

Minutes of the Cheshire East Schools' Forum Meeting held remotely via Teams on Thursday 1 October 2026 at 16:30

Members		Position	Attendance
Maintained Nursery School			
Emma Connor	Westminster Nursery School	Headteacher	✓
Maintained Primary Headteachers			
Sara Harper	Beechwood Primary School and Nursery	Headteacher	✓
John Frankland	Rode Heath Primary School	Headteacher	✓
Maintained Primary Governor			
Johanne McKie	Woodcocks' Well Primary	Governor	X
Maintained Secondary Headteacher			
Dean Postlethwaite	Ruskin Community High School	Headteacher	✓
Maintained Special School			
Lisa Hodgkinson	Springfield School	Headteacher	X
Academy Alternative Provision			
Nic Brindle	The Fermain Academy	Headteacher	✓
Academy Primary Headteachers			
Anna Jones	Black Firs Primary School	Headteacher	✓
Janet McKinlay	St Mary's Catholic Primary School	Headteacher	✓
Vacancy			
Academy Primary Governors			
Helen Marsh	Wilmslow Academy	Governor	✓
Academy Secondary Headteachers			
Nigel Bielby	Holmes Chapel Comprehensive	Headteacher	✓
Sarah Burns	Sandbach School	Headteacher	Apologies
Emma Caswell	Shavington Academy	Headteacher	Apologies
Academy Secondary Governor			
Christina Burgess	Holmes Chapel Comprehensive	Trustee	✓
Academy Representatives (Other)			
Janet Furber	The Cornovii Trust (Alsager; Brine Leas)	Trustee	✓
Kevin Simpson	CEO of Aspire Educational Trust	Other	✓
Ruth Livingstone	Chair of LGB, Bosley St Mary's Primary	Other	X
Sarah Sproston	Excalibur Primary	Governor	✓
Vacancy			
Academy Special			
Sarah Martin	Adelaide School/Adelaide Heath	Executive HT	✓
C of E Diocese Representative			
Neil Garratt	Elworth CE School	Headteacher	X
Catholic Diocese Representative			
Nuala Ferguson	St Anne's RC Primary	Headteacher	✓
Private / Voluntary Early Years			
Debbie Thelwell	Little Angels Nurseries	Manager	✓
16 - 19 Sector			
Jordan Swift	Cheshire College South and West		Apologies
TU Representative			
Sarah Vaughan	NEU		✓
LA Officers			
Louisa Moseley	Clerk to the Forum		✓

Sarah Clough	Strategic Lead for Inclusive Mainstream Practice	✓
Marc Booker	Minuting clerk	Apologies
Kathy Oliver	Accountant	✓
Samantha Longshaw	Principal Accountant	✓
Diane Green	Finance Manager (Children's Services)	✓
Dawn Godfrey	Executive Director of Children's Services	Apologies
Helen Wallace	Director for Education, Strong Start and Integration	✓
Laura Rogerson	Head of Education	Apologies
Alex Cooper	Project manager -SEND	✓
Observers		
Cllr Laura Crane		Apologies
Cllr Jos Saunders		X

The meeting commenced at 16:30 and was quorate. The Vice Chair (Emma Connor) agreed to act as meeting chair.

1. Welcome

The Vice Chair welcomed all forum members and LA officers and thanked them for attending. The Vice Chair reminded members of the MS Teams etiquette regarding online meetings. The members agreed to the meeting being recorded for minuting purposes.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received and accepted from:

- Sarah Burns – Academy Secondary Headteacher
- Emma Casewell – Academy Secondary Headteacher
- Jordan Swift – 16-19 representative
- Dawn Godfrey – Executive Director of Children's Services
- Laura Rogerson – Head of Education
- Marc Booker – minuting clerk

3. Declarations of Interest

Members were reminded to submit annual declarations of interest; the Clerk advised that eight declarations had been received and requested any outstanding forms be submitted before half-term.

ACTION: Submit outstanding annual Declarations of Interest to the Clerk to the Forum by 23rd October 2026.

Members were asked to notify the Clerk of any conflicts of interest with the business to be discussed at the meeting: there were no declarations of interest made.

4. Election of Chair

The Clerk advised that no nominations had been received following circulation of a request to members and outlined the responsibilities associated with the role, including participation in agenda-setting meetings, review of meeting papers and chairing Forum meetings.

Members discussed potential approaches to the role, including whether a rotating or co-chair arrangement could be considered should no individual member wish to undertake the position on a permanent basis. Clarification was provided that the Chair could be drawn from any Forum membership category but could not be a Local Authority officer.

Members sought assurance regarding the practical commitment involved in the role. It was explained that a standard cycle of business already existed for Forum meetings and that officers provided substantial administrative and professional support, including preparation of agendas, reports and briefing notes.

Following discussion, Janet McKinlay, Academy Primary Headteacher Representative, volunteered to undertake the role.

Resolved: Janet McKinlay was elected Chair of Schools' Forum for the 2026/27 academic year.

5. Election of Vice Chair

The Vice Chair confirmed her willingness to continue in office.

Members expressed their support for retaining continuity within the role.

