

SCHOOLS' FORUM

Minutes of the meeting held at 4.30 pm on 14 September 2023

Present:

David Dilling (Chairman)	Primary Academy Governor (Charles Darwin Academy Trust)
Patrick Foley	Primary Maintained Head Teacher (Southborough Primary School)
Neil Miller	PRU Head Teacher/Governor Academy (Bromley Trust Academy)
Steve Whittle	Secondary Academy Head Teacher (Impact Multi Academy Trust)
David Wilcox	Secondary Academy Governor (Darrick Wood School)

Also Present:

Jared Nehra	Director of Education
Kevin Walter	Democratic Services Officer

27 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from David Bradshaw, Chris Hollands, Andrew Rees and Ian Travis.

A message was received from Claire Bessa stating that she is no longer able to attend Schools' Forum meetings.

28 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 13TH JULY 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 13th July 2023 were approved and signed as a correct record.

29 UPDATE ON THE CONSTITUTION

The Director of Education confirmed that the Children, Education and Families Policy Development and Scrutiny (PDS) Committee met on 13th September to discuss the report on the revised Constitution of the Schools' Forum (as agreed and put forward at the Schools' Forum meeting on 13th July). The PDS Committee agreed to the amendments and the revised Constitution was now formally in place.

Schools' Forum members were informed that comment had been made at the PDS Committee regarding the reduction in members of the Schools' Forum, with the Committee noting and acknowledging the challenges around securing sufficient membership and representation.

RESOLVED: That the update on the Constitution be noted.

30 GLA FREE SCHOOL MEALS

The Director of Education provided an update on the Greater London Authority (GLA) Universal Free School Meals Scheme, with the report confirming the current position in respect of the scheme. Members noted that the funding level had been set at £2.65 per meal. Concerns had been expressed by Bromley school leaders, including Academy and Local Authority maintained schools, that the funding was below the costs incurred by the schools. Although concerns about the implications of delivering the scheme at short notice had also been noted, no schools had chosen to opt out.

As per Appendix A in the report, the initial allocation of funding had now been made to Bromley schools. This was based on a 90% take-up rate of pupils not eligible for benefit related FSM (based on May Census data). Additional funding could be sought from the GLA scheme if take-up exceeded 90%. The Director of Education confirmed that the second tranche of funding would be in December 2023 and the third tranche in April 2024.

A Forum member commented that it was felt that there was a significant issue with the GLA scheme with schools being under-funded due to the actual cost of providing FSM being higher than the funding level set. Staffing and equipment implications were also a consideration. Additionally, Secondary School pupils were missing out under the GLA scheme.

In response, the Director of Education agreed that the scheme was not 'universal' free school meals as it is only being provided to Key Stage 2 pupils and therefore there are five Secondary year groups currently not included, up to the age of 16 (year 11).

A question was raised regarding the monitoring of the uptake of the GLA scheme and any 'clawback' conditions for money paid out to schools. In response, the Director of Education confirmed that this had been an area of concern raised with the DfE and the GLA. The initial proposal was that there would be a system to recover any funding not fully utilised. This would have required the local authority to implement a new system to monitor the uptake of FSM through the new scheme and to 'clawback' any monies not required. The GLA subsequently confirmed that there would not in fact be any 'clawback' mechanism for the funding provided throughout the year.

The Director of Education informed members that if schools could evidence take-up of the GLA scheme above 90% then the Authority could contact the GLA to request further funding.

RESOLVED: That the allocation of the UFSM grant to Bromley schools be noted and a further update will be provided at a future Schools' Forum meeting.

31 EARLY YEARS CONSULTATION

The Director of Education introduced the report on the DfE Early Years Consultation and informed Forum members that unfortunately the timing of the DfE's consultation period had not allowed for a discussion at a Schools' Forum meeting prior to a response being provided.

The local authority consulted with various agencies, including Early Years providers and the London Early Years Group, to help inform Bromley's response to the plans. A London-wide response had also been provided which was very similar to that provided by Bromley.

The Forum's attention was drawn to Appendix A of the report, showing Bromley's response, setting out concerns and support for the proposals put forward by the DfE. Although the consultation period had now closed, any comments/views could still be expressed and put forward via other channels.

The Director of Education confirmed that he felt that Bromley had provided a balanced response, given the difficulty of obtaining feedback from various providers/groups over the summer period timeframe of the consultation period. Bromley had expressed its views covering the key points, and it is hoped that there might be further opportunities for the DfE to take on board local viewpoints. The Director and others involved were thanked for their efforts in seeking views and putting the responses together.

RESOLVED: That the update and consultation response provided to the DfE be noted.

32 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There were no additional items to discuss.

33 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meetings of the Schools' Forum would take place on Thursday 30th November 2023 and Thursday 18th January 2024 via MS Teams (subject to change).

The Meeting ended at 4.55 pm

Chairman