

High Needs Subgroup – Terms of Reference

1. Purpose of the Subgroup

Special Education Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) Transformation is a refocussed programme of work, following the approval of a Safety Valve Agreement (SVA) with the Department for Education (DfE).

Essential to the successful delivery of the SVA, is the continued operation of the School Forum, High Needs Subgroup (HNSG) to consider how expenditure on children and young people with SEND can be contained within the High Needs Block (HNB) funding in line with and for the duration of the Dedicated School Grant (DSG) management plan by:

- improving outcomes for children and young people aged 0 to 25 years with SEND;
- being involved in the meaningful transformation of the SEND and Inclusion offer;
- engaging in partnership working with the Local Authority and leaders from early years, schools and post-16 settings making best use of their experience and insights;
- providing greater transparency in decision-making and the use of HNB funding.

The HNSG supports the larger SEND & Inclusion Quality and Improvement Programme, in the delivery of transformation activity that aims to improve partnership SEND services for children and young people while ensuring services are sustainable for the future and meeting the conditions of the SVA.

2. Responsibilities

- Consider proposals from officers for setting the HNB budget each year and make recommendations to Schools Forum on the allocation of the HNB, in relation to:
 - i. the DSG management plan, identifying specific pressures and areas for change and in particular impact of spend on outcomes for children and young people including top-up rates, number of places, capacity and other specific financial pressures or issues identified;
 - ii. the wider strategic SEND Transformation agenda ensuring that resources are aimed at early intervention and improving inclusion in local education settings;
 - iii. current benchmarking data on spend and outcomes for children and young people with SEND and in Alternative Provision -following lines of inquiry where the Council is an outlier and recommending solutions.
- To act as representatives of all schools, to consider proposals objectively and impartially and to make recommendations based on evidence and in the

overall best interests of all Southwark children and young people with additional needs.

- To act as a consultation group with specialist knowledge and provide advice and support to the development of strategic commissioning plans, new local policies and strategies in the areas of SEND and Inclusion.

3. Membership

School members (at least two members must be a representatives of the Schools Forum):

- Five primary school Headteacher representatives
 - i. one to be from an Academy Trust,
 - ii. the other three to come from a maintained primary schools,
 - iii. one to be from a school with a Resource Base
- Four secondary school Headteacher representatives
 - i. three to be from an Academy Trust,
 - ii. the other one to come from a maintained secondary school.
- One PRU representative
- Two special school Headteacher representatives
 - i. one to be from an Academy Trust,
 - ii. one to come from a maintained special schools.
- One nursery provider representative
- One 16-19 provider representative

Local Authorities Officers will include:

- Assistant Director (SEND)
- Schools Finance Officer
- Other officers of the authority will attend as and when required.
- Officers will be available to assist the group with research.

4. Charing Meetings

The chair will be appointed by the council's Schools Forum and must be a school member of the that forum.

5. Duties of Members

All subgroup members will commit to:

- full attendance at all meetings. If members cannot attend, they must nominate an appropriate deputy to attend on their behalf;

- to contribute fully and provide expert advice, knowledge and insights to deliver the subgroup's responsibilities;
- complete any assigned actions by the agreed deadline.

6. Conduct and frequency of meetings

This group will meet at least four times per annum, prior to the scheduled School Forum meetings in September, December, January and June of each academic year, with more frequent meetings if necessary.

The December, January and June meetings will specifically focus on the outcomes of the formal DfE monitoring of the SVA (anticipated in September, December and May).

The HNSG will wish to arrive at decisions by consensus; where this is not possible the paper to the schools forum will record the differing views.

Meetings for 2025/26

All meetings will be held virtually (via Teams) from 2.00 pm to 3.30pm. Dates will be planned and shared for the year ahead.

7. Timescales

Whilst the HNSG is a permanent subgroup of the Schools Forum, the subgroup will continue in operation, in this form, for the duration of the SVA (which is projected to end in 2026-27).

The Schools Forum will agree the HNSG's terms of reference annually.

8. Expected Outputs

The HNSG is not a decision-making group and will:

- report a briefing note to Schools Forum which offers an update on progress after each HNSG meeting (Chair responsibility), including (draft) minutes and papers (excluding papers of a confidential nature);
- make recommendations to Schools Forum, where necessary;
- ensure the wider strategic transformation agenda and resulting budget plan is highlighted to the Schools Forum;
- Identify current and any new initiatives that will assist achieving the financial objectives of the DSG management plan;
- Identify risks and issues to achieving the financial objectives of the DSG management plan;
- Share good practice and strategies with the broader school community.

9. Version Control

March 2018	Original Terms of Reference (ToR) agreed by Schools Forum
February 2023	Reviewed and updated to include Safety Valve Agreement focus.
23 February 2023	Revised ToR agreed by HNSG
13 March 2023	Minutes of the February HNSG meeting presented to the Schools Forum
30 May 2024	Updated to take account of the refreshed focus, following the establishment of the SEND & Inclusion Quality and Improvement Programme
6 June 2024	Revised ToR considered by HNSG
19 September 2024	Revised ToR adopted by Schools Forum, with membership amended to include a 16-19 representative
16 October 2024	Meeting schedule for 2024/25 academic year inserted
10 June 2025	Membership update presented to HNSG. Agreement to amend membership number.
2 October	Amended membership number presented to Schools Forum