Resolved: Emma Connor was elected Vice Chair of Schools' Forum for the 2026/27 academic year.

6. Membership of School's Forum

a. Vacancies, appointments and terms of office

Recent appointments

The Clerk welcomed:

- Janet McKinlay as Academy Primary Headteacher Representative.
- Jordan Swift as 16-19 Sector Representative.

- Helen Marsh, who had agreed to extend her term as Academy Primary Governor Representative

Vacancies

Current vacancies were noted as:

- One Academy Primary Headteacher Representative.
- One Academy Representative (Other).
- One Academy Secondary Headteacher Representative, following the departure of Sarah Burns whose term would end on 04 October 2026.

During discussion, members requested that formal thanks be recorded to Sarah Burns for her longstanding contribution to Schools' Forum and particularly for her service as Chair.

Resolved: Members recorded their appreciation and thanks to Sarah Burns for her commitment and leadership during her tenure as Chair of Schools' Forum.

ACTION: Clerk to the Forum to continue recruitment activity for current Schools' Forum vacancies

Terms of office due to expire before the next meeting

Members were advised of terms of office due to expire before the next meeting and affected members were asked to confirm whether they wished to continue in post.

Academy Representative Other

Janet Furber (JF), The Cornovii Trust (Chair of Trustees), 19 Oct 2023 – 18 Oct 2026

Academy Primary Representative HT

Anna Jones (AJ), Black Firs Primary School, 04 Dec 2023 – 03 Dec 2026

Academy Secondary Representative Governor

Christina Burgess (CB), Holmes Chapel Comprehensive, 06 Dec 2023 – 05 Dec 2026

ACTION: JF, AJ, CB to confirm whether willing to continue in post following expiry of current term of office, before next SF meeting.

b. Members' Attendance Report 2025-26

The attendance report for 2025/26 was received and noted.

c. Approval of the Constitution/Terms of Reference

The Clerk presented the updated Constitution and Terms of Reference.

Members noted the only proposed amendment related to the operation of Schools Forum Working Groups, reflecting the previously agreed position that formal recommendations may be brought forward where consensus exists.

Resolved: The revised Constitution and Terms of Reference were approved.

d. Review of Voting Model

Members noted that no changes were required to the existing voting model as the Forum composition remained unchanged.

e. School Forum Working Group – Terms of Office/Membership

The revised arrangements for working groups were noted.

Members confirmed their support for the amended approach allowing recommendations to be brought to Forum where consensus had been reached.

7. Minutes of the Schools' Forum meeting held on 11 June 2026 and matters arising.

The minutes of the Schools' Forum meeting held on 11 June 2026 were reviewed.

Resolved: The minutes were approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

The **Action Log** was reviewed.

Members noted that all previous actions had either been completed or were progressing appropriately, with only recruitment activity relating to vacancies remaining ongoing.

8. Disapplication

Sarah Clough (SC) presented a detailed update on delivery of the 2026/27 disapplication programme and proposals for 2027/28.

Members were advised that funding had enabled establishment of the Inclusion Support Team, implementation of locality-based inclusion arrangements, introduction of the Inclusion Framework, development of SENCO networks, specialist outreach provision, targeted SEN funding arrangements and the creation of Inclusion Forums. Members further noted that the local authority had leveraged additional external grant funding, particularly through the Experts at Hand programme, to enhance the support offer beyond that originally envisaged.

Challenge Regarding Capacity

A member welcomed early positive experiences of the Inclusion Support Team but questioned whether local authority capacity would be sufficient to meet the significant levels of SEND demand across Cheshire East schools.

It was noted that many schools could identify substantial numbers of pupils requiring additional support and concern was expressed that demand might exceed available capacity despite the additional staffing and funding arrangements.

In response, SC outlined the expanded support offer being delivered through the Experts at Hand programme, the Inclusion Support Team, Educational Psychology services, Autism Team, Speech and Language Therapy and Occupational Therapy services. Members were advised that schools would begin to experience significantly increased visibility and accessibility of specialist services, although some aspects of the model remained subject to recruitment activity and would therefore become fully operational later in the academic year.

Challenge Regarding Pre-EHCP Funding

Members questioned whether funding proposed through the new pre-EHCP inclusion funding arrangements would be sufficient to address demand.

Officers acknowledged that available resources were finite and that the proposal would initially operate as a pilot. It was explained that the intention was to provide evidence demonstrating the impact of earlier intervention and additional support before EHCP assessment. SC reported that the pilot was intended to test whether timely support could reduce escalation of need and potentially reduce demand for statutory processes over time.

The Forum noted that the local authority wished ultimately to grow the fund but would first need to demonstrate impact and value through robust evaluation.

Challenge Regarding Value for Money and Evaluation

Members sought assurance regarding how the effectiveness of the substantial programme of activity would be measured and how Schools' Forum would be able to determine whether value for money was being achieved.

Officers advised that significant work was underway to develop a more sophisticated outcomes framework moving beyond simple activity and participation measures. Future reporting would focus on measurable outcomes including:

- Exclusions and suspensions.
- Attendance.
- Part-time timetables.
- Needs assessment activity.
- Pupil access and participation.
- Locality-level and borough-wide trends.

