of an early induction. Support is provided to ensure that SDPs are concise and focused on specific areas of school improvement to help drive forward change, without taking on too much at once.

Impact

- "While measurable impact will emerge over time, schools have already developed stronger leadership, deeper trust, and clearer systems for collaboration...the partnership is well-placed to embed long-term inclusive change."
  EDT, Progress Report.

Curriculum

ECLs provide curriculum subject support, utilising national best practice and research, auditing tools and stringent review processes to drive this work.

Context

Curriculum reviews are carried out with schools based on the SDP priorities. Many of which involve ECLs working directly with subject leaders and link governors to ensure that they have a good understanding of what is happening in school and prioritising next steps.

Examples of work

- The pre-teaching and assigning competence in Maths course has been offered. This took place for the second time throughout the summer term. 13 participants took up the opportunity.
- Strong Foundations audit and follow up support for EYFS/KS1.
- Curriculum intent and implementation focused sessions with curriculum leaders.
- Pupil Voice for evidence of personal development.
- CPD planning with schools – ensuring that they are aware of the LA offer and if any gaps in training needs how ECLs can help them to source this.
- One ECL facilitated Oracy CPD – delivered to Chesil Challenge schools by Devon Research School.
- Bespoke Teaching and Learning training delivered in schools, all linked to evidence-based practice.
- The lead ECL for English facilitated English Training for all Dorset Schools delivered by Hampshire and funded by LA.
- One ECL is the STA linked Assessment Lead for Dorset, and they coordinated the statutory assessment moderation of KS2 writing, Phonics Screening and KS2 SATs administration checks. This ensured that we met our statutory duty of moderating 25% of all Dorset schools with KS2 for teacher assessed writing and 10% of all schools received checks for Phonics Screening and implementation of KS2 SATs.
- Curriculum reviews offered and conducted at a Secondary School in the West – PE, MFL and Art & Design.
- Ongoing support provided to some headteachers regarding alternative placements for students at risk of permanent exclusion or in need of specialist support.
- As part of our commitment to ensuring schools fully understand the statutory assessments in Primary schools, the ECL ensured that they delivered a programme of CPD linked to assessment and improving outcomes (EYFS, LKS2, KS2 and New to KS2). Whilst this was not free of charge (2024-2025) to access, the LA subsidises this training to make it as accessible as possible for all maintained schools to attend.
- The lead ECL for English developed an English offer and facilitated this across the year supporting KS2 writing. This workstream will look at verified KS2 English data this year to look for evidence of impact in those that attended.

Case Study

Context: A large primary school in Chesil wanted to drive excellence in its Early Years (EYFS) provision (nursery and reception) believing that improvements there would have a lasting impact on children as they progress through the school.

Support Provided: The school ECL led a Strong Foundations briefing for all staff and subsequently, a Strong Foundations audit was completed by reception teachers. The ECL also supported a new EYFS Lead appointment. A professional conversation focused on use of 'continuous provision', the ECL conducted a shared learning walk and then provided feedback to all staff. This resulted in the EYFS Lead having a clear understanding of priorities, agreed with staff, to move forwards with.

Impact: This project is now being driven by the EYFS Lead who is feeling clear in vision and aims for the provision. Support for monitoring impact will be provided next term when there has been a chance to implement actions.

Impact

- "Thank you very much for the lovely ECL visit report. Your suggestions about how we can further enhance this aspect of Maths were particularly helpful."
- Improvements in KS2 pupil outcomes for a school supported with English and Maths curriculum development and delivery (last years data shown in red for comparison):
- Reading – 83% 75%
- Writing – 83% 50%
- GPS - 67% 50%
- Maths - 75% 56%
- RWM - 67% 38%

Schools who have attended training tell us that it makes moderation easier for them and helps drive their subject knowledge to support better outcomes.

Inclusion & Belonging

The key areas of focus have been attendance, persistent absence, behaviour, SEND and personal development.

Context

ECLs work with schools, locality colleagues, Education Psychologists (EPs), Specialist Teachers, Inclusion Leads and the Virtual school to support strategic priorities in line with the SEND, Belonging and Attendance strategy. The embedding of inclusive practices ensures that all children and young people feel a sense of belonging.

Examples of work

- Successful LAG funding bids have secured 5 additional Dr Lucy Willets EBSA training days building on the work of EPs, for East, North and Dorchester as well as representatives from all other localities. This meant we were able to scale up the reach quicker.
- LAG funding has been used to implement the School's Partnership Programme focusing on Inclusion for the Maintained Schools in the North.
- Therapeutic Thinking Training has continued to be embedded across Dorset. Over 100 Dorset educationalists have been trained to deliver training over the last 3 years. The ECL lead works in collaboration with the lead specialist teacher and Senior EP.
- We have been working closely with IMPOWER to support the introduction and development of the use of VSEND in our Early Years and Primary settings. Members of the ECL team are now VSEND champions and one ECL is the Operational Lead alongside a Specialist teacher, Senior EP and Best Start in Life advisor for this work. They work with the champions in their role to deliver training and support settings to implement the VSEND tool. This tool supports settings to evaluate their provision (setting readiness) and to see how it aligns with child need (including child and parent voice).

Case Study

SEND INSET Day (January 2025)

Context:

The West Dorset Schools' Collaboration (WDSC — a collective of maintained primary schools in the West, supported by a maintained secondary school) requested support in organising a combined INSET day for a group of seven schools, bringing together approximately one hundred members of teaching and support staff.

The INSET day was organised by the ECL, working closely with WDSC Headteachers to ensure it aligned with the strategic aims of the collaboration and addressed the identified needs of SENDCOs and school staff.

Strategic aims of the WDSC:

1. To promote and support wellbeing and positive mental health for pupils and staff
2. To improve outcomes for pupils with SEND
3. To improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils

Sessions were carefully selected based on feedback gathered by Headteachers regarding what staff would find most useful. The day comprised nine workshops, all chosen to meet the needs of the schools (as identified by Headteachers and through the SENCO networking group).

Workshops included sessions on Neurodiversity, Family Systems, Supporting Children with Spelling, and Therapy through Nature, among others. This was the second INSET of its kind and was planned in collaboration with Specialist Teachers, TADSS, staff from Dorset's Mental Health Services, Educational Psychologists, and other external experts.

The INSET day aimed to strengthen and extend understanding of teaching children with SEND and to provide practical strategies and takeaways that could be implemented in the classroom immediately.

Impact:

The INSET training received an average rating of 4.46 out of 5, with overwhelmingly positive feedback from delegates:

- "Brilliant workshops – lovely to have the opportunity to meet up with other local schools."
- "I really enjoyed all the workshops I attended and got something from each one."
- "I enjoyed the practical tips and adaptations that could be made for all learners."

Case Study

Locality SEND Reception Staff Training (Autumn Term 2024)

Context:

Feedback from Dorset schools highlighted that teachers and support staff working in Reception were finding it increasingly challenging to meet the complex needs of children joining their classes. To address this, the ECL, Specialist Teachers, and Educational Psychologists from each locality offered a free training opportunity to all Dorset schools. The training was designed based on feedback from SENCOs and Reception staff, who reported difficulties in supporting some of the more complex needs in their classrooms.

