

Report to the Lancashire Schools Forum
Meeting to be held on Tuesday 1st July 2025

Item 6

Recommendations of the Schools Block Working Group

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Brief Summary

On 17 June 2025, the Schools Block Working Group considered several reports, including:

- 1. School Budget Outturn 2024/25**
- 2. School Balances 2024/25**
- 3. Clawback 2025/26**
- 4. Schools in Financial Difficulty Recovery Plan Bids**
- 5. Schools in Financial Difficulty**
- 6. De-delegation 2026/27**
- 7. Schools Forum Annual Report 2024/25**
- 8. SEND/HNB education capital strategy**
- 9. Any Other Business**

A summary of the information presented, and the Working Group's recommendations are provided in this report.

A copy of Appendix's are included after Item 8

Recommendations

The Forum is asked to:

- a) Note the report from the Schools Block Working Group held on 17 June 2025,
- b) Ratify the Working Group's recommendations.

Detail

On 17 June 2025, the Schools Block Working Group considered several reports. A summary of the information presented, and the Working Group's recommendations are provided below:

1. School Budget Outturn 2024/25 (Attached)

Detail

This report provides information on the Schools Budget outturn position for 2024/25. The Overall Schools Budget outturn position for 2024/25 shows an overspend of circa £40.85m. Further details are provided below in connection with each funding block.



Central Schools Services Block (CSSB)

CSSB 2024/25			
	Budget (£)	Actual (£)	Variance (£)
CSSB			
ESG Retained Duties	2,591,000	2,591,000	0
Overheads	851,000	851,000	0
Copyright Licence	1,202,549	1,293,497	90,948
School Forum	188,000	188,000	0
Pupil Access (Admissions)	1,400,000	1,400,000	0
Rates Rebates	-75,000	161,075	236,075
PFI - Historic	2,672,368	2,520,620	-151,748
Total Grant	-8,829,917	-8,876,458	-46,541
Total Variance	0	128,734	128,734

Rates Rebates

The rates rebate budget estimated a £75k level of income from rateable value challenges throughout the year, however there was a reduction in rateable value income compared to the previous years. Expenditure relates to a contribution to the LCC Estates team to facilitate the school rateable value challenges and the payment of rates rebates to schools.

Over the lifetime of the rates rebates, the arrangements have generated significantly more income than has been paid out.

PFI - Historic

This budget line ended with an underspend of £151,748. This was due to ongoing expenditure on the former Thomas Whitham Sixth Form PFI site, with the former Hambledon site is now occupied by Broadfield Special School remaining in line with budget. To protect this funding, the ESFA agreed to fund this via CSSB.

There are ongoing discussions within the LA regarding the usage of the former Thomas Whitham Sixth Form, which may lead to a review of the costs within the CSSB.

Copyright Licences

Copyright licenses have overspent by £90,948. This expenditure relates to copyright licences that the DfE buys for all state-funded primary and secondary schools in England, which covers schools for almost all their copyright requirements. Purchasing these licences directly means that DfE can save schools money, and the administrative time involved in applying for many different licences. The LA usually receive the confirmed charges for copyright licences ahead of budget setting in December, however in recent years this information has not been available, and an inflationary increase was applied to the budget. Please note additional CSSB grant was received via an in-year adjustment to reflect the increased costs.

Other CSSB budget lines ended the year on or near the agreed budget level.



Schools Block

Schools Block 2024/25			
	Budget (£)	Actual (£)	Variance (£)
Maintained Schools	688,009,465	665,266,978	-22,742,488
Growth	1,500,000	1,922,807	422,807
Academy Recoupment	289,674,750	312,065,138	22,390,388
Total Expenditure	979,184,215	979,254,923	70,707
Total Grant	-978,029,652	-978,029,652	0
Total Variance	1,154,563	1,225,271	70,707

Maintained Schools/Academy Recoupment

The total Schools Block expenditure on maintained schools for 2024/25 ended the year largely in line with the agreed budget, taking into account that the LA required £1.154m of DSG reserves to set the budget on schools block in 2024/25. Academy recoupment increased by circa £22m during the year, which is balanced out by the underspend of £22m in the maintained sector. There was also an overspend in the growth fund of £422k.

High Needs Block

High Needs Block 2024/25			
	Budget (£)	Actual (£)	Variance (£)
Mainstream Schools	30,457,671	46,971,479	16,513,808
Special Schools	83,242,967	89,626,107	6,383,140
Alternative Provision	14,129,270	15,587,835	1,458,566
Further Education - Post 16	11,147,207	12,060,870	913,663
High Needs Growth	9,092,447	0	-9,092,447
HNB Supplementary Grant	3,478,462	3,478,462	0
Commissioned Central Services	41,312,171	66,517,195	25,205,024
Exclusions	-1,000,000	-2,063,326	-1,063,326
Total Grant	-191,860,195	-191,761,693	98,502
Total Variance	0	40,416,929	40,416,929

The outturn position for the 2024/25 High Needs Block (HNB) revealed a circa **£40.42 overspend**. Further information is provided below and the High Needs Funding Block Monitoring at Year End 2024/25 can be found in Appendix A:

Maintained Schools

Actual costs on all elements of maintained schools HNB expenditure, including mainstream schools, special schools and PRUs were above the budgeted figure. The most significant variance related to mainstream schools which represented a circa 50% growth in expenditure compared to the budget. Special Schools grew by over 7% and Alternative Provision by over 10%.



Further Education - Post 16

The Further Education - Post 16 budget had an overspend of £913,000.

High Needs Growth

When the 2024/25 Schools Budget was being set, provision was made for HNB growth, which was forecast at circa £9m for the year. This provision was fully utilised in year to partially offset the increased expenditure across the HNB school budget lines.

Commissioned Services

The commissioned services expenditure ended the year with an overspend of over £25m. A more detailed breakdown of the HNB expenditure against the agreed budget lines is provided at Annex A, however the main reason for the overspend is due to placements in the independent non maintained special school (INMSS) sector of which a £24.60m occurred. As members will be aware, strategies are being deployed to enhance maintained provision within the county, through SEN Units and increased special school capacity, but this will take time to feed through into the budget position.