Members were advised that some measures would provide short-term indicators, whilst others would require longer-term evaluation because of the complexity of the SEND system and the wider impact of national reforms. Case studies and lived-experience evidence would also form part of future impact reporting.

The Forum welcomed the commitment to outcome-focused reporting and requested that progress be reported through future meetings.

Members noted that the local authority intended to reduce the requested disapplication from 0.75% to 0.5% in recognition of financial pressures on schools whilst maintaining the inclusion support offer through a combination of DSG and external grant funding.

9. Update on 2027/28 DSG Funding and setting a Schools Funding Formula for 2027/28

Members received an update from Kathy Oliver (KO) regarding the latest position on DSG funding. It was noted that no detailed 2027/28 funding announcements had yet been issued by the Department for Education and that planning assumptions therefore remained based on current year's arrangements. Members were advised to expect further information later in the autumn.

Exceptional Rent Disapplication

Members considered the annual disapplication request relating to exceptional rent funding.

A member sought clarification regarding whether the funding related solely to core school accommodation. Officers confirmed that the request related only to schools' principal teaching accommodation and not additional facilities.

Resolved: Schools' Forum unanimously (14 out of 14 votes received) supported continuation of the exceptional rent disapplication for the two qualifying schools.

Schools Block Transfer Disapplication

Members considered the local authority's proposal to retain the option of seeking approval for a 0.5% Schools Block to High Needs Block transfer.

Discussion took place regarding the distinction between supporting the disapplication request and determining the eventual level of transfer following consultation.

Resolved: The majority of members (10 out of 11 votes received) supported the local authority retaining the option to pursue a 0.5% disapplication should this subsequently prove necessary. One member indicated opposition to the proposal.

Minimum Funding Guarantee

Members considered whether the authority should seek a disapplication to exceed the standard minimum funding guarantee range.

Resolved: The majority of members (13 out of 15 votes received) did **not** support pursuing a higher-rate Minimum Funding Guarantee disapplication. Two members indicated support, but the majority were opposed.

Trade Union Facilities

Members considered future funding arrangements in light of DfE clarification that de-delegated surpluses and deficits could no longer be carried forward.

A member questioned how schools that did not contribute to Trade Union Facilities arrangements would receive trade union representation when required. A member representative explained that support continued to be provided wherever possible and that unions had historically acted in good faith. Members were advised that many meetings now took place after the school day to minimise costs and disruption. It was further noted that only a small number of larger trusts now remained outside collective arrangements.

Members recognised the practical challenges involved and the importance of maintaining effective professional representation arrangements.

Resolved: Maintained school representatives (4 out of 4 votes received) unanimously supported the current de-delegated arrangement.

Contingency Fund

Members considered future treatment of contingency fund surpluses.

Discussion concluded that any future surplus should be returned to contributing schools on a pro-rata basis linked to their original contributions.

Resolved: Maintained school representatives (4 out of 4 votes) unanimously supported returning any future surplus to schools on the basis of original contributions.

10. General Finance Update

The Forum received an update from Kathy Oliver (KO) covering:

- Three-Year Budget Plans.
- Maintained and Academy Balances.
- Targeted SEN Funding.
- Consultations.
- Local Authority Services to Schools.

Three-Year Budget Plans

Members received an update on maintained school budget plans. It was reported that maintained schools collectively forecast a deficit position of approximately £1.3 million in 2026/27 and that around half were currently forecasting deficits. KO advised that falling pupil numbers continued to create financial pressures, particularly within the primary phase.

Challenge Regarding Financial Forecasts

A member sought greater clarity regarding the headline figures presented and questioned what the overall outturn and forecast positions were, noting that improvements in forecasts should be understood in the context of the underlying deficit position.

KO clarified that:

- The 2025/26 outturn deficit was approximately £579,000.
- The forecast aggregate deficit position for 2026/27 was approximately £1.3 million.
- Forecasts had improved compared with equivalent predictions made the previous year due to increased certainty regarding funding allocations and grants.

Members noted the clarification and agreed that understanding both the scale of improvement and the continuing deficit position was important when assessing financial sustainability.

Maintained and Academy Balances

Members noted that published DfE data showed continuing reductions in balances across both maintained schools and academies, with overall balances reducing by approximately 13.2% year-on-year.

Targeted SEN Funding

Members noted that targeted funding had been distributed to 15 schools where notional SEN allocations were insufficient to support EHCP demand, with total allocations of approximately £185,000.

Trade Union Facilities Review

Members noted that a request from one trade union for increased funding had initiated a wider review of Trade Union Facilities arrangements and that any resulting proposals would be brought back to Schools' Forum for consideration.

11. Any Other Business

No items of other business had been submitted.

Dates of Schools Forum meetings for 2026/27

The dates of the school forum meetings were confirmed as follows:

- Thursday 03 December 2026
- Thursday 11 February 2027
- Thursday 17 June 2027

All meetings will be held via MS Teams, 16:30-18:00.

The Chair thanked the members for attending the meeting and for the information provided.

The meeting closed at 17:57.

Signed by

Chair

Dated