



Solihull Schools Forum

Minutes of Meeting

9:30am – 11:30am

Thursday 27th March 2025

SMBC, Civic Suite, Committee Room 1

Solihull B91 3QB

Member Category	Member Name	Institution	Attendance (Y/N/ Apols)
HEAD TEACHERS OF PRIMARY MAINTAINED SCHOOLS (4)	Lynn Clark	Marston Green Juniors (Northern)	Apologies
HEAD TEACHERS OF PRIMARY MAINTAINED SCHOOLS (4)	Bernie Farkas	Blossomfield Infants (Synergy)	Present
HEAD TEACHERS OF PRIMARY MAINTAINED SCHOOLS (4)	Richard Marshall	Oak Cottage (Evolve)	Present
GOVERNORS OF PRIMARY MAINTAINED SCHOOLS (4)	John McDermott	St Alphege Inf & Junior (Synergy)	Present
GOVERNORS OF PRIMARY MAINTAINED SCHOOLS (4)	Tim Baptiste	Oak Cottage (Evolve)	Present
GOVERNORS OF PRIMARY MAINTAINED SCHOOLS (4)	Paul Jackson	Castle Bromwich Junior School (Northern)	Absent
HEAD TEACHERS OF PRIMARY ACADEMIES (2)	Louise Minter	Streetsbrook I&EY Academy, (Synergy)	Present
HEAD TEACHERS OF PRIMARY ACADEMIES (2)	Holly Lynch	TGA Primary St James (Synergy)	Apologies
HEAD TEACHERS OF PRIMARY ACADEMIES (2)	Mark Pratt	Ulverley School (Mosaic)	Present
GOVERNORS OF PRIMARY ACADEMIES (2)	Antoinette Fisher	Dorridge Primary (Rurals)	Present
GOVERNORS OF PRIMARY ACADEMIES (2)	Lynda Mackay	Knowle CofE Primary (Rurals)	Present
SECONDARY ACADEMY MEMBERS (10 – principals [or representatives] or governors) Inc. AP Academy	Claire Smith	Tudor Grange (Synergy)	Apologies
SECONDARY ACADEMY MEMBERS (10 – principals [or representatives] or governors) Inc. AP Academy	VACANCY		
SECONDARY ACADEMY MEMBERS (10 – principals [or representatives] or governors) Inc. AP Academy	Darren Gelder	Grace Academy (Unity)	Apologies
SECONDARY ACADEMY MEMBERS (10 – principals [or representatives] or governors) Inc. AP Academy	Stephen Steinhaus	Solihull AP Academy	Present
SECONDARY ACADEMY MEMBERS (10 – principals [or representatives] or	Stuart Shelton	St Peters RC (Synergy)	Present

governors) Inc. AP Academy			
SECONDARY ACADEMY MEMBERS (10 – principals [or representatives] or governors) Inc. AP Academy	Clare Thorpe	Langley Secondary (Evolve)	Present
SECONDARY ACADEMY MEMBERS (10 – principals [or representatives] or governors) Inc. AP Academy	Andrew Best	Smith's Wood Secondary Academy (Fairfax MAT)	Apologies
SECONDARY ACADEMY MEMBERS (10 – principals [or representatives] or governors) Inc. AP Academy	Claire Eaton	Alderbrook	Present
SECONDARY ACADEMY MEMBERS (10 – principals [or representatives] or governors) Inc. AP Academy	Janice Hiorns	Park Hall	Present
REPRESENTATIVE OF MAINTAINED SPECIALIST PROVISION (1) attend on rota basis	Andy Simms	Hazel Oak	Apologies
REPRESENTATIVE OF SPECIALIST ACADEMIES (1)	Nicola Redhead	The Heights	Absent
REPRESENTATIVE OF PUPIL REFERRAL UNITS (1)	VACANCY		
ELECTED MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL (4)	Councillor Annette McKenzie (Conservative)		Present
ELECTED MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL (4)	Councillor Andrew Burrow (Conservative)		Present
ELECTED MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL (4)	Councillor Karen Grinsell		Present
ELECTED MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL (4)	Councillor Samantha Gethen		Present
TRADE UNION REPRESENTATIVES (2)	Jane Davenport	NAHT	Apologies
TRADE UNION REPRESENTATIVES (2)	Gareth Eastham	NASUWT	Present
TRADE UNION REPRESENTATIVES (2)	Gary Woodhouse (Substitute Member)	GMB	Apologies
REPRESENTATIVES OF EARLY YEARS PVI SECTOR (2)	Gina Godwin	Whitesmore Neighbourhood Nursery (Wise Owls)	Present
REPRESENTATIVES OF EARLY YEARS PVI SECTOR (2)	Lisa Whitehouse	Tender Years	Apologies
REPRESENTATIVES OF POST-16 COLLEGES (2)	Susan Homer /	Solihull College	Present