Exclusions

The 2024/25 budget estimated that £1m income would be generated for High Needs Block establishments as funding followed pupils who were excluded from mainstream schools during the year. The actual income was circa £2m and created a variance of just over £1m

DSG grant

The grant remained largely in line with budget.

Early Years Block (EYB)

Early Years Block Expenditure			
	Budget	Final Allocation	Difference
Under 2YO	16,538,685	22,431,778	5,893,093
2YO	37,648,617	36,714,793	-933,824
3 4 YO	84,476,476	85,409,205	932,729
Early Years DAF	863,590	429,373	-434,217
Early Years PPG	1,812,463	1,286,546	-525,917
SEN Inclusion Fund	2,650,000	1,790,105	-859,895
Total	143,989,832	148,061,800	4,071,968

Early Years Block Income			
	Budget	Final Allocation	Difference
Under 2YO	-£16,838,685	-£24,304,223	-£7,465,538
2YO	-£37,319,388	-£36,254,866	£1,064,522
3 4 YO	-£87,155,549	-£85,062,249	£2,093,300
Early Years DAF	-£863,590	-£863,590	£0
Early Years PPG	-£1,812,460	-£1,824,357	-£11,897
SEN Inclusion Fund	£0	£0	£0
Total	-£143,989,671	-£148,309,285	-£4,319,614



Overall Difference	
Under 2YO	-£1,572,445
2YO	£130,698
3 4 YO	£3,026,029
Early Years DAF	-£434,217
Early Years PPG	-£537,814
SEN Inclusion Fund	-£859,895
Total	-£247,645

The Early Years Block outturn position for 2024/25 indicates a circa £0.250m underspend.

Further information is provided below:

Under 2-Year-Olds

Early Years Block expenditure relating to under 2-year-olds overspent by £5.89m, however please note that an additional £7.47m of grant income was received to offset the additional expenditure.

2-Year-Olds

Early Years Block expenditure relating to 2-year-olds underspent by £934,000, however a reduction in grant income was received totalling £1m.

3- to 4-Year-Olds

Early Years Block expenditure relating to 3- to 4-year-olds overspent by £933,000. In addition, a reduction in grant was received totalling £2m. It should be noted that for 3- to 4-year-olds the LA are notified of the forecasted income in December 2023, however, final Early Years DSG was confirmed in July 2024.

Disability Access Fund

This budget line was circa £434,000 below budget.

Early Years Pupil Premium

This budget line was circa £526,000 below budget

SEN Inclusion Fund

The SEN Inclusion Fund expenditure was circa £860,000 under budget. This is due to c£1m of EY top up funding being transferred to the HNB.

Overall Variance

In summary, the EYB ended the 2024/25 financial year with a £0.250m underspend. Due to the extended entitlements within Under 2-year-olds and 2-year-olds, the DfE are funding LAs on a termly basis, ensuring that take up is funded appropriately. Whilst overall the EYB has remained within budget, there is concern of the overspend within the 3- to 4-year-old entitlement, however this has been largely offset with a saving within the under 2-year-old entitlement.

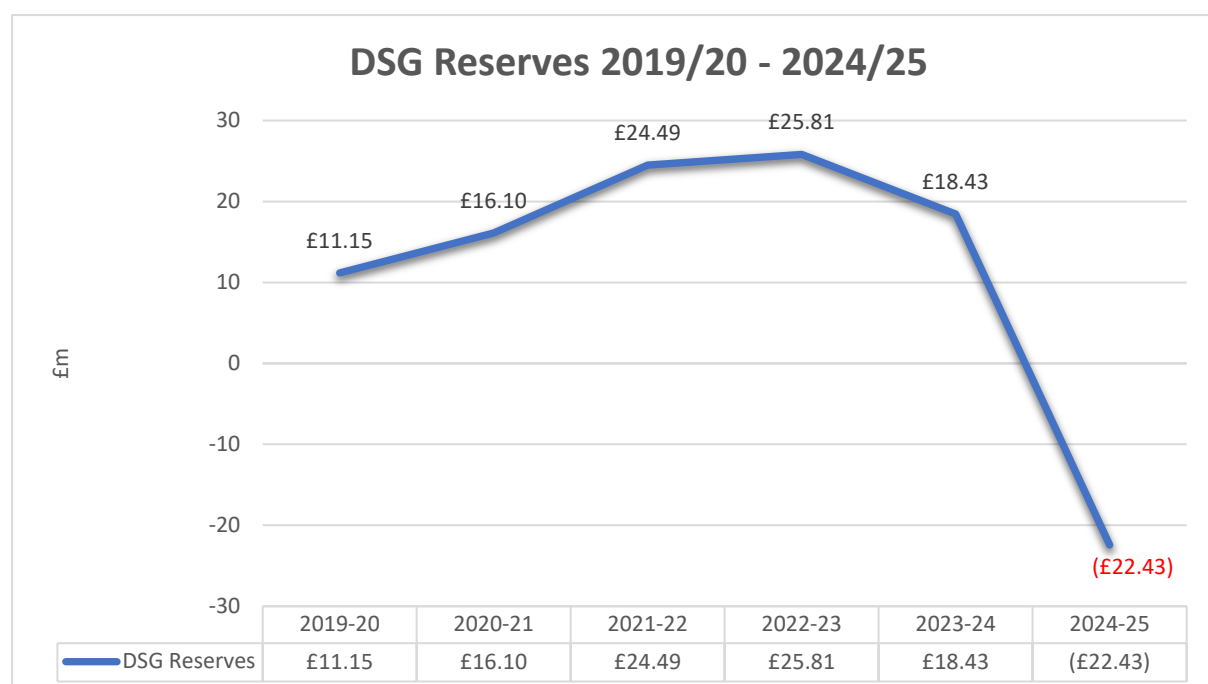


Due to the continuation of the extended entitlements within Under 2-year-olds and 2-year-olds in 2025/26, a significant part of the initial allocation received is based on forecasted national data/estimated take up. This could lead to significant variances within these entitlements until we move towards a more stable annual funding allocation in line with the 3- to 4-year-old entitlements.