Training was delivered in each locality, with the agenda adapted to suit individual contextual needs. For example, the training in West and Dorchester focused on Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN), sensory needs, ILP writing with purposeful small steps, and self-regulation.

Impact:

Individual feedback from Dorchester and West schools rated the training 4.78 out of 5:

- "Better understanding of supporting children with sensory differences and how to provide a sensory-friendly environment. Access to audit toolkits to help implement effective targeted support. Support with how to ensure ILP targets are outlining steps for success to evidence progress more successfully."

Case Study

Ofsted Feedback (Spring and Summer Term 2025)

Context:

Schools in Dorset have been working extremely hard to meet the varied and often complex needs of pupils in their classrooms. Recent Ofsted reports demonstrate the positive impact of this work, highlighting that our schools are progressing towards delivering an inclusive and adapted curriculum.

Impact:

Examples of recent Ofsted feedback in Dorset:

- Secondary school:
  "The school is precise and diagnostic in identifying the needs of pupils. It tailors the support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This means that teachers provide pupils with SEND with the adaptations they need to learn the curriculum."

- Primary school:
  "The school is ambitious for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). It works closely with outside agencies to identify and provide pupils with SEND the help they need."
- Special school:
  "The school has high expectations of pupils. It places high importance on a bespoke curriculum, including individualised therapeutic approaches to meet pupils' needs. Pupils benefit from a strong focus on communication, early reading, writing and mathematics. They experience success because staff understand their individual needs extremely well."
- First School:
  "Kindness ripples through this happy school. Nurturing relationships lie at the centre of this. Pupils appreciate the adults who care for them. They know who they can talk to if they have any worries. An inclusive culture ensures that everyone is welcome. Difference is valued and celebrated. As a result, pupils feel safe, supported and attend well."

Impact

We recognise the challenges our schools are facing and try and support this by providing training, utilising partnership working and directing schools to relevant research, case studies and strategies that might support and improve the work they are doing in this area.

Finance

The finance team provide support to schools and governors covering a range of services. Involvement of Dorset Council's School's finance team has been essential in bringing people together to source support for schools.

Context

Officers from the team work closely with school business managers and office support staff, alongside headteachers, to ensure that our schools are in the best possible financial position.
This year the Finance team have worked more closely with the ECL team to ensure that our work is aligned and to provide a streamlined approach for our maintained schools.

Examples of work

- Dorset Council has successfully secured School Resource Management Advisor (SRMA) reviews for six schools during 2024-25 and there are four booked so far for 2025-26. These in-depth specialist reviews provide schools with clear action plans and efficiencies for improving the use of resources at no cost to the school or LA.
- The School Finance & Support team continues to hold schools to account for their spending, which has contributed to a fall in schools' total deficit balances by approximately 8% over 2024-25. (*Excluding an accounting issue in one school)*
- The Schools' Finance team have issued three Notices of Finance Concern during the year and continue to work closely challenging and supporting schools to reach a financially sustainable position.
- Members of the school finance team attend Team Around the School (TAS) meetings for five schools currently to ensure financial objectives are balanced with maintaining quality of education. They work in partnership with ECLs to provide support and challenge to schools.
- The Finance team provide detailed guidance at budgeting and forecasting time to support schools in effective planning.
- The finance team have provided training for schools and created bespoke training to deliver an induction for three new Dorset maintained headteachers.

Case Study

Context: Dorset School ended 2023-24 with a deficit of £600,000.

Support Provided: • Investigation into accounts and variances • Technical accounting guidance on how to account for different income streams. Requiring them to remove their outreach costs and income from the school accounts reported as the income was providing false comfort and a lack of transparency in review of their financials. • Collaborating with internal colleagues from accountancy and SAFSOs – setting up a regular monthly internal meeting to aid information sharing and ensure consistent messaging. • Additional and enhanced monitoring • Creating a bespoke cash forecasting tool to monitor and forecast cash effectively (the school had experienced third party payroll direct debits bounce). • Escalating the need for a third-party review which took place in the summer term last year. • Providing support but also holding the school to account and clearly setting expectations by sending a notice of financial concern signed by Executive directors. • Attending governors' meetings. **Impact:** This has led to the school reducing their deficit by over £140k during 2024-25. This positive outcome has been achieved while maintaining an excellent working relationship with the Head and school Business Manager, who are appreciative of our support and challenge.
Impact
• 29 school finance courses were run by the School Finance & Support team during 2024-25 with a total of 234 delegates attending. Ensuring schools are equipped to manage their school budgets effectively. ➢ "I wanted to say separately a thank you to your team who have put in the work around this. I know it was a significant piece of work and appreciate it." ➢ " Thank you for your ongoing support and advice through attending Governing Body meetings."

Governance
In collaboration with Dorset Governor Services, the Education Challenge Leads work with governing bodies to support them in meeting their statutory duties.
Context
The Governor Services team have provided advice and support to the clerks and chairs. Advice has been about legal procedures and actions and advising on managing the relations and roles within governing bodies. Governor training has been delivered by ECLs including 'New to Governance and Understanding SEND as well as understanding Strategic vs Operational Leadership in the role of a governor. Training events and face-to-face clerk and chairs meets are held covering a range of relevant and requested topics. Based on feedback from this year, we are expanding our suite of governor training for 2025 – 2026.
Examples of work
• Working with the Chesil Collaboration: governor services officer/(s) have attended collaboration meetings each term to meet with Chairs and Heads to enable them to understand the challenges facing governors. Out of this came an invitation to attend a governing body meeting at each school. This has enabled officers to understand issues around recruitment of governors and build relationships with each board. Clerks have now asked officers to be involved in something similar for them. • A Governor services officer has attended TAS meetings for a school in the West, which has led to supporting the chair with some procedural matters around appointing governors; attended FGB meeting to support with minute taking in the absence of the clerk; provided support with new governor induction and governor training; and most recently supporting with the recruitment of a new clerk. • A secondary setting within the West received a full governor review in line with The School Governance Regulations 2013 document. This review involved interviewing all governors and key senior staff to assess the positive impact to date as well as to identify areas of development for the academic year ahead. • ECLs have worked closely with governors to provide support for Governor Monitoring - specifically linked to Review, Progress and Monitor (RPM) cycles. • An ECL has provided specific support for SEND support offering online training. • One ECL has conducted safeguarding conversations alongside the headteacher and extended leadership team. • Several schools have commissioned their ECL to work with governors as part of enhancement to their roles. This includes providing guidance and support linked to numerous areas dependent on school need and School Development Plan (SDP) priorities. • ECLs have attended full governing body meetings by invite of SLT to better understand the context of the setting and to develop relationships with the wider school community. • An overview of the Ofsted inspection process for management committees and governing bodies and how they can prepare and be ready at the point of inspection has been delivered in several schools. This has meant governors feel more secure in their understanding of the Education Inspection Framework (EIF) and how they can articulate the impact of their work with the lead HMI. • Bespoke support provided to a school within Chesil where a variety of issues were being dealt with. Officer from governor services has attended all FGB meetings this year; liaised with the chair, both previous and new, and helped to build relationships with other governors and Headteacher; advised on procedural matters; been a supportive ear to the clerk; appointed 'additional governors' under the power detailed in the school causing concerns guidance.