	Sonia Wallace		Absent
REPRESENTATIVES OF POST-16 COLLEGES (2)	Dr Martin Sullivan	Sixth Form College	Absent
OBSERVERS	Peter Davis	Diocesan Education Service (The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham)	Apologies
OBSERVERS	Sarah Smith	Education for Birmingham, The Church of England	Present
ATTENDEE	Graeme Burgess	CEO, Central Schools Trust	Present
Officers (attend as required)			
Director of Public Health, Education and Inclusion	Ruth Tennant	SMBC	Apologies
Assistant Director Children's Services	Kate Bradley	SMBC	Apologies
Head of Commissioning for Learning	Bern Timings	SMBC	Present
Finance Manager (Children's Services)	Sarah Cheale	SMBC	Apologies
Senior Accountant (Children's Services)	Ruth Barnett	SMBC	Apologies
Accountant (Children's Services)	Steve Fenton	SMBC	Present
Clerk	Jo Heys	SMBC	Present

Item	Minute	Action
1.	Welcome and Apologies for Absence	
1.1.	The Chair Antoinette Fisher welcomed everyone to the meeting. Introductions were given for the benefit of new attendees.	
1.2.	Apologies were received from Darren Gelder, Lisa Whitehouse, Holly Lynch, Lynn Clark, Claire Smith, Andrew Best, Jane Davenport, Kate Bradley, Andy Simms, Peter Davis and Ruth Tennant.	
1.3.	Michelle Andrews attended from Tudor Grange Academy on behalf of Claire Smith.	
2.	Minutes of previous meetings on 17th October 2024 and 14th January 2025	
2.1.	The minutes of 17-10-24 were agreed and approved as an accurate record.	
2.2.	The minutes of 14-01-25 required an amendment to 6.5 re: approval of DSG Management Plan to show that agreement in principle was given with significant reservations. ACTION: Amend 14-01-25 minutes as above.	JH
3.	Matters Arising	
3.1.	AF checked that all actions from the previous meeting had been completed.	
3.2.	KG explained that the LA had challenged not receiving any financial assistance but this had not been successful.	
3.3.	AF clarified regarding the £1k AP subsidy, which had been raised at Forum Executive meeting. BT explained that it was included in DSG and when previous minutes were checked the subsidy had been agreed for one year but then rolled	

3.4.	over into this year. It had been removed for next year. AF commented that it was important that this was transparent. DSG Management Plan – BT explained it was a live document and that work is beginning on 2025/26 now to allow more time for it to be considered prior to the approval process. ACTION: DSG Management Plan review to be a standing item on future Forum agendas, together with a financial statement forecasting HNB.	BT/JH
3.5.	Stephen Steinhaus explained he had raised a number of reservations throughout the meetings about the timelines of cuts and lack of communications but had not received any clarity on these. He said that AF and a couple of others had taken time to discuss the concerns with him but the absence of a response from the LA was a concerning precedent.	
3.6.	AF said she had raised concerns and Kate Bradley had provided feedback, which she would send directly or attach to the draft minutes. ACTION: AF to share feedback from KB.	
3.7.		AF
4.	Chair and Vice-Chair Membership update	
4.1.	AF said it would be useful to consider current vacancies on Forum. ACTION: JH to provide AF with details of Forum vacancies.	JH
4.2.	Members were asked to consider the roles of Forum Chair and Vice-Chair for 2025-26 and to advise AF if of interest. ACTION: Forum members to consider Chair / Vice-Chair roles from next academic year.	All
5.	Cabinet Member update – Councillor Karen Grinsell	
5.1.	Councillor Grinsell explained that there had been several monitoring visits recently. The fifth OFSTED monitoring visit had gone well as had a peer review for MASH and the duty team. There was still more to be done and areas for development but positive feedback. The 6-monthly DfE review around care-experienced young people had been positive. The Youth Justice Service had just had an inspection and was awaiting the report, which was believed to be mixed with areas for improvement.	
5.2.	The Early Help line for schools, parents and anyone involved with children and families had a soft launch. It is designed to alleviate some of the pressure on MASH and to offer early preventative work, not for full-on safeguarding issues.	
5.3.	KG thanked all the schools who had invited her, Beate and Kate to visit as these were very helpful and had been able to meet some very engaged and inspiration young people.	
5.4.	OFSTED visits for schools were ongoing and the investigation at the Heights was underway.	
5.5.	Recruitment for Assistant Director Children's Services and also for Director Children's Services is progressing and hopefully there will be a good handover and transition. Beate will stay for the ILAC inspection and then depart. KG said that she had been very impressive and staff recruitment from her arrival had been very good. New recruits had commented that it does not feel like an LA that is inadequate.	
5.6.	The HAF programme has been confirmed for holiday activities and food. <u>Questions / comments</u> a. Gina Godwin asked if the Early Help line would be promoted further? KG replied yes and the details would be shared again with schools and settings. ACTION: KG to circulate details of the Early Help line to providers.	KG
6.	LA update (including Education Strategy Plan) – Bern Timings	