Clawback

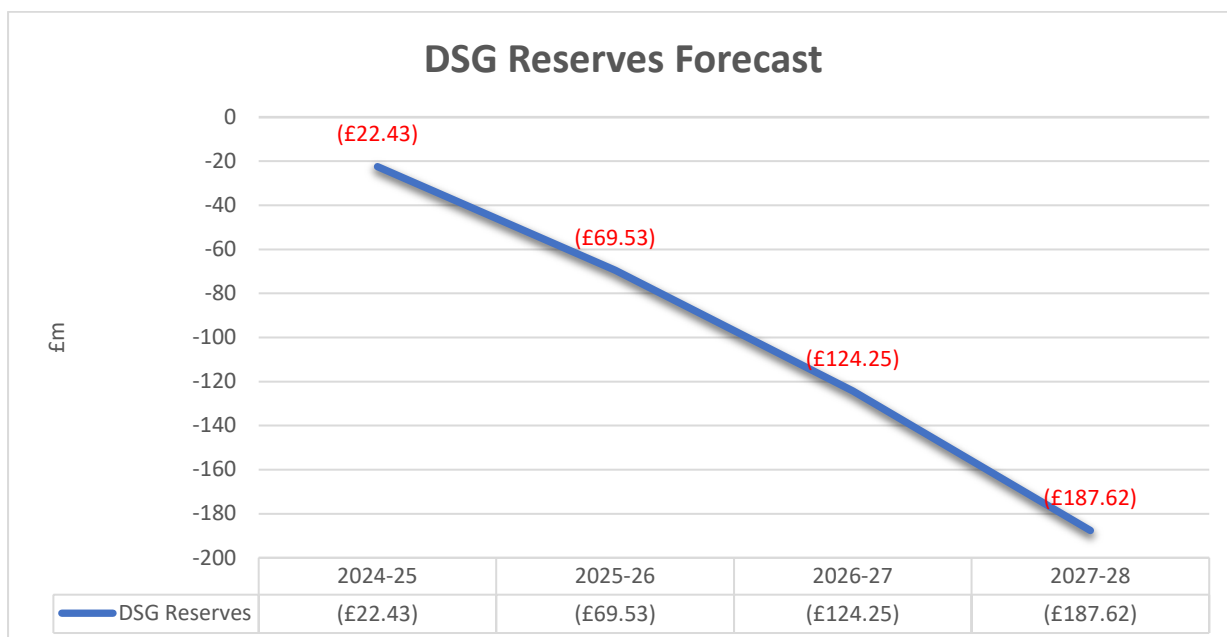
As previously agreed with schools forum, clawback recovered from schools who's balance was in excess of the 12% threshold as stated within the policy has been transferred from the schools in financial difficulty reserve to the DSG. This totals £677,000.

DSG Reserves



Due to pressures on the High Needs Block, Lancashire has ended the 2024/25 financial year with an overall DSG deficit/negative reserve position of £22.43m. If current trends continue, the deficit is forecasted to increase to £69.53m by March 2026. As a reminder, the statutory override is due to end by March 2026, meaning that DSG deficits will no longer be allowed to be carried forward, with DSG deficit being incorporated into the LA general fund budget.





The working group:

Noted the report

Discussed:

- There is no update yet on the statutory override, though an autumn paper is anticipated. A DSG recovery plan must be developed, with a deadline assumed to be around November. The DfE will raise the issue after the outturn submission in August.
- The LA must take an active and innovative approach to reducing the DSG deficit. Ideas for offsetting spend have been reviewed and will be presented to the forum in the autumn term for feedback. There is no DfE budget to cover overspends, reinforcing the need for local action.

2. School Balances 2024/25 (Attached)

Detail

School Balances Outturn 2024/25

This report sets out the year end position of schools' delegated budgets at 31 March 2025.

The overall school balances have decreased from £69.79m to £66.93m, an overall reduction of £2.86m. The tables below show analysis of school balances by phase at the end of the financial year 2024/25.

2024/25 School Balances - In-Year Movement of Balances by Phase

Phase	Balance Brought Forward as at 1 April 2024	In-year Increase / (Decrease) 24/25	Balance Carried Forward as at 31 March 25
	£m	£m	£m



Nursery	0.242	0.382	0.624
Primary	40.534	-2.052	38.482
Secondary	20.915	-3.027	17.888
Special	6.658	1.740	8.398
Short Stay	1.441	0.092	1.533
Total	69.790	-2.865	66.925

As can be seen, some phases showed an overall decrease in their aggregate balance and some phases an overall increase.

In addition to the core Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funding allocations to schools, considerable additional funding was allocated during 2024/25 in the form of Government grants. For Lancashire maintained schools, grant allocations in the year totalled £119m.

Some of these grants were allocated by the DfE on an academic year basis, whilst additional grant was received to reflect the government funding of teacher pay and pension grants.

The aggregate school balances figure at 31 March 2025 includes 16 primary and 3 secondary academisations during the financial year. *Without the academy conversions school balances would have largely remained unchanged with an aggregate change of £0.017m.*

2024/25 School Balances – In-Year Movement Count of Schools by Phase

Phase	Count of deficit in year	Count of surplus in year
Nursery	10	14
Primary	211	204
Secondary	16	19
Special	8	20
Short Stay	3	5
Total	248	262

To Summarise, 248 schools operated an in-year deficit in 2024/25, which equates to 49%, with 262 schools, 51%, operating an in-year surplus. In comparison, in 2023/24, 45% of schools operated an in-year deficit.

Phase	Count of deficit close balance	Count of surplus close balance	Count of schools subject to clawback with a balance deemed in excess
Nursery	8	16	2
Primary	31	384	6



Secondary	1	34	0
Special	4	24	4
Short Stay	0	8	0
Total	44	466	12

2024/25 School Balances – Number of Schools in Surplus/Deficit by Phase

A total of 44 schools ended the 2024/25 financial year in deficit. The number of schools in deficit on 31 March 2025 has increased by 6 schools in deficit a year earlier.

