

**Bury Schools Forum
Monday 12 January 2026
Microsoft Teams**

Attendance

Early Years

Rachel O'Neil Headteacher

Maintained Primary

Simon Waddington Headteacher Hollins Grundy

Maintained Secondary

None in Attendance

Maintained Special

Katy Neild Headteacher Millwood

Academy Primary

James Gabrieleles Headteacher Sunny Bank Primary
Kelly Macadam MAT CEO
Ruth Onyekaba Headteacher Gorsefield Primary

Academy Secondary

None in Attendance

Special

None in Attendance

Governor

Richard Ainsworth, Governor (Plus Governors Forum)

Pupil Referral Unit

None in Attendance

Non-Schools Sector

Karen Hopwood NASUWT

16 – 19 Education Representative

Carina Vitti Holy Cross College

Children's Services Department

Ben Dunne Director of Education and Skills
Philip Herd CYP Finance Business Partner
Alison Vidler Senior Schools Finance Officer (Schools & Systems Finance)

Observer(s)

Katherine Ashworth Millwood School
Elissa Reevel Children's Services

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Martin Van Hecke
Helena Thom
Clare Fergusson

Headteacher St Thomas's CE Primary
National Education Union
Oak plc

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

It was agreed:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2025 be approved as a correct record of the meeting.

3. MATTERS ARISING

Richard Ainsworth referred back to the vacancies on the Schools Forum highlighted at the previous meeting and requested that an up-to-date membership list be circulated to members. This would allow them to see which categories currently have vacancies and consider individuals who may be interested in joining.

4. SCHOOLS ACADEMIES AND FUNDING 2026 - 27

Alison Vidler presented the Schools & Academies Funding update 2026-2027.

1. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2026-27

Following the publication of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocations on 17 December 2025, which takes into account the fully validated October 2025 pupil census, the 2026-27 DSG for Bury was summarised in the table set out in the report.

It was explained that the 2025-26 baseline shown includes the Core Schools Budget Grant, Teachers Pension Grant and Teachers Pay Grant in the Schools Block and the Early Years Budget Grant in the Early Years Block. This is for the purpose of demonstrating the actual variance as these have been incorporated into the 2026-27 DSG.

2. Schools Block

The application of the NFF unit values, agreed at Schools Forum in December 2025, results in the allocations shown in Table 2 in the report. The amount of funding distributed to schools, including the centralised Rates payments, equates to almost 100% of the Schools Block Funding. The effect of pupil number variances between the October funding census collections for 2024 and 2025 needs to be noted in respect to the impact on the figures included in the table.

Primary schools have seen an overall net reduction of 334 funded pupils.
Secondary schools have seen an overall net reduction of 69 funded pupils.

It was stated that for both sectors there will be individual schools with reductions, and others with gains to pupil numbers. They will all need to financially plan for pupil number changes, in order to sustain their balanced budget positions.

£349,750 transfer to the High Needs Block is 0.2% of the total Schools Block. This is within the permitted 0.5% which was approved at the December 2025 meeting. The increase from the previous year is due to the lower amount available last year as a result of the increase in deprivation factors.

3. Central Schools Services Block

It was explained that Schools' Forum is required to approve the allocation of budgets included under the CSSB, which was created several years ago in place of the former Education Services Grant (ESG) retained functions funding for Local Authorities. The former ESG funding was added to the DSG in April 2018 in order to help sustain the services that it is intended to support.

The overall amount of grant in the 2026-27 CSSB has increased by 2.2%.

The following should be noted:

Each service funded via the CSSB has been increased in line with the overall funding increase.

This leaves an unallocated balance of £131,200 available to transfer to High Needs. Movements from the Central Services Block to any other block are not subject to any limit and can be made in consultation with Schools Forum.

Decision:

Bury's Schools' Forum recommend the allocation of CSSB budgets as outlined to the applicable services for 2026-27 and to transfer the remaining balance of £131,200 to the High Needs Block in support of High Needs cost pressures and the DSG Management Plan.

4. High Needs Block

It was explained that high needs funding is provided to local authorities through the high needs block of the DSG, enabling them to meet their statutory duties under the Children and Families Act 2014.

It was also explained that, due to the pending review of High Needs funding, the overall amount of grant in the 2026-27 High Needs Block has been frozen at the 2025-26 grant level, with the addition of the previously separate grants. The final allocations do not include any adjustments for census data.

Further changes to the High Needs Block funding are made in-year where there are changes, particularly in relation to import/export adjustments.

5. Early Years Block

It was reported that the Early Years Block would be adjusted in-year in respect to fluctuations in Early Years Participation. The final funding allocation for 2026 – 27 will be based on termly census data:

Summer Term data collection 13/38ths
Autumn Term data collection 14/38ths
Spring Term data collection 11/38ths

Therefore, the funding received from the DfE is based on take up of places as at the termly census dates. The Authority funds Early Years providers on actual take up of places, as notified by providers through the Early Years Portal which means that there is inevitably a variance in the funding allocated and the actual costs each year.

