

**MINUTES OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING WITH
ENFIELD MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT**

Held on Friday 20 November 2015 at Highlands School

Schools Forum Members in attendance:

Governors: Ms I Cranfield (Primary) Chair, Mrs J Leach (Special), Mrs L Sless (Primary), Mr Clark (Primary)

Headteachers: Ms H Ballantine (Primary), Mr P De Rosa (Special), Mr B Goddard (Secondary) and Mr M Lavelle (Secondary)

Non-Schools Members:

Teachers' Committee	Mr S McNamara
Head of Behaviour Support	Mr J Carrick
Education Professional	Ms E Stickler

Enfield Members of Parliament:

Members of Parliament: Enfield Southgate	Mr D Burrowes
PA to Mr Burrowes	Ms M Zavros
Representing Ms Ryan, Member of Parliament: Enfield North	Ms N Cazimoglu
Representing Ms Osamor, Members of Parliament: Edmonton	Ms A Spence

Also attending:

Interim Chief Education Officer	Ms J Tosh
Resources Development Manager	Mrs S Brown

cc Schools Forum

* Italics denote absence

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from:

- Ms J Ryan who was represented by Ms Cazimoglu.
- Ms K Osamor who was represented by Ms Zavros.

2. INTRODUCTION

Mr Goddard welcomed and thanked Mr Burrowes, Ms Cazimoglu and Ms Zavros for agreeing to attend this meeting of the Schools Forum.

Mr Goddard explained that the Schools Forum was keen to meet with the Enfield MPs because the Forum considered it was important to share the concerns being raised by Enfield schools. Enfield schools were reporting that the Government policy of a flat cash settlement for the last five years was now leading to schools being unable to balance their budgets beyond 2016/17. The briefing previously circulated outlined some of the key areas but not all that were affecting schools.

Mr Goddard was aware after attending the Secondary Headteachers' Conference earlier in the week, that Mr Burrowes had already been made aware of the issues facing secondary schools, but this meeting would provide an opportunity to hear about the challenges for primary and special schools.

3. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSIONS

(a) Flat Cash Settlement

Reported that the flat cash settlement had meant schools needed to fund the cost of the pay award, increases in National Insurance contributions and other inflationary increases within existing budgets.

Noted:

- (i) The effect of the pay award had meant, for example, one secondary school had to find an additional £700k from within existing resources. Enfield schools had already been reducing their expenditure to manage the diminishing resources available through the

flat cash settlement. The significant money now needed to meet the ongoing effect of the pay award and NI contribution meant the need to review and reduce numbers of teaching, teaching assistant and specialist support staff. There was a real concern that the reduction in staffing would impact students' outcomes, because schools would need to consider larger class sizes with less in-class support.

Most secondary schools had seen a significant reduction in balances and were now projecting a budget deficit. Indeed, some schools' budgets were already in deficit.

(ii) There was currently a national shortage of teachers and a crisis in Enfield to recruit and retain good quality teachers.

(iii) Schools were seeing a contextual change within the borough, with some schools having up to 50% of their pupils with English as an additional language (EAL).

An example was a primary school that would be facing a deficit of £400k beyond 2016/17. As well as the staff reductions already mentioned, most schools had also reduced extra support provided by after schools clubs and activities.

With the high levels of pupils with EAL and pupils from a deprived background, there was a real concern that the most vulnerable pupils were the first to be affected by the tight financial settlement.

(iv) Most schools were being distracted from focussing on teaching and learning by having to investigate and consider the opportunity to raise income through lettings.

(v) At a recent meeting of special school Headteachers, it was confirmed that the special schools in Enfield would be facing a deficit budget at the end of next year.

Staffing structures were being reviewed and the schools were trying to manage and assist pupils with the most complex needs with reduced resources. Most special schools were now also closing provision such as clubs, swimming lessons and community shop.

(vi) Enfield had an increasing population of primary-aged pupils and, because there was no increase in places in special schools; primary schools had to manage pupils with increasingly complex needs.

(vii) Enfield schools recognised the need to make economies and savings but the lack of money to meet the cost of the NI, pension and pay award increases was having a profound impact. Headteachers were concerned that there was a real danger of eroding the improvements to educational standards.

(viii) A contextual problem was that Headteachers and staff were choosing to leave the profession and Enfield was unable to pay the higher salaries offered by neighbouring boroughs on Inner London Weighting.

(b) Funding growth for new academies and free schools

Reported that the responsibility for funding all academies and free schools from the Dedicated Schools Grant had transferred to local authorities. Where the academies and free schools were already established, this responsibility could be managed. However, the issue was managing the cost of growth for new academies and free schools as agreed by the DfE. These new academies and free schools were approved with no discussion with the Local Authority as to whether the provision was required and no additional funding provided to meet the cost of the growth.