At the opposite end, a total of 12 schools ended the 2024/25 financial year with a balance deemed in excess of the clawback policy, which is the same number as the 2023/24 financial year.

A comparison showing the total number of schools in deficit across recent years is provided below:

Year End	Number of schools in deficit
31 March 2025	44
31 March 2024	38
31 March 2023	42
31 March 2022	21
31 March 2021	30
31 March 2020	41
31 March 2019	39

Support for Schools in Deficit

The county council, in consultation with the Lancashire Schools Forum, has continued to provide significant targeted support and enhanced monitoring and early warning to support schools that are in, or may be heading towards, financial difficulty. This includes monitoring the financial outlook of schools on the Schools in Financial Difficulty (SIFD) category warning system for maintained schools, issuing early warning letters to offer a 'heads-up' that financial pressures may be mounting and using the agreed SiFD procedures to provide additional support to some schools.

Clawback 2024/25

At 31st March 2025, 12 schools held balances above the clawback guidelines. This totalled £292,000, of which 50% (£146,000) of the total balance in excess will be recovered.

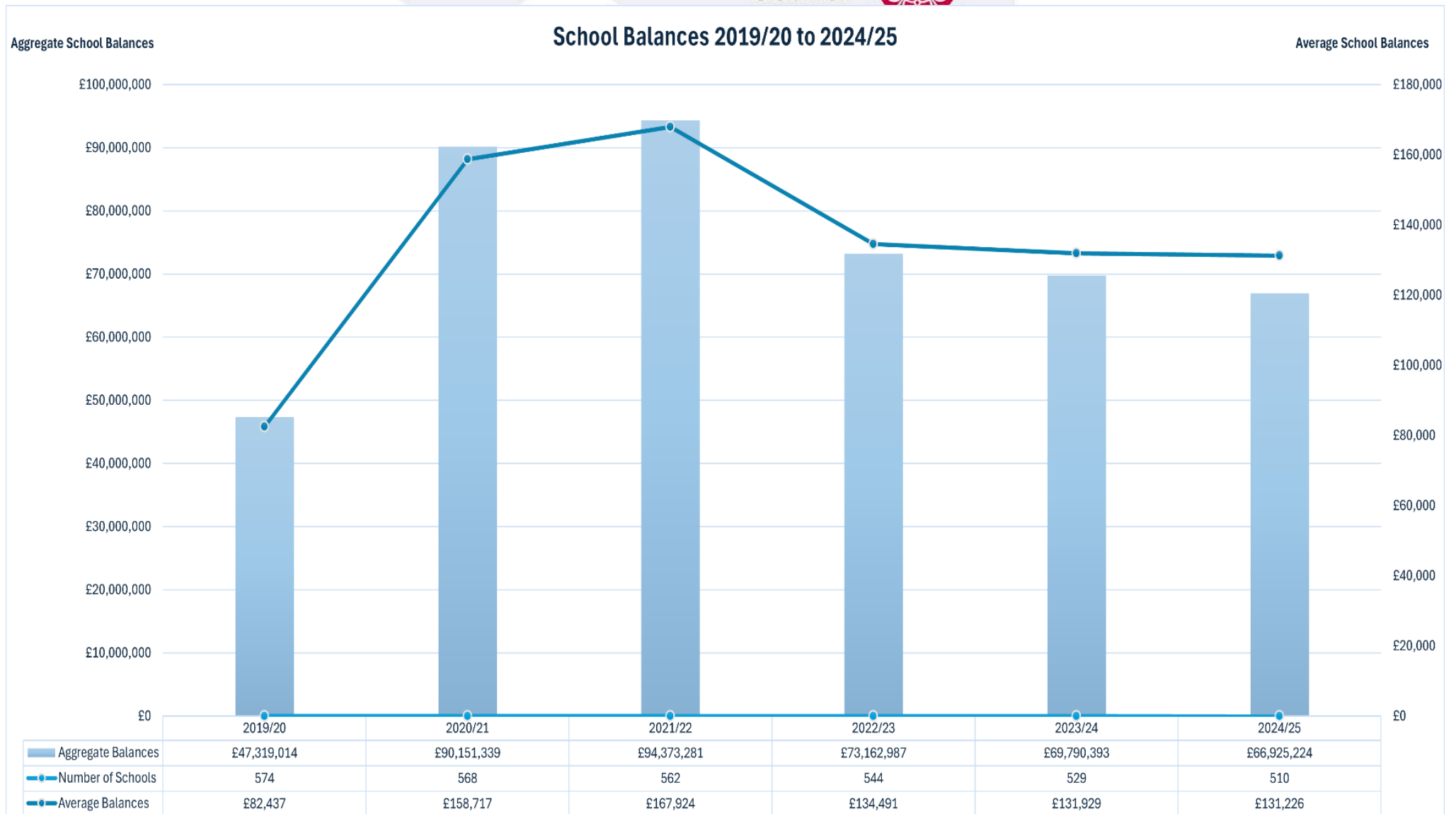
All maintained schools received a letter on the Schools Portal on 9 May 2025, outlining the year-end balance in accordance with the clawback policy. Clawback funds will be transferred to assist with pressures in the high needs block.

The following graph demonstrates the trend in aggregate school balances over a number of years and shows that following the increase in the balances held by schools between 2020 and 2022, school balances have slightly decreased at March 2025, however without academy conversions school balances would have largely remained unchanged.