6.1.	Bern Timings explained that the Education Strategic Plan was currently working through political sign-off. Current MERS scheme meant that support work could not be restructured until MERS has ended. The plan will bring together around 30 projects across all education workstreams so that there is one set of reporting and monitoring. It has been formulated from the DSG Management Plan, core funding, task 7 finish groups, Jane Friswell review and Solihull Parent Carer Voice. The aim is to bring together what needs to change into one place. Some projects requiring additional resources are for 2-3 year but many projects are already underway where no further resources are needed.	
6.2.	Proposing to use the £1.6m uplift and will involve schools putting forward funding too. There will be a bid process after Easter and key will be how is it going to change experiences and reduce HNB spend in the long term.	
6.3.	The Education Strategic Plan will be communicated via Headlines and in Heads' Briefings and brought to Forum.	
6.4.	The Government Spring Statement did not shed any light on anything for education. We will need to be flexible so that when government give priorities we can respond.	
	<p><u>Questions / comments</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Clare Thorpe asked about the Jane Friswell review as she and colleagues had given a lot of time to it but not had any feedback. BT replied that this was so that solutions could be given as well as the report. b. CT said solutions need to be co-produced and often schools have the solutions but need to be involved. c. BT explained the review would be shared with everyone and would come out with the Education Strategic Plan at the end of April / start of May, in advance of the next Forum papers. <p>ACTION: Jane Friswell review to be circulated end of April / start of May</p>	
6.5.		BT
7a.	Finance Working Group report (04-03-25) – Mark Firmstone	
7a.1.	Mark Firmstone explained that the discussion at FWG echoed today's Forum meeting regarding the need for transparency and communication. FWG received Early Years and Early Years Inclusion Fund. The Early Years team have asked for inclusion funding to have an extra band (level 2.5). FWG had agreed in principle on the understanding that the financial implications were understood.	
7a.2.	<p>Forum agreed to recommend that the Early Years Inclusion Fund include an extra band.</p> <p><u>Questions / comments</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Gina Godwin said that it was not transparent how EY funding happens, the criteria were unclear and often no extra money was paid unless the setting complained. Steve Fenton responded that historically no additional funding had been given for Nursery places, then with the move to NFF the Government mandated that we recognise that issue and so the Inclusion Fund was created with two bands with the idea of getting money to settings quickly as children only in Nursery for three terms. Until recently, it was only running with half a dozen plans so was not a priority. Now that has changed so the paper to FWG was an attempt to address this. SF said that he would be speaking to Lisa Morris after this meeting and that she had a working group that considered SENIF. b. AF said it was important that this was not lost and asked where it should report into? c. SF suggested the usual route: working group to FWG then to Forum. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> d. Mark Pratt commented that there should be a broader view and having done a reasonable costing, that is what school then works from. That can be done using the banding and the understanding is that the cost is Section F, take £6k and then everything else is LA cost. e. MF said that FWG would endorse a broader review. f. BT commented that the lines are much more blurred and this is a key line of enquiry in the Education Strategic Plan. g. GG added that she has to find the skills within her staff. h. AF said that it was possible her school could offer support. i. Louise Minter added that recruitment was very difficult. j. Bernie Farkas commented that speech and language was almost impossible to obtain and extortionate when it was provided. k. SF said that we are talking about a very small percentage of children, so while they do have significant additional needs, it is very small numbers. l. MF added that it was recognised these were difficult issues but they must be worked on together to reach the solutions and he would welcome an open review. m. SShelton suggested that children who have an EHCP but no specialist provision place available so remain in mainstream be included as this costs a significant amount of money and schools are given no extra funding. Lots of schools are in this position and it becomes much more expensive if we don't get that part right both in terms of the cost and the effect on the child long-term. n. AF said that as a Chair of a special school, quite willing to offer support outside of school. Would require funding but would be possible. It comes down to education and schools not being funded appropriately full stop. o. KG said that we wait for Government to make an announcement. Half of councils were warning of insolvency due to SEND alone. p. Janice Hiorns added that there is significant pressure on staff and impact on staff wellbeing. The increasing numbers of Looked After Children is adding pressure and increasing cost too. 	
7b.	SSSAB (13-03-25) – Louise Minter	
7b.1.	Louise Minter explained that SSSAB met recently and had an updates from the DCS, Kara Evans, the Headteacher Coach for Early Help and Jameel Mullan, Head of EPAS. Charlotte Jones spoke about the Education Strategy Plan and some of that work will start at Partnership. Bridget and Charlotte will be attending Collaboratives.	
7b.2.	The issue of parental complaints was raised as schools are receiving an increasing number of complaints, many of which are vexatious and nasty. Collectively we need to do something to protect headteachers and staff as the impact on class teachers is huge. It will contribute to a crisis with people no longer wanting to be teachers.	
7b.3.	LM also discussed Admissions and Appeals costs with Jameel and Bern as schools pick up the cost of these.	
7b.4.	Clare Thorpe commented that Langley was not unique in being oversubscribed and appeals used to cost £250 per appeal, which has now risen to £300. ESFA give back £180 after 20 appeals but Langley have had to allocate £10k just to protect against those appeals, which takes that money away from children. She would like the LA to show some kindness as schools cannot do anything about the number of appeals. In addition to this, a permanent exclusion, which is rarely done, costs £1000, which is not even factored in. These are unseen costs and the details were sent out very late and without consultation. Headteachers sit on the panel and need to read a huge amount of paperwork, giving up a considerable amount of time. Schools are charged £185 if the parents do not turn up.	
7b.5.	SShelton asked how the cost could be justified for lay panels that meet on Teams?	
7b.6.	BT replied that the LA had not got a handle yet on all of the costs of traded services and he was trying to pull these together so it was clear how much extra schools are being asked to pay.	