- Improved communication with clerks and chairs due to the creation of a weekly newsletter. This notifies them of training, key updates and other pertinent information.
- Training and meetings provided:
  - New governor induction training termly
  - Chairs' Briefings
  - Clerks' Briefings
  - Training for new clerks
  - Suite of five finance courses termly
  - Bespoke ECL training for governors
  - Short course on the Nolan Principles and Good Governance

Impact

- Bespoke training has been offered to all locality areas and has given governors the opportunity to work together and access additional training beyond the National Governance Association (NGA) resources (this is necessary because not all schools choose to sign up to the NGA). This work is being built on for 2025 – 2026 with a brand-new suite of training being written and delivered by ECLs.

Local Alliance Group (LAG) funding

Local Alliance Groups include members who have a vested interest in making a difference in the lives of children and families. There are six local alliance groups in Dorset, each representing a different geographical area. The groups agree on priorities and create plans to improve things for children and young people in their local area.

Context

ECLs support schools to write and submit LAG funding bids to support maintained schools with different priority areas. In addition, ECLs also facilitate consortium bids in conjunction with external organisations, including charitable foundations.

Examples of work

- ECL helped complete a successful bid for a first school 'Outdoor Sensory Circuits for KS2' with outcomes expected following installation in 2025-26.
- ECLs supported The Colyton Foundation to successfully bid for funding to run the 'Your Future Story' programme across a number of Secondary schools in Chesil and the West. This is led by a coalition of leading universities, schools, and charities today and is a pioneering initiative designed to support high-attaining young people from under-resourced backgrounds across the South West to access top universities.
- LAG funding was used to fund a Peer Review project in the North.
- LAG funding was used to provide EBSA training across locality areas.

Case Study

Chickerell Camp

LAG finding was utilised to purchase resources to support schools hosting children from the Chickerell Camp. Items purchased and given to schools included:

- 7 EAL Toolkits from Mantra Lingua**,** including Talking Pens and bilingual books
- Beginner's schemes of work
- EAL Beginners Activity Packs
- Picture Dictionaries (KS1 and KS 2 and KS 3)
- Picture Dictionary activity Packs

- Communication games

In addition, training was signposted, and schools were sent information about webinars and resources from the Bell Foundation, including the EAL Assessment Framework. Schools with Chickerell camp pupils also accessed Specialist Teacher EAL training.

Impact

- Whilst this funding specifically supported schools to work with children speaking Dari and Pashto (Afghan children) the resources can be added to ensure other languages are also supported.
- “Just to say that the resources are working so well with the boys.”
- “They are exactly what we were looking for in terms of offering a structured scheme of learning.”
- “It is so useful having these resources and knowing about the EAL Assessment Framework. It has helped us to work with other EAL children also.”
- “Thank you so much for the amazing pack you have left for me in reception. It is going to have a big impact on the children's progress during their time with us.”
- “We are really enjoying using the resources – they are just what we need to work with the children while they are with us.”

Specialist Projects and Events

The ECLs are involved in the leadership and implementation of a large number of different projects.

Context

ECLs work in partnership with Dorset locality colleagues, external stakeholders and national organisations to develop and deliver a range of specialist projects and opportunities.

Examples of work

- Chesil Challenge activities – addressing educational disadvantage. Learning walks, support with action planning, pupil voice, oracy, staff questionnaire and strategies. The Chesil Challenge continues to provide support and challenge to all school involved, focusing on their disadvantaged strategy. After 5 successful in-person workshops, the work is now focused on a school level, with ECLs following up on action points.
- ECLs facilitated the Chesil Challenge - Addressing Educational Disadvantage CPD, this was delivered by Marc Rowland and Roy Blatchford.
- Working with St Osmund's Middle School (Wessex MAT) to offer relational learning walks has resulted in 27 teachers visiting St Osmund's this academic year, this work is based on the research of Paul Dix and closely aligns with Dorset priorities.
- Our Leaders Learning Day at Trinity Academy in Bristol saw eleven delegates from across maintained schools visit Trinity Academy to focus on how the school works with, and prioritises, disadvantaged learners. Councillors with the portfolio for education were also invited to attend this event.
- We are in the process of commencing work with ALPS and Post 16 collaborative learning and this will come into fruition in the next academic year.

- The PESSPA network event in July 2025 saw one hundred primary teachers from across Dorset and BCP come together to focus on boosting student engagement. PESSPA education and play provides innovative sports and learning programs that extend beyond the classroom, promoting well-being and academic achievement.
- One ECL presented our Dorset Disadvantage Strategy at our Dorset LEADs meeting and as part of the Careers Hub Conference.
- An ECL lead attended the DfE Attendance Conference and presented feedback during our in-person LEADs meeting.

Action Tutoring

Dorset Council has piloted the use of Action Tutoring for KS2 and KS4 and following on from this work, has secured funding to provide eligible LA maintained schools with a subsidy to take up Action Tutoring for KS2 (2025-2026). We are pleased to be able to offer eligible schools £3000 towards the total cost of the tutoring programme. There are seven eligible schools (six primary and one middle school in Dorset). The selection of schools was a decision based on Action Tutoring's criteria and programme offer. Each school will be offered the following programme:

- An online programme in maths, reading or both subjects with Year 6.
- For a Year 6 programme, the pupils will receive tutoring sessions in the autumn (the first session will take place over the first two weeks of October) and spring term. In the summer term we would run a Year 5 programme.
- The programme is for an hour a week, at the same time and day each week. This can be before, during or after the school day.
- Action Tutoring will provide a dedicated member of Action Tutoring staff to support the delivery of the programme virtually, supporting with technology and as an observer in each virtual classroom, to manage the group of volunteers, and to provide the school with feedback.
- Action Tutoring will run a baseline assessment in September, and a progress check around the February half term, so that support can be tailored to the pupils needs, and so that they can also provide each school with an impact report.
- Each high-quality, trained volunteer tutor works with three pupils on average.

Case Study

Beach Clean: The Climate Ambassadors programme, of which all ECLs are involved, is dedicated to fostering awareness and action on climate issues. As a climate ambassador the goal was to educate and empower the next generation to take active roles in environmental conservation. By involving students in this hands-on activity, we aimed to instil a sense of responsibility and urgency about protecting our natural environment, while also highlighting the tangible impact of waste on our local ecosystems. Together, we can make a significant difference and inspire lasting change.

Impact: ECLs are all trained as Climate Ambassadors. They can provide bespoke support to schools, alongside our South West Climate Ambassador team, to achieve the Department for Education's Climate Action Plan initiative.

Case Study

Chickerell Camp

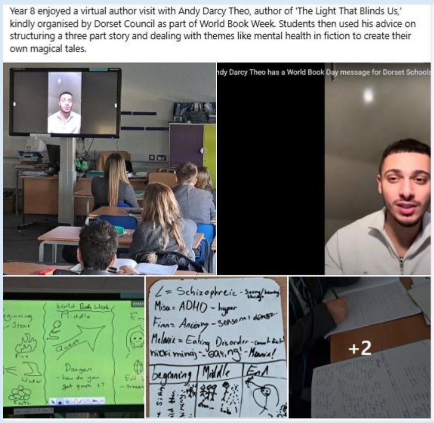
Afghan Nationals were moved to Chickerell Camp as part of a temporary housing scheme. The camp has accommodated families who were eligible to settle in the UK due to their contribution to UK objectives in Afghanistan. ECLs provided early support and education sessions for children, and they also provided education overview sessions for adults at the Chickerell Camp so that they could better understand the British Education system. When it became clear some families would be staying for longer than initially anticipated, ECLs worked with other Dorset Council (internal and external) stakeholders to place 170 children in local schools. The camp will be closing at the end of September and schools who have taken Afghan children from the camp have all expressed how much they've enjoyed having the children.