Aggregate School Balances by Year



Balance Comparison 2019/20 – 2024/25

Phase	2019/20 Aggregate Balance	2024/25 Aggregate Balance	Difference
Nursery	£382,574	£624,041	£241,467 ↑
Primary	£35,953,268	£38,482,478	£2,529,210 ↑
Secondary	£7,658,903	£17,888,244	£10,229,341 ↑
Special	£2,576,223	£8,397,905	£5,821,682 ↑
Short Stay	£748,046	£1,532,557	£784,511 ↑

Phase	2019/20 Average Balance	2024/25 Average Balance	Difference
Nursery	£15,941	£26,002	£10,061 ↑
Primary	£77,485	£92,729	£15,244 ↑
Secondary	£159,560	£511,093	£351,533 ↑
Special	£88,835	£302,849	£214,014 ↑
Short Stay	£83,116	£191,570	£108,454 ↑

Phase	2019/20 Number of Schools	2024/25 Number of Schools	Difference
Nursery	24	24	0
Primary	464	415	-49 ↓
Secondary	48	35	-13 ↓
Special	29	28	-1 ↓
Short Stay	9	8	-1 ↓

A further analysis has been undertaken to compare the 2024/25 schools outturn to the historic 2019/20 schools outturn.

The analysis shows that schools are continuing to hold balances some £20m higher than the historic 2019/20 total of £47m. The average school balance as shown in the 'aggregate school balances by year' graph is £131,000. This is £49,000 higher than the historic 2019/20 average of £82,000.

Furthermore, with academy conversions there are less Lancashire schools in 2024/25 compared to 2019/20, meaning that Lancashire has less schools but higher collective balances. Across all sectors both the average balance and aggregate balances are higher in 2024/25 when compared to 2019/20, with significant increases within the Secondary, Special, and Short Stay sectors.

Analysis provided by schools about their year-end position at 31 March 2025 indicates that circa £15.5m of total balances are classed as 'committed'.



Individual School Balances 2024/25

Attached at **Annex A** are details about the movement in balances at an individual school level in 2024/25. As previously requested by the Forum, in addition to the year-end balance by school, information is included in this annex setting out:

- Balance as a % of CFR income.
- Balance per pupil.

Schools Budget Reserves 2024/25

		£
<u>1</u>	<u>DSG Reserve</u>	
	Opening Balance	-18,429,170
	24/25 overspend	41,523,443
	Transfer Clawback Balance from SiFD	-751,182
	Closing Balance	22,416,986
<u>2</u>	<u>Schools in Financial Difficulty Reserve</u>	
	Opening Balance	-7,020,536
	Academy School Balances	-308,437
	Underspend 24/25	-68,872
	Transfer Clawback Balance to DSG Reserve	751,182
	Closing Balance	-6,646,663
<u>3</u>	<u>De-delegated Reserves</u>	
	Opening Balance	-966,411
	Underspend 24/25	-59,828
	Closing Balance	-1,026,239
<u>4</u>	<u>Supply Teacher Reserve</u>	
	Opening Balance	-1,537,080
	Underspend 24/25	-131,791
	Closing Balance	-1,668,871
<u>5</u>	<u>Schools Balances</u>	
	Opening Balance	-69,790,392
	Underspend 24/25	-17,011
	Academy Conversions & Closed School	2,882,179
	Closing Balance	-66,925,224
<u>6</u>	<u>Schools Forced Conversions Reserve</u>	
	Open Balance	0
	Net In Year Movement	25,878
	Closing Balance	25,878
<u>7</u>	<u>Total All Reserves</u>	
	Open Balance	-97,743,588



	Net In Year Movement	43,919,456
	Closing Balance	53,824,132

Further information about the year-end reserves are provided below.

1. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG Reserve)

The DSG overspent by £40.85m in 2024/25. Details of this figure are provided in the Schools Budget Outturn report 2024/25. The outturn position for the DSG Reserve is therefore a balance of **-£22.40m.**

2. Schools in Financial Difficulty Reserve

To maximise the funding available in the Schools in Financial Difficulty (SIFD) Reserve, several adjustments have been made to the reserve in 2024/25.

As members will be aware, convertor academies take a surplus or deficit balance with them to their academy trust, whereas the balance at forced academies remains with the LA. Where balances have accrued due to academy conversions, these have been transferred to the SiFD reserve. The LA have recently created a new cost centre to hold the forced academy conversions of which further detail is provided below. It is proposed that a similar approach is adopted for converter academies.

The reserve has decreased by £0.373m in year. Due to the high level of reserves the de-delegation ask to schools was reduced, and as such a further reduction in reserves is expected at 2025/26 outturn.

3. De-Delegation Reserve

The de-delegation reserve ended the year with a surplus of circa £1.026m.

Members will recall that for the Inclusion Hubs de-delegation the LA includes adjustments relating to inclusion hub funding that has been delegated to banker schools at the start of the year. So that individual school balances at certain banker schools were not artificially high, which would impact on school year end balances reporting and national benchmarking, the £750,000 remaining balance was held by the LA for year-end accounting purposes and then redistributed to the relevant banker schools in the new financial year.

4. School Teaching and Support Staff Supply Reimbursement Scheme

The staff reimbursement scheme ended the year with an underspend of circa £131,000, leaving an outturn position of circa £1.67m.

The Forum has previously agreed that any year-end balance above £1.5m should be redistributed to scheme members, however it is proposed the £131,000 underspend is put into reserves. For 2026/27, members will need to consider a rise in the premiums charged for the teaching staff scheme, but it may be possible to hold the premiums on the support staff element of the scheme to 2025/26 levels. Further reports will be presented to the Forum in due course.

5. School Reserves

As set out earlier in the report, school balances decreased to c£67m at the end of 2024/25.



6. Schools Forced Conversions Reserve

As mentioned above, the LA has now created a new cost centre to hold forced academy conversions with the balance (surplus or deficit) remaining with the LA. Whilst this is a small balance, ensuring balances of any forced academy conversions do not escalate is key to minimising any financial risk to the LA.