Noted:

(i) The current estimate was that an additional £1.5m would need to be found from a flat cash DSG settlement to fund the new year-group opening in each of the new academies and free schools. The effect of the new academies and free schools meant that Enfield will not receive the funding in its DSG for the new classes opening at these schools.

(ii) While it was acknowledged that some of the new primary academies and free schools were required, unfortunately not all were in the area of greatest need for places. This was creating a pressure for some of the existing primary schools.

The current demographic changes being seen in the borough were such that there was a great increase in the number of primary-aged pupils, which was not currently being seen for secondary-aged pupils. Secondary schools were seeing a decline in pupil numbers and the creation of new secondary academies and free schools meant the need to fund growth in the new schools and at the same time existing schools were experiencing financial difficulties due to a drop in number of pupils on roll. It was estimated the loss in DSG to fund the new secondary academies and free schools was £750k.

There were already three maintained secondary schools and one academy facing financial difficulties and reporting deficit budgets, a situation that could only get worse unless more funding was provided.

- (iii) There was a need for the DfE and the Government to fund the pressures due to growth at the new academies and free schools, as well as consider involving local authorities and their Schools Forum when considering new academies and free schools.

(d) Support for Pupils from a Deprived Background

Reported Enfield schools historically had a high number of pupils from deprived backgrounds. The borough was now seeing a significant increase in the number of refugee families and asylum seekers. For example, one primary school had 47% of its pupils eligible for free school meals and 68% of EAL pupils.

The children of refugee families settling in Enfield and attending local schools were found to speak little or no English and some had no previous access to education.

Noted:

- (i) Schools had used the funding provided through the pupil premium to support pupils from deprived backgrounds and seen an increase in the number of pupils achieving the required attainment targets.

However, the school in the example detailed above was projecting a drop of pupils eligible for free school meals in the coming year from 47% to 38% and consequently a drop in funding. This drop was not due to a change in the needs of the pupils but to changes to criteria for assessing welfare benefit.

To manage and counter the effect of the reduction in funding, schools were cutting additional support and services.

- (ii) The change in the number of pupils eligible for free school meals was being seen across all schools. Nationally, it was recognised that there was a need to support the attainment of white British boys and the reduction in funding would make it very difficult for schools to do this.
- (iii) Schools were trying to encourage parents of pupils to apply for free school meal eligibility, even though their children were receiving a free school meal as part of the universal offer for infant-aged pupils.
- (iv) Schools were continuing to work hard to reduce the attainment gap between pupils eligible and not eligible for free school meals and the current pressure in funding would make it unsustainable to maintain and provide the additional support the disadvantaged pupils required.

(c) Response to the issues raised

- (i) The Government was committed to reviewing the funding arrangements for schools and ensure that they supported pupils from deprived backgrounds. Nationally, it was a difficult time and the needs identified had to be balanced against the resources available.

Under the current Government policy, the Forum could not be advised that the Schools Budget would be protected while other budgets were being cut, but the Government had protected the per-pupil spend.

It was commented that, although this was acknowledged, it did not allow for the increase in the pay award due to national changes to the NI contributions and pay award.

- (ii) It was observed that the funding arrangements needed to recognise the changing picture for the demography of the borough and the additional burden this created for schools.
- (iii) It was questioned whether Enfield schools had informed parents about the issues they were facing.

It was commented that it was difficult to raise these issues with some parents without causing alarm. However, parents were seeing changes in terms of bigger class sizes, less support staff around the schools and reduction in the provision available after school.

There were a number of parents who did not speak English and it was sometimes difficult to communicate with these and other vulnerable families.

Schools were the first point of contact for raising general concerns and issues families were experiencing but, with the reduction in support staff, schools may not be in a position to deal with these.

The Forum advised that there was an increase in the number of families stating that they could not afford for the children to have a meal. The children were coming to school hungry and the school had a duty to look after the children, which placed a further burden on the school.

(d) Funding for Pupils with High Needs

The MPs were advised that Enfield had seen a real increase in primary-aged pupils and yet there had been no change in the number of places provided for pupils with complex needs. The current increase in pupils with high needs was being managed within the existing DSG and creating a further pressure for mainstream schools. There was a need to ensure that the system recognised and funded all pupils with high needs as well as the place funding for individual institutions.

4. ARRANGEMENTS FOR RESPONDING TO ACTIONS ARISING FROM THE MEETING

The Schools Forum was asking the Enfield MPs to raise the issues and difficulties discussed at briefings and meetings held in Parliament. The Forum also sought a public statement recognising the issues.

It was agreed that the three Enfield MPs would be provided with such further information as they requested and also:

- (a) examples of the impact of the cuts;
- (b) the notes from the meeting.

ACTION: Schools Forum Members and Mrs Brown

5. CONFIDENTIALITY

No items were considered to be confidential.