- "We've so enjoyed being a part of this scheme, I'm quite sad to hear that it's finishing."
- "Thank you for sharing this, I am sad to read this news, they are a key part of our family and we will miss them."
- "It has been a pleasure to support the children and families, and we would do so again - without hesitation."

Case Study

World Book Day

One ECL worked with Dorset Library Services to develop and facilitate an author event, this was hosted by Dorset Library Services.   Over 6000 pupils signed in to join online for the primary session and the secondary session was pre-recorded with schools accessing this throughout the week.



Case Study

The Chesil Literacy Project

The Chesil Literacy Project is run by ECLs in collaboration with colleagues from Dorset Music Service. The group organised the Chesil Poetry and Music festival giving Year 5 children the opportunity to perform on the professional stage at Weymouth Pavilion. Classes had support from the Dorset Music Hub to bring a musical element into the performance. Children (with disadvantage) were selected to introduce their performance (giving them increased opportunity to develop their oracy skills). Twenty-one classes across Chesil took part and parents and carers were invited into the audience.

Feedback:

- "Just a quick note to say how impressed I was with how well the children performed at today's performance at the Pavillion, and a big thank you to the teachers and Chesil literacy team for all the hard work and preparation that must have gone into it. And what a wonderful experience for the children to perform in a theatre."– A parent.
- "From an Oracy and personal development perspective, this event had a significant impact on some of our children. From a child who has significant S&L needs but could stand and clearly deliver part of their poem alone; a selective mute who played a key role and participated throughout, and an autistic child who didn't want to participate at the beginning but then wanted to play an instrument, perform and even have a solo part! This shows why we do it and we were proud of the children and to be part of this fantastic event so thank you once again!"– A school teacher.

Case Study

Dorset Education Conference: 26th June 2025

The conference was opened with a wonderful performance of spoken words from children of a Weymouth primary school.

Conference objectives:

- *To be able to identify and analyse the systemic and socio-economic barriers that impact educational access and achievement for disadvantaged children*
- *To learn about evidence-based teaching and intervention strategies that have been shown to improve engagement and attainment among disadvantaged learners*

Keynote speaker: Marc Rowland

The keynote address focused on disadvantage through the lens of education. Marc referenced both national and Dorset specific context and talked about barriers and what works to overcome them (with reference to the Chesil Challenge work). To conclude, he spoke about potential next steps and what proactive things schools can do to meaningfully address the educational gap.

During the conference we also heard from Action Tutoring and two schools who worked with them this year (as part of a pilot scheme) and from The Engagement Platform (TEP) about the research and findings from their most recent published paper.

Impact:

- The event was widely praised for its positive atmosphere, smooth delivery, and impactful networking.

- Attendees appreciated the inclusion of young people, the quality of presentations, and the collaborative spirit.

Improvements:

- Raise the profile of this event and give school leaders more lead in time so that they can prioritise their attendance.

Case Study

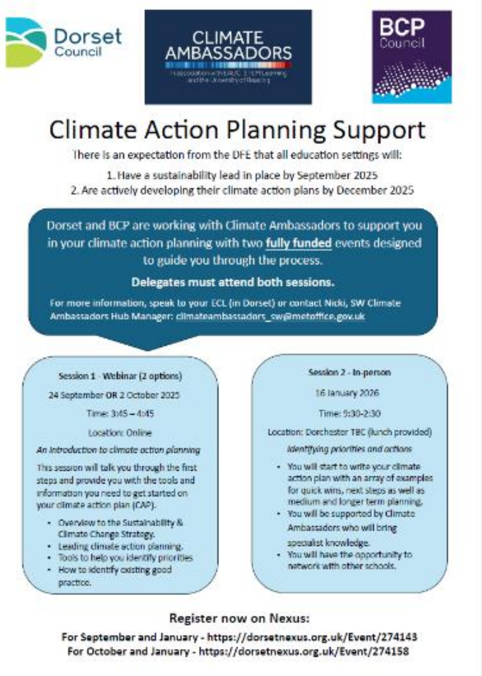
Dorset SACRE:

SACRE Locally Agreed Syllabus Launch and SACRE work have been a priority this year for the ECL Lead. The Locally Agreed syllabus for 2025-2030 was launched in the Spring Term (which was the culmination of 12 months of planning), with over 80 delegates in attendance. A restructured role for the RE Adviser for SACRE and significant work on developing a SACRE website has taken place, providing a platform for all of Dorset SACRE's work.

The launch of the new Common Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education 2025-2030 has been a success. All schools and academies across Dorset have received a hardbound copy of the new syllabus and were invited to a full day's training to support the implementation of the new curriculum. 82 schools attended this training. A new SACRE website is now in operation along with further annual training for leaders of RE, in addition to more structured guidance in operation around the role and functions of Dorset SACRE.

Impact

- All schools have been invited to attend Climate Action planning training taking place in Autumn (2025) and Spring (2026).



ECL involvement in specialist projects will continue and this will provide additional opportunities for our maintained schools.

Next Steps 2025 – 2026

- Adoption and implementation of policy changes: New Ofsted Framework, Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, Curriculum and Assessment review, expected SEND white paper.
- Commencing our project work with ALPS and Post 16 collaborative learning.
- Commence plans to work towards a Dorset Smart Phone strategy – a task and finish group has been set up and the key priority areas of work decided.

- Development work with the governor services team to strengthen our training offer including the delivery of a new training suite.
- Launch of a new programme focused on Rights and Responsibilities.
- Climate Ambassador programme (in line with the Department for Education's initiative).
- Specialist Projects: monitor and develop our partnership work with Action Tutoring, The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), Impact Ed (The Engagement Platform – TEP) and the PSHE Association. We have offered paid membership of the PSHE Association to all maintained schools, along with a significant contribution for TEP sign up. Along with this, we are also offering funded annual membership to OnlineSCR – a fully digital Single Central Record platform, which streamlines this crucial process. As ever, we will collect and analyse feedback from our maintained schools to determine the impact and value of these.
- Preparations for the 2026 Education Conference.
- Key Stage 2 Steering Group with Trust leaders.
- Detailed granular analysis of Key Stage 2, Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 outcomes for Dorset (identifying patterns/trends and considering how we can link schools to share best practice and further improve outcomes).
- We will focus on suspension and exclusion data. ECL will conduct a detailed analysis to identify key insights and opportunities to improve systems and processes. We will utilise data from the Virtual School, which will inform our practice and support efforts to reduce suspensions.
- Expansion of the Headteacher Appraisal service
- Development of the Chesil Regeneration project in partnership with the Economic Growth and Infrastructure Team (Weymouth 2040).