The working group:

Noted the report

Discussed:

- **Around 24–25 schools are currently reporting in-year deficits. Comparisons to 2019/20 data were questioned for reliability, though trends remained steady pre-COVID. Concerns were raised about schools' financial commitments, clawback implications, and whether funds are being shifted between blocks. There's a notable contrast between schools in deficit and those with reserves. Regular monitoring (six times a year) is essential to avoid year-end surprises, especially with uncertainties like pay rises.**
- **There is a need for better financial awareness among governors, as many rely solely on headteachers without understanding the budget. Schools are facing pressures from falling rolls and cold spots, prompting them to increase pupil numbers to secure funding. Suggestions included adding birthrate and pupil number graphs to the governors' handbook and improving communication with LCC. A new dashboard and a designated officer for pupil place planning are being introduced under the new department led by Aby.**

3. Clawback 2024/25 (Attached)

Detail

Lancashire's Scheme for Financing schools includes a balance control mechanism, which is designed to control and clawback, where appropriate, schools' excessive surplus balances.

The clawback mechanism ([section 4.2](#)) states " *For schools that hold balances greater than the Authority's recommended guideline the Authority shall be empowered to deduct from the current year's budget share a percentage of the excess surplus balances (clawback) as agreed following consultation with the Lancashire Schools Forum. The rate and any exceptions shall be reviewed annually by the Authority in consultation with the Lancashire Schools Forum, and guidance issued to schools*".

"Lancashire Schools Forum can consider exceptional cases for an exemption from the clawback provisions as stipulated in the current clawback policy available on the Schools Forum website".

School Balances and Clawback Policy 2025/26

Whilst clawback had been suspended on year end balances at March 2020, 2021 and 2022, since 2022/23, Schools Forum has voted to reintroduce clawback. The policy is as follows:



- 12% of Consistent Financial Reporting (CFR) income for all phases of maintained school
- A £75,000 minimum balance threshold will be applied.

The Forum are now asked to consider the school balances and clawback policy to be applied at 31 March 2026.

Although the 2024/25 outturn positions have slightly decreased by circa £3m since 2023/24, aggregate school balances however are still some £20m higher than the historic pre 2019/20 average of £45m. The average school balance of £131,000 is also some £49,000 higher than the historic pre 2019/20 average of £82,000.

In addition, current budget submissions for the 2025/26 financial year show a total forecasted outturn of £47.75m, which remains higher than the historical £45m outturn average. The previous two financial years outturn data shows that schools outturn balances increase by c35% compared the initial budget forecast.

DfE guidance has previously stated that balances are deemed in excess, where they are greater than 5% (Secondary) and 8% (Primary, Special, PRU, Maintained Nursery schools) of CFR income. Recent benchmarking has shown that many local authorities implement these recommendations within their clawback policies.

Based on the above information, the local authority has proposed the following options:

- a) Apply the clawback policy in 2025/26, at 12% CFR income threshold to all schools
- b) Apply the clawback policy in 2025/26, but reducing the 12% CFR income threshold down to 8%
- c) Apply the clawback policy in 2025/26, but reducing the 12% CFR income threshold down to 5%

All options include the continuation of the minimum £75,000 balance threshold and clawback would continue to apply as per the below

- A clawback rate of 50% is to be applied to any balance above guideline in the first year a school exceeds the guideline (after adjusting for exemptions)
- A clawback rate of 100% is to be applied to any balance in excess of guideline where the guideline has been breached for two or more consecutive years (after adjusting for exemptions)

The proposed Clawback Policy is attached as Annex B with the local authority recommending **option B**.

**The working group:
Noted the Report**



Supported recommendation for option B) *Apply the clawback policy in 2025/26, but reducing the 12% CFR income threshold down to 8%*

Discussed:

- **Maintained schools benefit from more direct support and guidance compared to others. Academies are not subject to clawback, as trusts manage their own budgets—though this has been debated at ministerial level. Concerns were raised about schools holding large surpluses (e.g., 12%), which is seen as unsustainable. It was suggested that governors and forum members should question such balances, especially when the focus should remain on current pupils.**
- **Clawback funds are returned to the DSG, and while a 5% threshold helps, it's a significant drop from the previous 12%. Lowering the threshold could impact schools' three-year projections, prompting suggestions for a transitional phase. There were questions about whether per-pupil funding could decrease if the DSG becomes too low. A call was made for more detailed modelling to understand the impact on individual schools, however this is difficult in nature to provide, and whether the forum has the authority to set a maximum surplus limit.**

4. Schools in Financial Difficulty Recovery Plan Bids (Attached)

Background

The Schools Forum voted to implement the Clawback policy to excess school balances at 31 March 2023 due to the continued high level of balances across the authority. As a result, circa £751,000 was clawed back from eighteen Schools.

During their meeting on 18 October 2023, the Schools Forum agreed to use some of these funds to support schools in financial difficulty who were actively working with the authority to reduce their deficit.

In line with the Schools in Financial Difficulty policy, schools with recovery plans were eligible to 33% of the greater of the 2022/23 or 2023/24 outturn deficit. This was to be allocated over two financial years. Schools shown in the table below were eligible and received 50% of this funding in the first year, 2024/25. The remaining balance however was only agreed to be payable in 2025/26 if the schools continued to work with the authority and are actively working to reduce the deficit in line with their approved recovery plan and have met the conditions of their recovery plan.

The table below shows the 2024/25 outturn position of the ten schools. This shows three schools have reached a surplus budget position and as such will not require the 2nd year allocation. There are also two schools that have breached their recovery plans and are not eligible for the 2nd year allocation. In addition, the remaining five schools have a balance in line, or better than their agreed recovery plan and will be eligible for the 2nd year payment.



School	Outturn March 2024	Outturn March 2025	Year 1 Allocation	Agreed recovery plan balance 2025	In line with Recovery Plan	Year 2 Allocation	Comments
1	-£8,535	£1,390	-£3,264	-£5,641	Yes	£0	Recovered
2	-£15,752	-£18,097	-£2,599	-£20,928	Yes	-£2,599	Eligible for 2nd year allocation
3	-£48,174	-£33,181	-£7,949	-£42,107	Yes	-£7,949	Eligible for 2nd year allocation
4	-£22,415	-£8,454	-£3,699	-£28,048	Yes	-£3,699	Eligible for 2nd year allocation
5	-£93,654	£842	-£15,453	-£46,876	Yes	£0	Recovered
6	-£294,402	-£230,014	-£48,576	-£253,008	Yes	-£48,576	Eligible for 2nd year allocation
7	-£43,008	-£57,563	-£7,096	-£38,762	No	£0	Not in line with recovery plan
8	-£227,009	-£131,818	-£37,457	-£6,805	No	£0	Not in line with recovery plan
9	-£44,636	£37,960	-£7,365	-£26,369	Yes	£0	Recovered
10	-£172,351	-£101,585	-£30,511	-£144,008	Yes	-£30,511	Eligible for 2nd year allocation

The working group:

Noted the report

Discussed:

- It was explained that LCC clearly communicated expectations to schools and issued reminders when necessary. Despite these efforts, some schools did not engage with the process.