The free childcare offer has been extended so that eligible working parents in England will be able to access 30 hours of free childcare per week for 38 weeks per year from the term after their child turns 9 months to when they start school. The full year effect of this increase is included in the 2026-27 indicative allocation.

There has also been an above inflation increase to the Pupil Premium funding rate in the Early Years Block. This has risen from £1 per hour to £1.15 per hour

A table setting out the figures and variation was included in the report.

For 2026-27 Local authorities are required to pass-through at least 97% of funding for each of the following funding entitlement streams individually:

- 3 & 4YO entitlements
- Under 2s
- 2YO disadvantaged offer
- 2YO working parents

This pass-through requirement ensures that most of the government funding reaches providers so that they can deliver the government's free entitlements. Bury has historically passported more than the minimum requirement for 2, 3 and 4 year-olds.

It should be noted that the DfE has increased the minimum pass-through requirement from 95% in 2024-25 to 96% for 2025-26, and 97% in 2026-27.

The percentage retained by Local Authorities is used to contribute to Early Years SEN inclusion costs, central support services covering advisory support, sufficiency requirements, free entitlement eligibility checking, and management and administration of the complex Early Years Single Funding Formula determinations, allocations, systems, and statutory reporting requirements.

A table showing the proposed Central Early Years budget was included in the report.

Decision:

Bury's Schools' Forum approve the central budget allocation of the Early Years Block as set out in the report.

5. HIGH NEEDS BLOCK (HNB) FUNDING AND ESTIMATED SPEND 2026-2027

Philip Herd presented a report setting out the HNB allocation for 2026-27 and the estimated spend for 2026-27.

The DfE High Needs operational guide quotes: Local authorities must ensure any changes to SEND provision and high needs funding arrangements are made in close consultation and co-production with the schools and colleges which will be affected. The local authority's school's forum is one way through which partnership working across the education sector can be strengthened to ensure the local authority's spending decisions are most effective. Local authorities must consult with the school's forum about their high needs funding arrangements,

which should include funding for place number changes and top-up funding rates, as well as budgets for independent school placements and central support services.

High Needs Funding Allocation for 2026-27 The DFE operational guide quotes: - 'In 2026 to 2027 we are temporarily suspending the high needs national funding formula (NFF), which in previous years we have used to calculate local authorities' high needs allocations. Instead, local authorities' allocations will be based on their 2025 to 2026 allocations, with some adjustments. Following wider reforms to the SEND system, which the government will set out in early 2026, we will review the methodology for allocating high needs funding so that it supports the SEND reforms. In practice this means that the HNB is cash flat, i.e., no inflationary increases. Previous specific grants for special schools and other providers have been rolled in to the main DSG allocation'.

High Needs Funding Allocation for 2026-27

The allocation for 26-27 was set out in the report

The estimated spend for 2026-27 and 2025-26 comparisons were set out in the report.

The special schools spend and HNB allocation have both increased by £2.395m due to former specific grants being rolled in to the HNB allocation.

It is expected that all local authorities will have an in-year deficit in 2026-27 due to there not being an inflationary increase. Many similar local authorities will have far higher deficits.

These figures assume the current PSV arrangements continue, i.e. the General Fund contribution of £2m and PSV contribution £0.75m will remain.

Special Schools

The estimated spend on special schools was set out in the report.

It was explained that the funding will change as numbers change during the year. These are estimates for the purpose of the HNB only.

Resourced Provision

The estimated funding for Resourced Provision is £2.729m

Mainstream EHCP Top ups

The estimated cost of mainstream EHCP's for 2026-27 is £12.254m. A comparison of this against previous years is shown

The total funding for special schools is £25,606m.

Independent Special Schools

The estimates funding was set out in the report.

The spend on Independent Special Schools has been relatively stable over the last 4 years. This is due to their being far more capacity in Bury Special Schools.

Post 16 Places

Expenditure on post 16 places has been approximately £1.8m but for 2025-26 it is estimated to be £2.1m. On the basis this continues 2026-27 spend is estimated to be £2.4m

Alternative Provision

There is also a large increase this year on AP expenditure. Previous years spend has been about £0.9m but now is £1.750m. For this reason the estimate for 2026-27 is £2m.

Future Funding Arrangements

Future funding will be dependent on the outcome of SEND reforms. This will include a reform of how the funding is allocated to local authorities. Bury's allocation on a per capita basis is higher than statistical neighbours' but other factors will be taken into account when a new formula is consulted on.

It was agreed:

That the estimated spend for 2026-27 be noted

That the Forum note there is not the flexibility to allow for inflation on current rates.

Note: The meeting started at 4pm and ended at 5.00pm