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Dorset Council

Dorset Schools' Forum

Date of Meeting:	**26 September 2025**
Report Title:	**Dedicated Schools' Grant (DSG) Monitoring 2025-26 (Q1)**
Executive Director:	**Paul Dempsey, Executive Director for People - Children**
Corporate Director:	**Alice Deacon, Corporate Director for Commissioning and Partnerships**
Report Author: Title: Tel: Email:	Lee House Service Manager - Finance 01305 225032 Lee.house@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk
Presenting Officer:	**As above**
Report Status:	**Public**
Reason for Submission to Schools' Forum:	**For ~~APPROVAL / CONSULTATION~~ / INFORMATION** **Under Forum power/responsibility**: ___ 4 (a) (i) acting as the conduit for information relating to Children's Services budgets, and particularly schools' and early years' funding, for relevant colleagues in schools and early years settings, to ensure the work of the Schools' Forum becomes a central part of the local education context.
Recommendation(s):	• To note the DSG Q1 2025-26 position
Reason for Recommendation(s):	To inform School's Forum of the latest DSG position and the reasons for the position.
DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST	**Schools' Forum members are reminded of their responsibility to make a declaration of interest in any agenda item in which**

	they have an interest, to the Chair or the Clerk, preferably in advance of the meeting.

1. **Executive Summary**

2. This report covers:

    1. The Dedicated Schools Grant context, including the statutory override
    2. The financial position of Dorset's DSG at July 2025
    3. Individual Schools Budget (ISB) Autumn Outturn Forecast for 2025-26
    4. Early Years and Central School Services blocks

3. <u>Context</u>

4. The Dedicated School Grant (DSG) is a ring-fenced grant of which the majority is used to fund individual school budgets in local authority maintained schools and academies in Dorset, early years nursery entitlement and provision for pupils with high needs, including those with Education Health & Care Plans (EHCPs) in special schools, special provision and mainstream schools in Dorset and out of county. Part of the DSG, the Central Services Schools Block (CSSB) provides funding for Dorset Council to carry out central functions on behalf of pupils in state-funded maintained schools and academies in England.

5. There are four blocks within the DSG: Schools Block (SB – including Individual Schools Budgets), Early Years Block (EYB), High Needs Block (HNB) and Central Services Schools Block (CSSB).

6. The cumulative DSG deficit, at the 31 March 2025 was £95.63m (31 March 2024 the total was £59.6m) with a forecast cumulative deficit reaching £148.18m by 31 March 2026. The following three paragraphs detail how local authorities currently account for the cumulative deficit until March 2026, when the deficit becomes a local authority general fund issue.

7. Any deficit associated with the DSG is kept off councils' balance sheets because of the statutory override set out in The Local Authorities Capital Finance and Accounting (England) Regulations. This was extended from March 2026 to March 2028 in June 2025.

8. Until March 2028 the deficit is therefore held separately from the general fund, however, there remains an underlying cashflow pressure from carrying a £148m deficit meaning that the Council has access to £148m less cash than it would otherwise. As a result, interest foregone during 2025/26 on the deficit equates to £4.9m of pressure met by the General Fund. This is £4.9m which could otherwise be spent on local service delivery.

9. As the deficit grows, there will come a point at which it exceeds Council reserves, and the Council would be technically insolvent. However, the government announced a two-year extension to the statutory instrument in June 2025, and in addition, will set out their approach to SEND reform in a white paper in the autumn. These commitments from the government should mean the future risk is lowered.

10. <u>DSG Quarter 1 position</u>

11. To align with the first published Dorset Council financial position, the first forecast position is July 2025.

12. At the 31 July 2025, the forecast outturn is a £52.534m overspend for 2025/26 (Appendix A). Adding the historic cumulative deficit position, a revised cumulative deficit would be £148.18m. This figure reflects the withholding of DfE contributions whilst the safety valve agreement is being reviewed. If the agreement is reinstated and previously committed contributions are received this would reduce to a cumulative deficit of £111.89m after DfE and Council contributions.

13. The outturn position for 2024-25 was a £37.3m overspend.

14. The performance of the 'Safety Valve' agreement is monitored against the DSG cumulative position excluding all DfE contributions. At the 31 March 2026, the revised DSG deficit is forecast to be £128.5m over the 'Safety Valve' agreement (Appendix B).

15. The overspend is exclusively within the High Needs Block although there is risk with the Early Years Block income accrual estimation made at the end of 2024/25.

16. Appendix A provides a summary of the forecast variance position and Appendix B provides an end of year position against the agreed 'Safety Valve' position.

17. 'Safety Valve' agreement

18. The 'Safety Valve' is a DfE programme where the local authority has agreed to develop a revised DSG Deficit management plan to achieve a sustainable financial position for the DSG budget. In return, the DfE will provide the local authority with additional funds as set out in the published plan. Agreements run for around five years and there are currently 34 local authorities in the programme and are published online.

19. Dorset Council signed a £42m 'Safety Valve' agreement with the Department for Education in March 2022 to help eradicate the cumulative DSG deficit and support a return to a balanced in-year DSG position by 2026-27. Dorset Council will contribute £33m as part of the agreement. Additionally, Dorset are investing £47m into capital schemes across the county.

20. To date, the DfE funding received totals £23.75m and Dorset Council contributions equal £15m. As at the 31 December 2024, no DfE contributions for 2023-24 and 2024-25 have yet been received. Dorset Council maintain a separate reserve totalling £12.9m to support the Safety Valve programme.

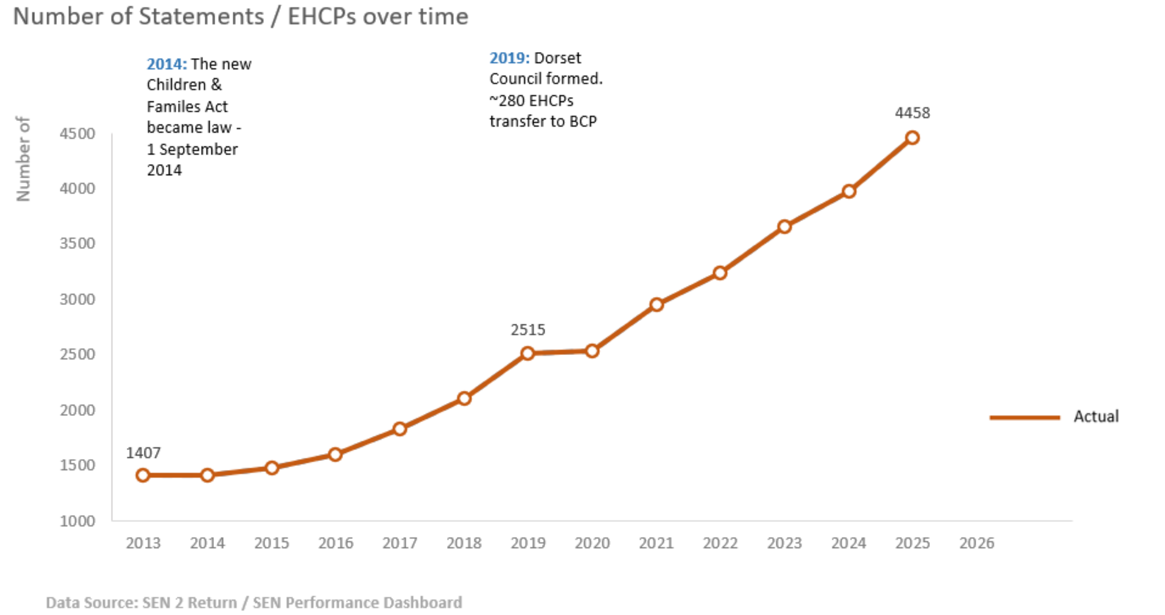
21. As a result of the financial position the Department for Education (DfE) continue to have conversations with Dorset Council, including a site visit by the DfE SEND Advisor culminating in a request produce another revised plan. A revised plan was submitted to the DfE on the 12 September 2025.

