

## SCHOOLS' FORUM

### MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON FRIDAY 3 JULY 2026

#### 40. Attendance Record

| Sector                     | Name                     | Role<br>Establishment                                   | and26<br>Sep | 7<br>Nov | 16<br>Jan | 27<br>Feb                          | 27<br>Mar | 3<br>Jul |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------|----------|-----------|------------------------------------|-----------|----------|
| <b>MEMBERS</b>             |                          |                                                         |              |          |           |                                    |           |          |
| 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        | A         |                                    | P         | P        |
| Primary Maintained         | Simon Smith              | Head Teacher - Parrett & Axe Primary School             | A            | P        | P         |                                    | P         | A        |
|                            | Andrew Johnson           | Head Teacher - Conifers Primary School                  | P            | A        | P         |                                    | P         | A        |
|                            | Barbara Southcott        | Governor - Cerne Abbas First School                     | P            | P        | P         |                                    | P         | P        |
| Special Maintained         | Clive Padgett            | Head Teacher - Yewstock School & College                | A            | P        | P         | Reserve date, meeting not required | P         | P        |
| Learning Centre Maintained | David Dinsmore           | Head Teacher - Dorchester Learning Centre               | P            | P        | A         |                                    | A         | A        |
|                            | Alison Glazier           | Head Teacher - Compass Learning Centre                  | -            | -        | -         |                                    | P         | P        |
| Secondary Academy          | Brian Boyes              | Director of Secondary Education – Initio Learning Trust | P            | A        | A         |                                    | A         | A        |
|                            | Nick Rutherford          | Head Teacher - Thomas Hardy School, Wessex MAT          | P            | P        | A         |                                    | P         | P        |
|                            | Vacancy                  |                                                         |              |          |           |                                    |           |          |
|                            | Vacancy                  |                                                         |              |          |           |                                    |           |          |
| Primary Academy            | Adam Gough               | Head Teacher - Burton Bradstock                         | P            | P        | -         |                                    | -         | -        |

|                               |                   |                                                                                           |   |   |   |  |   |   |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|--|---|---|
|                               |                   | Primary, Initio                                                                           |   |   |   |  |   |   |
|                               | Paul Lavis        | Interim Director of Education - SAST                                                      | P | P | P |  | A | P |
|                               | Giles Pugh        | Deputy Director of Education and Finance Director - Salisbury Diocesan Board of Education | P | P | P |  | A | P |
|                               | Debbie Shutts     | Chief Financial Officer - Wessex MAT                                                      | P | P | P |  | A | P |
| Special Academy               | Katherine Seymour | Head Teacher - Wyvern Academy                                                             | P | P | P |  | A | P |
| Learning Centre Academy       | Kelly Knight      | Head Teacher - Harbour Vale School, SAST                                                  | P | P | P |  | P | P |
| Early years                   | Lorraine Clark    | Proprietor - Hopscotch Pre-school                                                         | P | A | P |  | P | P |
|                               | Dani Mark         | Director - Muddy Monkeys Ltd                                                              | A | P | P |  | - | - |
| Post-16                       | Kate Wills        | Principal - Coastland College                                                             | P | A | P |  | P | A |
| Trade Unions                  | Sarah Randell     | NASUWT - Dorset Teachers' & Support Staff Council                                         | P | P | - |  | P | P |
| <b>NAMED OBSERVERS</b>        |                   |                                                                                           |   |   |   |  |   |   |
| Maintained Learning Centres   | Kieren Hasler     | Governor - Forum Centre                                                                   | P | P | P |  | A | P |
| Maintained Special Schools    | Bruce Bonwell     | Governor- Westfield Arts College                                                          | P | A | P |  | P | A |
| Local Authority               | Clare Sutton      | Portfolio Holder for Children's Services                                                  | P | P | A |  | P | P |
| Church Schools                | Giles Pugh        | Deputy Director of Education and Finance Director - Salisbury Diocesan Board of Education | P | P | P |  | A | P |
| Local Authority               | Bridget Bolwell   | Elected Member                                                                            | - | P | - |  | - | - |
| Local Authority               | Carole Jones      | Formal observer to the Schools Forum (Elected Member)                                     | - | - | - |  | - | P |
| <b>OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE</b> |                   |                                                                                           |   |   |   |  |   |   |
| Local Authority               | Tom Easterbrook   | Schools' Forum Officer, (Clerk)                                                           | P | P | P |  | P | A |
| Local                         | Vanessa Eddey     | Acting Schools'                                                                           | P | P | P |  | P | P |

