



Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council Children's Services Directorate

BARNSLEY SCHOOLS FORUM

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FORUM HELD ON TUESDAY
17th March 2026**

Meeting Attendance

Name	Role	Present?
Primary School (LA)		
Claire Throssell (CT)	Governor	✓
Jackie Milliner (JM)	Governor	✓
Simon Tabbner (ST)	Headteacher	✓

Primary Academy		
Joe Woffinden (JW)	Headteacher	Apologies
Katie Adamski (KA)	Headteacher	
Michael Sanderson (CHAIR)	Governor	✓
Victoria Gorton (VG)	Headteacher	

Secondary School (LA)		
Paul Crook (PC)	Headteacher	✓
Visseh Pejhan Sykes (VPS)	Governor	✓

Secondary Academy		
Amir Arezoo (AA)	Associate Principal	Apologies
Nigel Leeder (NL)	Governor	Apologies
Victoria Harrison (VH)	HCAT CFO	✓

Special & Alternative Provision		
George Wild (GW)	Governor	✓
Josh Greaves (JG) (VICE CHAIR)	Headteacher	✓

Nursery Provision		
Simon Sykes (SS)	Leader	✓

Early Years Provision		
Connor Halstead (CH) (Delegate for Melanie Szoke)	Early Years Entitlements Funding Manager	✓
Melanie Szoke (MS)	Childcare Quality & Sufficiency Manager	Apologies

Education for Young People aged 16-19 Years		
Tom Smith (TS)	Head of Service	

Councillors		
Cllr Deborah Pearson (DP)	Councillor	Apologies
Cllr Ken Richardson (KR)	Councillor	Apologies

Diocesan		
Nevine Towers (NT)	The Diocese of Sheffield	✓

BMBC Officers		
Anna Turner (AT)	Head of Education and Partnerships	✓
Eleanor Cooper (EC)	Clerk	✓
Helen Perrin (HP)	Principal Accountant	✓
Katharine Knowles (KK)	Strategic Finance Business Partner	Apologies
Lauren Firth (LF)	Clerk	✓
Nina Sleight (NS)	Service Director	✓
Peter Bell (PB)	Governor Services Adviser	✓
Sarah Phipps (SP)	SEND Sufficiency Programme Manager	✓
Sue Day (SD)	Head of SEND	

1. Welcome and apologies

- The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting and extended a specific welcome to new Forum member Claire Throssell, Governor at SpringVale Primary School.
- Formal apologies were noted from Joe Woffinden, Nigel Leeder, Cllr Deborah Pearson, Cllr Ken Richardson, Melanie Szoke and Katharine Knowles.
- Nina Sleight informed the group that Amir Arezoo has moved on from Astrea Academy. She noted that, because of this change, the Forum may need to re-engage with Astrea to review their representation on the Schools Forum.

Action: To contact Astrea Academy to review their at the Schools Forum following Amir Arezoo leaving post.

2. Declarations of interest

- Visseh Pejhan Sykes declared an interest as a Trustee for Wellspring Academy but confirmed is attending the meeting solely as the representative for Penistone Grammar School.
- Nevine Towers declared interests in relation to three academies within DSAT: The Ellis Church of England School, All Saints Academy Darfield, and Elsecar Holy Trinity Church of England School.

3. Minutes and action log of the previous meeting of the Schools Forum

- The minutes from the previous meeting held on 22 January 2026 were agreed and approved as a correct record of the meeting.
- Actions were reviewed on the action log.
- No other matters arose during consideration of the minutes.

4. Annual Review of the Local Guide to the Barnsley Schools Forum inc. Terms of Reference (TOR)

- The updated Local Guide to the Barnsley Schools Forum was presented by Peter Bell for its scheduled annual review.
- Updates made this year were described as mainly relating to membership, with a small change noted in the forward section.
- It was confirmed that the updated version will be uploaded to the Schools Forum website, where it is accessible for new colleagues and anyone interested in understanding the Forum's work.
- Attendees indicated they were content with the updated version presented.

Action: Eleanor Cooper to upload the updated Local Guide to the Barnsley Schools Forum to the Schools Forum website.