22. This recovery plan is part of the Council's Enhanced Monitoring and Support programme and is supported by DfE advisors.

23. This remains a prominent and well documented national issue.

24. High Needs Block

25. A significant driver for the historic deficit is the continued rise in the number of children and young people who require an Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP). Chart 1 demonstrates this growth since the introduction of the SEND reforms introduced in 2014.



26. CHART 1: Number of pupils with an EHCP since 2013

27. There has been a notable increase in Independent Special School Placements, with current forecasts indicating 305 FTE at an average cost of £67,377. This compares to the budgeted 261 FTE at £74,000. Although the average unit cost is lower than anticipated, the higher volume of placements is contributing to a projected overspend on Independent Special School Placements of £1.19m.

28. The DSG budget for financial year 25/26 was set with a starting in-year deficit of £51.11m. The majority of the movement from this starting deficit to the current overspend position of £52.534m is the forecast position on Independent Special School Placements mentioned above.

29. Learning Centres and Resourced Provision funding is seeing overspends of £1.13m as a result of high top-ups and additionally commissioned places for 25/26 academic year. However, these pressures have been partially mitigated by the removal of a previously forecasted cost, linked to a review whose conclusion has now been deferred to the next financial year.

30. A new EHCP database, Synergy Case Management, was implemented on 7th May 2025. Due to delays with reporting and data cleansing, EHCP data as at the end of July is currently unavailable but detail will be provided in the Q2 report.

31. <u>Individual Schools Budget (ISB) Outturn Forecast for 2025-26</u>

32. Final 2024-25 outturn balances for maintained schools were reported in July 2025. High level budget setting information for 2025-26 is shown below. Overall surplus levels are predicted to reduce. Deficit levels have also reduced although the number of schools in

deficit has increased by one.

	Surplus		Deficit	
2024-25 final	40 schools	£8,855,290	5 schools	-£806,136
2025-26 budget	39 schools	£5,209,006	6 schools	-£357,899

33. Historically, school surplus predictions are conservative at budget setting and increased levels would be expected at year end.

34. Work continues with schools in deficit to ensure deficit reduction plans are in place and remain on track. Meetings often involve the relevant Education Challenge Lead to ensure deficit reduction is not at the expense of school improvement.

35. There will be a focus on the use of excess surplus balances in the autumn term. At 2024-25 year end there were 24 schools with an excess surplus of 3,525,204. Schools report plans for the use of excess surplus balances when setting the budget and updates are provided with the termly forecast of outturn reports. Individual schools will be contacted this term for additional information on actions taken to ensure surplus reduction plans remain on track.

36. Early Years Block

37. There are no reported issues within the Early Years Block. The Early Years Block entitlements are:

- The 15 hours entitlement for eligible working parents of children from 9 months up to 2 years old (due to be extended to 30 hours from 1 September 2025)
- the 15 hours entitlement for eligible working parents of 2-year-old children (due to be extended to 30 hours from 1 September 2025)
- the 15 hours entitlement for families of 2-year-olds receiving additional support (formerly known as the 2-year-old disadvantaged entitlement)
- the universal 15 hours entitlement for all 3 and 4-year-olds
- the additional 15 hours entitlement for working parents of 3 and 4-year-olds

38. The Early Years Block has significantly increased in funding because of new entitlements and changes. Risks within the sector include deliverability of the new entitlements and (including financially) understanding and predicting the demand for the new or extended entitlements.

39. Central Schools Services Block

40. Part of the Central School Services Block funding allocation is based on historic commitments. The DfE remove part of this commitment for authorities to apply for this to be returned. Dorset Council have been successful in this application, resulting in a return of £76k, amending the historic commitment funding to £384k. This is due to premature retirement costs continuing to be greater than the historic commitment funding received

1. Well-being and Health implications

Provision for children with SEND is a statutory duty and includes provision for their wellbeing and health implications.

Effective school provision is part of the wider provision for supporting the health and wellbeing of children and young people.

2. Climate Implications

None

3. Other implications

None

4. Risk Assessment

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk posed by the DSG overspend has been identified as:

Current Risk: High
Residual Risk: Medium

This is dependent on effective management of the DSG HNB and EYB.

5. Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA)

The provision of education for children and young people is an essential part of tackling equalities issues. The council has a strategic role in promoting equality through its work for children with SEND.

6. Appendices

Appendix A: Total Dorset DSG forecast variance

Appendix B: Dorset's Cumulative DSG Position

Appendix F: Forecast DSG spend 2025-26

7. Background Papers

[Dorset SV agreement (publishing.service.gov.uk)]

Footnote:

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.

Total Dorset DSG forecast variance - July 2025

	Schools Block **£**	Central School Services Block (CSSB) £	High Needs Block £	Early Years Block £	**TOTAL FORECAST VARIANCE** **£**
Individual Schools budgets	0				**0**
Growth fund	0				**0**
De-delegated budgets	0				**0**
School Admissions		0			**0**
Schools Forum		0			**0**
Miscellaneous (not more than 1% of Schools Budget)		0			**0**
Licences		0			**0**
PRC ongoing		0			**0**
Dorset SACRE		0			**0**
Central services to all schools		0			**0**
HNB - overspend identified at budget setting			-51,107,820		**-51,107,820**
HNB - Places			-322,950		**-322,950**
HNB - Placements and Direct Payments			-1,857,761		**-1,857,761**
HNB - top up payments			832,188		**832,188**
HNB - Bespoke packages			-138,912		**-138,912**
HNB - NHS support			0		**0**
HNB - Contracts and development			-4,925		**-4,925**
HNB - hearing and vision support service			-23,484		**-23,484**
HNB - specialist teaching			87,113		**87,113**
HNB - physical and medical service			0		**0**

HNB - portage			42,141		**42,141**
HNB - complex communications			0		**0**
HNB - other			-39,780		**-39,780**
HNB - Recharges			0		**0**
					0
Early Years - 3&4 year old Universal and additional hours				0	**0**
Early Years - 2 Year old - Disadvantaged				0	**0**
Early Years - 2 year olds - Working Families				0	**0**
Early Years - Under 2s				0	**0**
Early Years - Early Years Pupil Premium				0	**0**
Early Years - Disability Access Fund				0	**0**
Early Years - Central rentention				0	**0**
Early Years - Exceptional circumstances				0	**0**
Early Years - Early SEND support				0	**0**
Early Years - Contingency				0	**0**
	0	0	-52,534,190	0	**-52,534,190**

Footnotes

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Dorset's Cumulative DSG Position - July 2025