5. Schools in Financial Difficulty Bid (Attached)

Detail

SRaS Support Bid Background - Confidential

Previous reports to the Forum have set out the support arrangements developed by the Authority for schools that may be experiencing exceptional financial difficulty. Financial difficulty can arise from several causes which lead either to budget reductions for example due to falling rolls, or from the need for short term increases in expenditure. Examples of these pressures on the school budget requiring short term financial support include:

1. Being judged by OfSTED as Inadequate or Requires Improvement.
2. Identified by the School Advisor/Senior Accountant as requiring additional support for serious educational difficulties or failure to meet attainment targets.
3. Subject to intervention by the Authority.
4. Faced with serious personnel difficulties.

Schools can also face falling roll situations because of demographic changes.

The consequences of these are that the school can experience serious financial difficulty. Schools Forum has agreed that the School Improvement Group (SIG) can provide support to schools in financial difficulty that has resulted from the above.

In addition, the budget is also used to:



- Mitigate the interest charges that would otherwise have to be met by schools that have implemented an agreed recovery plan (i.e. have implemented appropriate measures to ensure that they do not exceed agreed deficit limits);
- Meet the cost of contracting the School Finance Team at an enhanced level.
- Provide financial support to schools where their reserves are not sufficient for the school to meet the full cost of the intervention or restructuring costs themselves, in accordance with the financial support criteria agreed with the Forum.
- Provide one off financial support to schools who otherwise would not be able to recover from a deficit position. As a general guide, SIG suggested that whilst individual circumstances will always need to be taken carefully into account, maximum allocations from the Schools in Financial Difficulty fund in response to an application from an individual school should generally not exceed 33% of the relevant deficit, but many may be lower.

The budget for this support is obtained through the de-delegation, which is agreed annually by the Forum, following a consultation with schools.

In recent years, the number of bids for one off support have been limited, with support being primarily offered through the standard support options.

It should also be noted that a small number of schools at the extreme end of the Schools in Financial Difficulty (SIFD) spectrum have accumulated significant structural deficits, deemed as Category 1 on the county council's Schools in Financial Difficulty category warning system for maintained schools. These schools often have a range of difficulties, not simply a deficit budget, which can impact on their ability to recover financially.

It has not been considered appropriate to request one off SIFD support for a number of these schools, as it has been judged that they have a structural deficit with no prospect of financial recovery, and it has been necessary to pursue strategic solutions in respect of these schools.

As can be seen from the information above, the county council only submits a request to the Forum for a bid for one off support when there is confidence that any agreed funding will assist the school to return to a sustainable surplus position.

On 29 April 2025, the School Improvement Group supported the Schools in Financial Difficulty Bid.

Bids to Forum for one off financial support can be found at Appendix A. Please note, the Schools Finance service had recently reviewed the content of this report and have informally approved. Bid A is provided in the previous format.

The working group:

Noted the report

Supported the Bid



6. De-delegation 2026/27 Proposals (Attached)

In 2025/26, the Forum formally approved 5 service de-delegations, relating to:

- Staff costs – Public Duties/Suspensions
- Heritage Learning Service – (Primary Schools Only)
- Schools Requiring Additional Support
- Inclusion Hubs (Primary Schools Only)
- Children's Champions

Relevant de-delegations were also offered to nursery schools, special schools and PRUs as pooled services buy-backs.

For 2026/27 the following proposals have been received from the relevant services, with a change to the Schools Requiring Additional Support de-delegation, however there is no proposal from the service in relation to the inclusion hubs and as such this will cease to be a de-delegation in 2026/27.

All reports & proposals have been provided in the papers (appendices).

The consultation will be live in September 2025 and will be formally voted on by schools forum at the October schools forum meeting.

1. Staff costs – Public Duties/Suspensions

Supporting information received, summarise de-delegation, with Jeanette available to answer questions. No changes to ask, and forum usually supportive of this de-delegation.

Members will be aware that in recent years the 'Staff costs – Public Duties/Suspensions' de-delegation proposals included various options around the treatment of trade union duties, including:

- a) Continue the 'Staff Costs - Public Duties/Suspensions' de-delegation using the existing policy
- b) Continue the 'Staff Costs - Public Duties/Suspensions' de-delegation but with a reduced Trade Union Facilities Time contribution to reflect a smaller workforce
- c) Continue the 'Staff Costs - Public Duties/Suspensions' de-delegation but without any Trade Union Facilities Time contribution
- d) Completely discontinue the 'Staff Costs - Public Duties/Suspensions' de-delegation

In considering this de-delegation each year, the Forum has also asked for information arising from an annual review of the trade union facilities time agreement and the latest report (Appendix B), which has been produced by Schools HR colleagues.

The proposed de-delegation rate will increase by 4% to reflect the teachers pay award

Jeannette Whitham (Head of Schools HR) will be in attendance to answer questions



2. Heritage Learning Team – (Primary Schools Only)

Supporting information received, summarise de-delegation. No changes to ask, and forum usually supportive of this de-delegation.

The Schools Forum have historically supported the work the Heritage Learning Team undertakes for primary schools to help meet the national curriculum and to support wider cultural learning and learning outside the classroom.

It is again proposed to consult on the continued de-delegation of this service for 2026/27, at the same level as currently de-delegated of £1.97 per pupil, in the primary sector only.