Resolved: The updated Local Guide to the Barnsley Schools Forum, including the Terms of Reference, was approved and will be uploaded to the Schools Forum website for publication and reference.

5. High Needs Budget and Funding Arrangements (2026-27)

- Helen Perrin presented the 2026–27 High Needs budget, highlighting a £1.9m increase in headline funding, largely driven by the roll-in of the Core Schools Budget Grant, leaving no real-terms growth in the core allocation. The DfE's temporary suspension of the High Needs National Funding Formula results in a standstill funding position for 2026–27.
- The previously agreed 0.8% (£1.8m) transfer from the Schools Block remains unchanged. Helen Perrin outlined technical adjustments to the funding framework, including consolidation of central grants, and confirmed a 0% Minimum Funding Guarantee for special schools.
- Demand pressures continue to rise, with a forecast £8.3m recurrent in-year deficit for 2025–26 driven by increasing EHCP numbers and specialist placements. Helen Perrin confirmed that the Safety Valve programme ends on 1 April 2026 and will be replaced by the High Needs Stability Grant, expected to cover 90% of the accumulated 2025–26 DSG deficit, subject to approval of the local SEND reform plan.
- Barnsley is forecasting an £11.2m planned High Needs deficit for 2026–27, reflecting growth, inflationary pressures and the development of new in-borough specialist places, including 40 places at The Mill. Funding uplifts include 2.1% for state-funded specialist settings and 3% for independent providers, with the latter subject to strengthened commissioning challenge. Post-16 provision, specialist services, and the importance of sufficiency and demand-management planning were also highlighted.
- Nina Sleight outlined the wider national pressures affecting High Needs funding and emphasised the need for joint working across the system to manage resources and support inclusive practice.
- Claire Throssell raised concerns regarding mainstream schools' ability to fund EHCP-related staffing, particularly during breaks and lunchtimes. Helen Perrin explained the relationship with mainstream top-up funding, and Nina Sleight noted that this reflected broader

system pressures and the importance of increasing local specialist provision to reduce reliance on costly out-of-borough placements.

- Josh Greaves queried the rationale for a higher uplift for independent providers compared to state-funded specialist settings, referencing national concerns about profiteering. Helen Perrin acknowledged the issue and confirmed that uplift requests from independent providers are frequently higher than 3% and are actively challenged through strengthened commissioning and review processes.

Resolved: The Schools Forum noted the 2026–27 High Needs funding settlement and the projected budget position.

6. Education Improvement Strategy for the Barnsley Schools Alliance

- Anna Turner outlined the refresh of the Barnsley Schools Alliance Education Improvement Strategy for 2025–2028, developed in consultation with headteacher representatives to ensure it remains aligned to current priorities and collaborative practice. She explained that a number of system-wide developments have informed the refresh, including the establishment of the CEO subgroup and ongoing work through the Every Child in School Every Day initiative.
- The refreshed strategy continues to be underpinned by four core principles:
 - Ensuring children and young people receive a high-quality education.
 - Embedding inclusive practice across all schools.
 - Strengthening the school-led improvement system, enabling professional support and challenge.
 - Prioritising the health and wellbeing of children, young people and staff.
- Anna Tuner highlighted the key educational priorities, including strengthening SEND support and outcomes from Early Years to Year 6, sustaining improvements in higher-level mathematics attainment, improving writing and curriculum impact through oracy, enhancing reading progress from phonics to comprehension, and increasing the proportion of boys achieving a good level of development in early years.
- A clearer overview of governance arrangements has been included, including a plan-on-a-page setting out how boards, subgroups, clusters and workstreams link together, in response to feedback requesting greater clarity.
- Simon Sykes raised a query regarding references within the strategy to “good or outstanding” early years settings in light of changes to the Ofsted grading framework. Anna acknowledged this and confirmed that performance indicators will need to be updated to reflect the revised framework.
- Simon Tabbner welcomed the improved structure of the Alliance’s subgroup and governance arrangements, noting that previous duplication had been reduced. Anna Tuner confirmed that significant work had been undertaken to streamline governance, including the introduction of cluster leads and deputy cluster leads to strengthen resilience and accountability.