|                  |  |                                   |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|------------------|--|-----------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Authority</b> |  | <b>Forum<br/>Officer, (Clerk)</b> |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|------------------|--|-----------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|

| <b>Key</b> |                                 |
|------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>P</b>   | <b>Present</b>                  |
| <b>A</b>   | <b>Apologies</b>                |
| <b>-</b>   | <b>Absent without apologies</b> |
| <b>n/a</b> | <b>Not applicable</b>           |

#### 41. **Apologies for Absence and Vacancies**

The Chair opened the meeting and noted apologies received from David Dinsmore, Brian Boyes, Bruce Bonwell, Simon Smith and Mick Homer.

The Chair welcomed 4 new members Cllr Carole Jones, has replaced Cllr Byron Quayle as formal observer to the Schools Forum, Adam Gough, Bincombe Valley Primary (primary maintained), Mick Homer, St Mary's First School, Charminster (primary academy) and Alex Fulton, Little Birch Pre-school (Early Years).

An observer to the meeting is Cllr Jindy Atwal and Alison Glazier attending on behalf of DALCH.

In terms of vacancies, Giles is stepping down as primary academy member but will remain as the Church school's member. Furthermore, the Chair highlighted the long-standing secondary academy vacancies and asked members to assist in filling these.

The Chair thanked Andrew Johnson who will be leaving Schools' Forum at the end of this term.

No further apologies or membership updates were raised.

#### 42. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### 43. **Minutes and Actions from the Previous Meeting**

The Chair invited Forum members to comment on the accuracy of the minutes from the previous meeting. No amendments were requested, and the minutes were approved as an accurate record.

The Chair referred to the 4 outstanding items within the action log and the Clerk confirmed that these would be covered within the meeting.

One nomination had been received and seconded for Chair therefore Phil Jones will continue in his role as Chair. One nomination had been received

and seconded for Vice Chair therefore Keith Hales will continue in his role as Vice Chair.

#### **44. Work of Schools' Forum 2026/27**

The Forum noted the updated membership following recent elections and appointments.

The following members were confirmed as elected or reappointed:

- Mick Homer, Primary Academy
- Adam Gough, Primary Maintained
- Alex Fulton, Early Years
- Cllr Carole Jones, Formal Observer to the Schools Forum

New members have all attended a Schools' Forum induction session. The draft forward plan for 2026/27 was reviewed and some additional items raised. There has been a lot of activity around school-based nurseries so this will be brought to Forum in November.

The Forum asked about a date for the 90% write off via the High Needs Stability Grant. Officers updated Forum members that a local area Partnership SEND reform plan was submitted on 19<sup>th</sup> June and a decision is expected from the DFE in September about whether they approve our plan or not. However, this may not be in time for the September meeting and assurance was given that it would be brought as soon as possible to Forum.

Forum members asked for information around incentives for inclusive practice, previously presented in a detailed spreadsheet looking at the number of EHCPs in each school in Dorset. Forum members also requested information on post 16 capacity numbers and planning around this.

The proposed meeting dates and formats were also confirmed and going forward regular business meetings are scheduled to be online with the potential for 2 face to face workshops in November and March. Officers are aware that these sessions need to be meaningful and a good use of officers and Forum member's time.

#### **45. High Needs Allocations funded by block transfer**

There were two options presented for Forum to consider with the clarification that the allocations are high needs block funding in line with high needs guidance as opposed to a refund of schools' block funding or unwinding of the high needs block transfer. The aim of the additional funding is for schools to utilise it alongside the Inclusive Mainstream Fund.