Table 1: Dorset's revised DSG Position				
		£	£	£
Opening DSG Cumulative Deficit (1 April 2023)		35,918,172		
Add: All years 'Safety Valve' DfE funding received		23,750,000		
2023-24 DSG In-year overspend		23,655,314		
2024-25 DSG In-year overspend		37,288,452		
2025-26 DSG In-year overspend		52,534,190		
DSG Cumulative Deficit (31 March 2025)			173,146,128	
Dorset Council 2023-24 contribution		-		
Dorset Council 2024-25 contribution		-		
Dorset Council 2025-26 contribution				
Schools Block transfer 2024-25	-	1,231,990		
Schools Block transfer 2025-26	-	1,313,318		
Revised DSG Deficit (for 'Safety Valve' monitoring reporting)			**170,600,820**	
DfE ‘Safety Valve’ 2021-22 contribution	-	17,500,000		
DfE ‘Safety Valve’ 2022-23 contribution	-	6,250,000		
DfE ‘Safety Valve’ 2023-24 contribution		-		
DfE ‘Safety Valve’ 2024-25 contribution		-		
DfE ‘Safety Valve’ 2025-26 contribution		-		

Forecast closing DSG cumulative deficit (31 March 2025)	**146,850,820**
Outstanding DFE and DC contributions	36,287,000

Table 2: Required DSG position versus actual DSG position

Required DSG Deficit (for 'Safety Valve') 2025-26	42,099,501
Actual DSG Deficit (as Table 1)	170,600,820
Over the required 'Safety Valve' DSG Deficit	**128,501,319**

Appendix F

Total Dorset DSG forecast spend - July 2025

	Schools Block £	Central School Services Block (CSSB) £	High Needs Block £	Early Years Block £	**TOTAL FORECAST £**
Individual Schools budgets	75,115,515				**75,115,515**
Growth fund	471,459				**471,459**
De-delegated budgets	225,466				**225,466**
School Admissions		475,000			**475,000**
Schools Forum		54,700			**54,700**
Miscellaneous (not more than 1% of Schools Budget)		51,600			**51,600**
Licences		275,000			**275,000**
PRC ongoing		512,700			**512,700**
Dorset SACRE		10,000			**10,000**
Central services to all schools		781,057			**781,057**
HNB - Places			19,545,116		**19,545,116**
HNB - Placements and Direct Payments			31,243,254		**31,243,254**
HNB - top up payments			42,626,446		**42,626,446**
HNB - Bespoke packages			9,189,689		**9,189,689**
HNB - NHS support			213,308		**213,308**
HNB - Contracts and development			1,185,016		**1,185,016**
HNB - hearing and vision support service			904,468		**904,468**
HNB - specialist teaching			799,887		**799,887**
HNB - physical and medical service			101,780		**101,780**
HNB - portage			571,609		**571,609**
HNB - complex communications			0		**0**
HNB - other			813,997		**813,997**
HNB - Recharges			206,926		**206,926**
Early Years - provider budgets 3&4 year olds				17,986,824	**17,986,824**
Early Years - provider budgets 2 year olds				25,820,536	**25,820,536**
Pupil Premium				341,620	**341,620**
Early Years - centrally retained services				1,174,268	**1,174,268**
Early Year - disability access fund				232,624	**232,624**
	75,812,440	2,160,057	107,401,495	45,555,872	**230,929,864**

182,786,487	5,228,834
2,751,274	54,867,305
1,313,318	(52,534,190)

Footnotes

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Agenda Item 9

Dorset Schools' Forum

Date of Meeting:	**26 September 2025**
Report Title:	**Update on the Early Years Reference Group – Autumn 25**
Executive Director:	**Paul Dempsey, Executive Director for People - Children**
Corporate Director:	**Alice Deacon, Corporate Director for Commissioning and Partnerships**
Report Author: Title: Tel: Email:	Tom Easterbrook Schools' Forum Officer Schools, Finance & Support 01305 224567 tom.easterbrook@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk
Presenting Officer:	**Tom Easterbrook, Schools' Forum Officer Schools' Forum Officer Schools, Finance & Support Team**
Report Status:	**Public**
Reason for Submission to Schools' Forum:	**For Information** **Under Forum power/responsibility**: 1(e) Changes to the Scheme for Financing Schools
Recommendation(s):	That Schools' Forum notes the work of the Early Years Reference Group since the last meeting of Forum
Reason for Recommendation(s):	To ensure that Forum continues to be aware of the work and operation of the early is reference group as it is a formal subgroup of Forum.
DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST	Schools' Forum members are reminded of their responsibility to make a declaration of interest in any agenda item in which they have an interest, to the Chair or the Clerk, preferably in advance of the meeting.

1. Executive Summary

At the March 2025 meeting of Schools Forum, members agreed to establish an Early Years Reference Group (EYRG) to strengthen engagement with early years providers across Dorset. I am pleased to report that the group held its inaugural meeting on Tuesday, 1 July 2025, via MS Teams.

The meeting was chaired by Liz Curtis-Jones, Principal Lead for Best Start in Life, and attended by a broad range of early years representatives from across the county. The group includes members from childminding, private, voluntary, independent, and maintained sectors, ensuring diverse representation across Dorset's localities.

Membership of the Early Years Reference Group:

Rebecca Martin – Little Explorers Childminding (Childminder, Chesil – Weymouth)
Daniela Mark – Muddy Monkies (Private Sector, North)
Marketa Toon – Yarrells School and Nursery (Independent Sector, East)
Alex Fulton – Little Birch Pre-School (Private Sector, North)
Heather Stephens – Cerne Abbas CE VE First School (Local Authority Maintained, Dorchester)
Ewa Praschma – The Old School Nursery (Private Sector, East)
Regina Madero – Mariposa Childminding (Childminder, West)
Debbie Appleby – Orchard Day Nursery (Voluntary Sector, East)
Lorraine Clark – Hopscotch Pre-School (Private Sector, East)
Key areas of discussion included:

Funding Consultation: Members raised concerns about the fairness of current deprivation and small setting supplements. There was strong support for exploring a child-level deprivation model and reviewing the relevance of the small setting supplement. The Early Years Funding Team will prepare data and scenarios for the next meeting.

Workforce Incentives: The group discussed the new DfE £1,000 incentive scheme for new and returning practitioners. Concerns were raised about the exclusion of childminders and the long-term sustainability of the workforce. Dorset Council officers committed to raising these issues with the DfE.

Local Provider Agreement: Members expressed confusion around charging practices and the definition of "consumables." There was concern about equity and transparency across settings. Dorset Council has sent a formal letter to the Secretary of State for Education highlighting the financial pressures on PVI providers, supported by cross-party councillors.

SEND Consultation: The group was informed of an upcoming consultation on the use of Early Years Block funding for SEND. Members welcomed the opportunity to shape the engagement approach and review the draft consultation.

The meeting was constructive and well-attended, with members actively contributing to discussions. The group will meet again in October, with a focus on funding formula modelling and SEND consultation.

2. Financial Implications

n/a

3. Climate Implications

n/a

4. Other implications

n/a

5. Risk Assessment

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:
Current Risk: low
Residual Risk: low

6. Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA)

n/a

7. Appendices

A. Minutes of the 1 July 2025 Meeting

8. Background Papers

n/a

Footnote:

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.