Further information can be found within Appendix C

3. Schools Requiring Additional Support

Proposals have been received from service who will discuss the de-delegation

The de-delegation arrangement is aimed to support schools in financial difficulty where additional support is deemed necessary for staffing reorganisations (HR), Intervention support (MIT) and finance support (SFS) based on a set of long-established principles. It aims to encourage schools to operate on a self-managing, self-sustaining strategy with schools in the worst situation receiving the greatest support, but still contributing, with those schools which take early preventative action also entitled to support based on a RAG rating system.

The delegation will also fund the work of the MIT team who provide the professional advice and guidance to the schools that require support, and the advisors who provide financial and governance support outside of the SLA arrangements that schools sign up for individually. It is not possible for the County Council to provide this for free due to the removal of the school monitoring and brokering grant from the DfE. Instead of asking for a separate de-delegation request for this function (as is normal in many other Local Authority areas) we are rolling this into this de-delegation and not increasing costs to schools. This will increase in-year costs to the fund by c£850k but will keep the fund well within budget, whilst maintaining a low rate of de-delegated funds.

Current evidence indicates that the SRaS de-delegation is well received and highly valued by headteachers and governors. The partnership between schools and the local authority has also proved invaluable in helping schools to improve the quality of provision in a sustainable way.

The proposed de-delegation rates will be held at 2025/26 levels to reflect the reserves held. It is expected that the surplus will allow the de-delegation rates to stay low for the next couple of years, but in future years the rate may need to increase.

Further information can be found within Appendix D

Aby Hardy/Paul Turner will be in attendance to answer questions



4. Children's Champions

Proposals have been received from service who will discuss the de-delegation

The children's champions enable schools to gather young people's voice when they were struggling to access mainstream education. This could be if they were at risk of permanent exclusion, breakdown of a relationship with school leading to attendance, working with families where they are considering home education, but this may not be in the best interests of the child and assisting in reintegrating some of our children missing education cohort who are often new to country/area and therefore may need extra support on transition into school. Their work has been in all sectors primary, secondary, PRU and special. Alternative provision: children's champions - Lancashire County Council This de-delegation supports additional children's champions to maintained schools.

- 1x Grade 9 Children's champion, brokering support and supporting children across Lancashire for maintained schools
- 4x Grade 7 officers, to support operational support for reintegration and admission for children and young people who have been or are at risk of permanent exclusion

The proposed de-delegation rate will be reviewed ahead of the consultation and will be in line with pay awards.

Further information can be found within Appendix E.

Sapphire Murray will be in attendance to answer questions

The working group:

Noted the report

Staff costs – Public Duties/Suspensions - Jeanette updated the figure from the proposal - 41% now work in academies.

Discussed:

- **Heritage Learning Team – (Primary Schools Only):** a request was made to clarify
 - how many schools currently use the service
 - how many have borrowed resource boxes

This was asked to review if the service represents good value for money. It was noted that the report lacks information on the impact of the service and what alternatives might exist. An update has been requested from the service for the autumn term meeting [18th September].
- **Schools Requiring Additional Support:**
 - **The Red Book is being revised over the summer, with updates pending Ofsted outcomes. The MIT has supported 87 schools, covering a wide range of settings.**
 - **The RISE team, currently supporting only four schools, follows a similar model to MIT. Clarification is needed on whether all schools**



- can access this support. Schools are encouraged to be proactive and reach out if they anticipate needing assistance.
 - Schools may be flagged for financial support following Ofsted notifications, statutory visits, or direct school requests. Examples of such cases were discussed.
 - MIT often requires significant change within a short timeframe. There was discussion around whether MIT should adopt a more supervisory or supportive role in these situations.
- **Children's Champions:** Since September, the team has received 447 support requests across various areas. The majority were for exclusion support (243), followed by SEN support (51), and Section 19 support (9). This reflects the diverse ways the team has provided assistance over the years.
- Engagement is crucial, as these discussions involve official funding decisions. The Inclusion Hub is not a de-delegated service; instead, it will submit bids to the High Needs Block (HNB) for funding starting from September. This aligns with the broader need to review how inclusion funding is spent.
- The Inclusion Hub currently holds reserves that could cover approximately three-quarters of a year and will continue to benefit those who have contributed (primarily primary schools). At present, only the Inclusion Hub can submit funding proposals, which will be reviewed annually. There are concerns about potential service reductions if bids are not approved and whether this will place additional pressure on the HNB. Improved communication is needed, as some headteachers were unaware of the process due to a lack of formal proposals.

7. Schools Forum Annual Report 2024/25 (Attached)

Detail

Since 2005/06, the Forum has produced an Annual Report, which is circulated to all schools via the Schools Portal and made available on the Forum website. A draft Forum Annual Report for 2024/25 is now attached at Appendix A for consideration by the Working Group.

The working group:

Noted in 3.1 misspell of Formula

8. SEND/HNB education capital strategy

Verbal update from Paul Turner

The working group:

Noted the report

Discussed:

- Several presentations will be delivered regarding increased SEND capital funding, with projects planned for 2026/27 and 2027/28. Input is



being sought on priorities and locations for provision types such as ASD and SEMH.

- Feedback is essential as plans will be submitted to Cabinet. Ongoing engagement and involvement in future planning are encouraged. A request will be made to share the presentation with the forum, and an email invitation will be sent out.
- Forum requested a copy of the Slides and have included as Appendix G

9. Any Other Business

- **LCC – Raise issue of deadline Supply:** The importance of adhering to supply deadlines was raised, as these align with other key deadlines across LCC. A number of schools have missed the supply deadline, resulting in additional administrative workload and time that could have been better allocated. Schools are reminded to respect these timelines to support efficient operations.
- **Schools Block Chair Update:** It was announced that Steve Campbell will be stepping down as Chair of the Schools Block Working Group at the end of this academic year. A nomination for his replacement has been received. If no further nominations are submitted by 24th July, the new Chair will be formally confirmed at the Schools Forum meeting on 1st July.

The working group:

Thanked for the updates