It was agreed that schools understood the methodology used for the Inclusive Mainstream Fund in Option A, however officers were asked to explain Option B in more detail. The approach for option B is to distribute

based on the pupil factors in the October 2025 census; numbers of pupils in stage, free school meal children, low-priority attainment,

English as additional language, mobility and the IDACI deprivation measure. It was highlighted that this would not include any sort of exceptional circumstances or lump sum allowances.

Feedback received by Forum members from schools was that they understood that the money would be returned in the closest way that it was taken. It was noted that some schools could make considerable gain in their original funding using Option A.

In summary, Forum noted that the decision lies with officers, however that money being returned to schools was a benefit. The overall feeling was that Option B would be the most appropriate.

#### **46. Dedicated Schools' Grant (DSG) Outturn 2025-26**

The Forum received an update on the DSG final position for 2025-26. This continues to highlight the financial pressures facing the education system, particularly around special educational needs and disability. The overall DSG allocation was around £369 million of which there was an overspend of £54.5 million, exclusively within the high needs block. One of the reasons for that overspend, which has been well documented, is the continued rise in children and young people who require an education, health and care plan (EHCP).

Forum members observed that overall individual school balances have increased and the number of schools in deficit has gone up by one, but the amount of deficit has come down. Officers continue to work with schools with an excess surplus this year, collecting information on what plans are, with the principle of money today is for children in school today.

Forum members queried point 26, alternative provision spend and building capacity in learning centres to limit the AP spend. Officers explained a previous slide was shared showing the different pathways that we've developed with the Learning Centres and the 4th, Connect pathway is primarily designed for children that have been out of school for a long time. Officers will continue to work with Learning Centres on this.

Forum members queried the growing reserve balances for both Permanent Exclusions and Pupil Growth. Officers advised that the Pupil Growth balance includes the falling rolls fund and there will be a paper at the September forum meeting regarding this.

**Action 2025/11 Lee House: Provide further detail in respect of variances in the DSG budget in the next monitoring report.**

#### **47. SEND Reform Update**

Officers presented slides that were shown to secondary headteachers recently around SEND reform. The information included sufficiency plans around improving inclusion and capacity in mainstream schools. Data was presented to address previously raised actions and in particular the increase in Learning Centre capacity. From September, there is increased capacity in some Learning Centres.

Attention was drawn to the report in Appendix (08a) relating to Mainstream Specialist Funding in Dorset Report. £7.6 million pounds has been spent on this initiative over the past two years and the report summarises how the funding has been spent. East and Purbeck localities attribute the majority share of the spend, but this reflects the higher demand, the higher complexity of need and differences in local provision in that area.

Members asked about any capital plan to increase capacity in special schools for the most complex pupils and at what point would a family be given further options about continuing in mainstream or specialist provision. The vision is to create the understanding that there will be a choice for their child to be educated locally.

**Action 2025/12: Gavin Hayman to report back**

Members queried how educating more children more locally might reduce the transport budget. A working party will do a detailed piece of analysis around this.

Members asked about provision at post 16. Officers reassured members that a major strand of the SEND reform plan involves improving provision transition points, particularly secondary to post 16 and post 16 to adulthood. This involves extending the value in the SEND tool to post 16 transitions, developing something equivalent to the reception ready approach for secondary to post 16, creating more consistent information sharing between settings.

**48. Funding formulae for 2027-28: Timetable for Consultation**

The paper summarises the timeline for the consultation on the DSG formula for 2027-28 which is mostly dictated by the DfE deadlines and publications. Forum members were directed to a request for some feedback around how to introduce a new mainstream schools SEND working group this year. The group will initially focus on the High Needs Block and SEND Reform, incorporating a review of exceptional funding and the banding system. Members were also informed about an ongoing automation of EHCP's project with a view to purchase AI technology to support in this area. The proposed technology has very clear benefits for SEND colleagues in terms of reducing admin burden and improving consistency, allowing more time for relationship work with families and schools.

Paul Dempsey closed the meeting by giving members some further updates.

Dorset Council has funding for a SEND expert in every family hub across Dorset, which is very welcome and recruiting to those posts is happening now. More capacity has been added into the Council's SEND system and from September, there will be a specialist assessment team of officers just doing EHCP assessments.

49. **Any other business**

None