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Early Years Reference Group – Meeting Minutes
Date: Tuesday, 1 July 2025Time: 6:30 pm – 8:00 pm

Venue: MS Teams Chair: Liz Curtis-Jones Clerk: Tom Easterbrook

Attendees

- Liz Curtis-Jones – Principal Lead, Best Start in Life
- Tom Easterbrook – Schools Forum Officer (Clerk)
- Vanessa Eddey – Team Manager, Schools, Finance & Support Team
- Tracy Privett – Early Education Funding Officer
- Lucy Cropp – Early Education Funding Officer
- Marketa Toon – Finance Manager, Yarrells Prep School
- Becca Martin – Childminder, Weymouth
- Regina Basurto – Childminder, West Dorset
- Dani Mark – Co-owner, Muddy Monkies Forest School, Blandford
- Lorraine Clark – Director, Hopscotch Preschool and Nursery, Ferndown
- Debbie Appleby – Owner, Orchard Day Nursery, Verwood
- Alex Fulton – Manager, The Birch Preschool, Blandford

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed members to the inaugural meeting of the Early Years Reference Group. The group was described as a vital new forum to ensure that the voices of all early years providers are heard in strategic discussions.

Each member introduced themselves, representing a wide range of settings across Dorset.

The Chair emphasised that this group is not intended to be a passive information-sharing session but a collaborative and challenging space where members are encouraged to question, reflect, and bring forward the views of their peers. The importance of diverse representation was highlighted, particularly in light of the complex nature of early years funding.

2. Declarations of Interest

The Clerk reminded members to declare any specific interests in agenda items. While all attendees have a general interest as early years providers, no specific declarations were made.

3. Review of Terms of Reference
The Clerk presented the Terms of Reference, which outlines the group's role in strengthening the relationship between providers, the local authority and Schools' Forum.

The group will provide feedback on funding formula impacts, sustainability, and the administration of grants. The Code of Conduct was also introduced, focusing on respectful, open, and confidential dialogue. Members were reminded that while discussions may be challenging, the aim is to foster a constructive and transparent relationship between the local authority and providers. There was general agreement with the principles outlined. Members appreciated the clarity and welcomed the opportunity to shape future agendas.

4. Timing and Content of the Next Financial Consultation
Vanessa Eddey led a detailed discussion on the financial consultation process. She explained that while funding rates are typically confirmed late in the year (often December), there is an opportunity to consult earlier on principles such as the deprivation and the small setting supplements.

Several members challenged the fairness of using provider location to determine deprivation funding, arguing that many children travel from more deprived areas and the current model does not reflect the actual needs of the children. There was strong support for exploring a child-level deprivation model, though concerns were raised about data availability and administrative complexity.

The small setting supplement was also questioned. Some felt it may no longer be necessary due to increased income from new entitlements, while others noted it still plays a role in supporting viability. Members requested clear data on how many settings are affected by each supplement. There was consensus that both supplements should be reviewed in detail at the next meeting, with scenarios and data modelling provided.

5. Sector Update
The group discussed the new DfE scheme offering a £1,000 incentive for new or returning practitioners in group and school-based settings.

Exclusion of childminders was a major concern. Some welcomed the scheme as a recruitment tool, especially given the sector-wide staffing crisis. Others expressed frustration that experienced, qualified staff receive no such recognition or support.

There were concerns about retention, with examples shared of staff leaving shortly after receiving similar incentives in the past.

The cost of Level 3 qualifications was highlighted as a barrier. Some settings are loaning staff the money to complete training, but this is not sustainable. The group agreed that while the scheme may help attract new staff, it does not address the long-term workforce sustainability challenge. Dorset Council officers committed to raising these concerns with the DfE and exploring local funding options alongside contacts at DWP

6. Local Provider Agreement
This item generated significant discussion. Members reflected on the recent changes to the Local Provider Agreement, particularly around charging practices and the DfE's statutory guidance on voluntary contributions.

Confusion remains over what constitutes a "consumable" and what can be charged for. There is inconsistency between local authorities, especially for providers near county borders. Some providers are charging high daily rates for consumables, while others offer the same services at no cost. This raises concerns about equity and transparency. Several members warned of a two-tier system, where children from lower-income families miss out on enrichment activities because their parents cannot afford voluntary charges. Others noted the difficulty of setting universal limits, given the diversity of settings, business models, and costs. There was strong support for Dorset Council to provide clearer guidance, including examples and FAQs. Members also requested that the Council raise the issue of national inconsistency with the DfE.

As part of Dorset Council's response to sector concerns, the Chair shared that a formal letter had been sent to the Secretary of State for Education, raising issues around the impact of National Insurance contribution changes on early years providers. This action followed extensive feedback from the sector, particularly regarding the financial strain on PVI (Private, Voluntary, and Independent) settings.

The letter was developed with cross-party support from Dorset Council members, including Councillor Nick Ireland and Councillor Andrew Parry, and was signed by local party leaders. It highlighted:

- The disproportionate impact of National Insurance changes on non-school settings.
- The lack of parity in funding and support between school-based and private providers.
- The risk to sustainability if providers stopped delivering funded places due to financial pressures.

The Chair explained that only 12 providers had submitted detailed financial data, but the reported impacts from the employers tax changes ranged from £1,000 per week to over £65,000 per year. These figures were used to illustrate the scale of the issue in the letter.

Although a response from the Secretary of State had not yet been received, the group was informed that MP Lloyd Hatton (South Dorset) had responded and met with Dorset Council representatives, including Liz Curtis-Jones, Vanessa Eddey, and Councillor Claire Sutton. During the meeting, Mr. Hatton expressed understanding of the challenges and committed to raising the issue with Stephen Morgan MP, the responsible minister

The Chair noted that while the group is realistic about the political complexities involved, maintaining pressure and visibility on these issues is essential. The engagement with MPs and ministers is part of a broader strategy to ensure Dorset's early years sector is represented at national level.

7. 30 Hours from September

This item was noted as a standing agenda point. No additional discussion was held, as many of the issues had already been covered under the Local Provider Agreement and sector update.

8. SEND Consultation in the Autumn Term

The group was informed of an upcoming consultation on the use of Early Years Block funding for SEND. This will focus on how funding is allocated and used to support children with additional needs. Members supported the idea of using multiple engagement methods, including locality meetings and informal discussions, to reduce survey fatigue and ensure broad participation. The group will be invited to review the draft consultation before it is launched.

9. Any Other Business

A new team member, Melissa, has joined the Early Years Funding Team to support with the growing volume of claims. Members expressed appreciation for the continued support from the funding officers, especially given the significant increase in workload.

A suggestion was made to include a brief overview of Schools' Forum at a future meeting, to help members understand its role and how early years issues are represented. Members were encouraged to suggest future agenda items and to reach out between meetings with ideas or concerns.

Action Summary

Action No.	Description	Owner
1	Prepare data and scenarios on deprivation and small setting supplements	Early Years Funding Team
2	Schedule October meeting and circulate consultation timeline	Clerk
3	Raise concerns with DfE re: incentive scheme fairness and retention	Dorset Council
4	Explore local funding options for Level 3 qualifications	Liz Curtis-Jones
5	Clarify guidance on consumables and voluntary charges	Early Years Funding Team
6	Raise concerns with DfE about charging inconsistencies and equity	Dorset Council
7	Draft SEND consultation and share with group for feedback	Vanessa Eddey
8	Add Schools Forum overview to next meeting agenda	Clerk

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