7.b.7.	SShelton added that schools do pay a service level agreement for Admissions and lots of appeals come through.	
7b.8.	Lynda Mackay explained that at the SGA meeting, Clair McNeill brought Claire Potts' consultation on Governors as there is a large turnover so it is important for governors to work together. There is a gap in governors not having full understanding, particularly around the pressure on staff and heads and abuse being received so this is being approached from different angles.	
7b.9.	AF said sharing of good practice and working together does happen. We have several new Heads of Service but there is such a wealth of knowledge and a willingness to work together and for sharing good practice and skills.	
7b.10.	Mark Firmstone added that funding had been allocated for the increase in NICs from April. However, this did not fully cover the cost. He provided an example of the shortfall. Also, there was nothing for the increase from third party contractors, whose costs will also rise to cover this.	
7b.11.	John McDermott said that across the sector, schools were receiving between 60-85% of NI. The Government have only issued the details very recently and they have only published the allocation, not the calculation.	
7b.12.	Councillor Burrow commented that the LA contracts out quite a lot so it is affecting everywhere. It is a tax on schools.	
7b.13.	AF asked if there was a plan to escalate it?	
7b.14.	KG replied that it is in every area.	
7b.15.	Bernie Farkas added that another issue is the Government's expectation regarding breakfast and after-school clubs as those staff sit outside the school staff.	
7b.16.	AF said it was almost at a point where we should have a meeting to highlight the situation.	
7b.17.	KG said that the LA is talking to MPs and they are pushing it and they frequently write to Government.	
7b.18.	AF said a face-to-face meeting would be useful.	
8.	<p>AOB</p> <p>No AOB.</p> <p>Meeting ended at 10:54am.</p>	
	<p>Date of the next meeting</p> <p>The date of the next meeting of Solihull Schools Forum is Thursday 22nd May 2025 at 9:30am – 11:30am in Room 1, Civic Suite.</p>	