Resolved: The Schools Forum noted and endorsed the refreshed Education Improvement Strategy and its revised priorities.

7. SEND reforms white paper

- Sarah Phipps provided an overview of the national SEND Reforms White Paper, outlining the major proposed changes and the implications for Barnsley. She highlighted that the reforms aim to introduce a single, inclusive education system, with a stronger emphasis on early identification, targeted support, and reduced reliance on EHCPs. A new tiered support model is proposed, encompassing universal provision, targeted/targeted-plus support, and specialist provision aligned with new national EHCP thresholds.
- Sarah Phipps explained that Barnsley is well placed to build on the reforms due to existing strengths in co-production, local data, sufficiency planning, and governance structures. She also outlined the role of the Local Area SEND & AP Partnership in shaping Barnsley's local response. Additional government investment is expected nationally, but the detail and extent of "new money" remains unclear.
- She summarised the key considerations for Barnsley: increasing mainstream capacity, strengthening inclusion, reducing out-of-borough placements, and preparing for changes to governance, accountability and the new annual Inclusion Strategy. Workforce development, capital use, forecasting, and alignment of service plans with the national reform timetable will also be required.
- Sarah Phipps noted the transition from the Safety Valve programme to the High Needs Stability Grant, and the need for an approved Local SEND Reform Plan by 19 June. She confirmed that wider implementation will run through to 2035, including the expectation that EHCP numbers will stabilise over the long term.
- Anna Turner noted that the White Paper is likely to prompt a surge in parental EHCP requests, driven by anxiety about future eligibility, and stressed the need for careful communication and system readiness.
- Claire Throssell questioned how the predicted "stabilisation" of EHCP numbers by 2035 could be forecast given the continued birth of children with complex needs. Anna Turner and Sarah Phipps responded that the reforms focus on improving early intervention and inclusion, not reducing support for children with the highest levels of need.
- Simon Tabbner reported that the White Paper has already caused a significant increase in parental requests, fuelled by fears about losing access to EHCPs. He emphasised the risk of overwhelming local teams and diluting support for children with the most complex needs.
- Nina Sleight confirmed this national pattern and noted that even the Secretary of State acknowledged these pressures. She highlighted the critical need for strengthened inclusion in mainstream schools, more local places, and improvements across the whole system to support the transition effectively.
- Members also discussed the need for clear, consistent communication to parents and schools to reduce confusion and reassure families during the transition.

Action: To agree communication that will be sent to parents and schools to reduce confusion and reassure families during the during the transition.

Resolved: The Forum noted the national SEND reforms and the implications for Barnsley. The Forum recognised the need for clear communication with schools, families and partners during the transition period.

8. Any other urgent business

No urgent business was raised.

9. Future Agenda Items

The Forum noted the following agenda items that are scheduled for discussion at the forthcoming meeting on 16 July 2026:

- Review of Membership of the Barnsley Schools Forum
- School Budget (2025/26) Year-end Outturn
- Schools Budget (2026/27) Latest Position
- Special Educational Needs Performance and Finance Report (Quarter 4:2025/26)
- Election of the Chair

- The chair invited members to suggest any additional items that they feel would be beneficial to share at the School Forum.
- Anna Turner suggested sharing a positive update at a future meeting regarding the record number of children receiving their first-choice school preference, particularly at secondary level.
- Anna Turner also requested a future agenda item focusing on long-term demographic projections, including the declining birth rate and its impact on school place planning and resource allocation.

Action: Lauren Firth to update the forward plan to include children receiving their first-choice school preference and declining birth rate and its impact on school place planning.

10. Schedule of future meetings (2026)

The following meeting dates were noted:

- Thursday 16th July 2026 - 2:00pm - Boardroom, Westgate Plaza
- Thursday 22nd October 2026 - 2:00pm - Boardroom, Westgate Plaza
- Thursday 17th December 2026 - 2:00pm - Boardroom, Westgate Plaza

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(Signed by the Chair of the Barnsley Schools Forum)