

High Needs Working Group – 24/02/2026

Virtual meeting via Microsoft Teams

2p.m. to 3p.m.

Attendees:		
Fiona Robinson (FR)	Headteacher – Bensham Manor	
Chair		
Shelley Davies (SD)	Director of Education	
Priya Perera (PP)	Head of Service, SEND Transformation & Delivery	
Melanie Farris (MF)	SEND Lead (Early Intervention)	✓
Keran Currie (KC)	School Governor – Norbury Manor Primary School	
Katie Goodwin (KG)	Headteacher – St Nicolas'	
Clare Cranham (CC)	Headteacher – Kensington Avenue	
Julie Evans (JE)	Headteacher – Priory	✓
Alfred Donkor (AD)	Commissioning & Contracts Manager	
Sharon Hemley (SH)	Lead Commissioner – CYPE	✓
Jenny Bartlett (JB)	Head of Strategic Finance	
Abioye Aimolowo (AA)	Finance Manager	
Yetsie Adeboye (YA)	Principle Accountant	✓
Susanna Roe (SR)	Principle Accountant	✓
Darran Money (DM)	Education Business Support Lead	
Mori Bates (MB)	Clerk	✓

Agenda Items

1	Apologies and welcome	FR
	Apologies received prior to the meeting by FR, PP, AA and SD JE was acting as chair for the meeting in FR's absence	
2	Previous Minutes and Actions	FR
	2.1 Previous minutes read and reviewed, agreed to be a true record	
3	Therapies Update	AD/SH
	3.1 AD circulated a therapies update to the working group, of which the findings were generally positive despite the contract still being in the early days. SH confirmed that initial areas of doubt are being investigated and addressed, adding that the schools are helping to work with the LA to give a better measure of the data with many of the key players reporting positive outcomes for children.	
4	Finance Update	YA
	4.1 YA presented a paper on the High Needs Forecast Expenditure and Budget Monitoring, focusing on Table 1 which showed the in year allocations from the DSG with the most recent announcement being in November '25 for £97,485,367 with a net allocation of £86,663,367. 4.2 Table 2 showed the year to date against the High Needs Budget with a comparison between the 25/26 forecast and the 24/25 outturn, including the variance.	

	4.3 Under 3.3, it was noted that the increase in the number of children requiring an EHCP is significant, along with the need for specialist places. In particular, there is an increase in children moving into reception classes requiring specialist places. 4.4 YA added that, as outline in 5.2, when the Safety Valve programmed finishes at the end of the 25/26 financial year, the government plans to introduce a one off High Needs Stability Grant which would be paid in Autumn '26, subject to the LA submitting for and securing DfE approval of a local SEND reform plan. It is believed that the new grant will provide an equivalent level of support that would have been received through the remainder of the Safety Valve agreement. 4.5 JE queried some lines in Table 2, such as line 15 (PRU) and line 17 (Other), asking where the funds are specifically being spent or what is covered under other. In AA's absence, YA noted this would have to be investigated further. Q1: JE: Under 4.4, it notes there will be 137 new special school places – where are these places coming from. A1: MF: This is being addressed through panels following multiple tours of schools that have spaces. An expansion project is being created to look at buildings that are not being utilised in mainstream schools or schools with available spaces with a focus currently on primary school provisions. In terms of admissions, there are number of satellite provisions and ELPs at various stages of the process of opening, with one due to open in Autumn '26.	
5	SENIF Update	MF
	5.1 MF provided the working group with an update on SENIF, explaining that the Locality team has been transformed in the restructuring. Previously with SENIF, there had been a model with 3 bands where, band 1 would cover children in Early Years settings to mainstream schools needing support or EHCPs and band 3 would cover additional complex needs. As this has not been updated recently, it has had an impact on PVI's and childminders. MF confirmed they are working with the EY SEND team to look at the distribution of SENIF 5.2 MF proposed to the EYWG to use a notional fund for settings that can be paid out in advance in cases where there are issues and allow for changes to be made as needed. 5.3 MF explained that there is a proposal for the Early Years sector to purchase the Speech and Language Link with Little Link which can be used to support the needs of the children up to the age of 5 which will also help assist with transition from EY to primary school Q1: JE: Under 4.4, it notes there will be 137 new special school places – where are these places coming from. A1: MF: This is being addressed through panels following multiple tours of schools that have spaces. An expansion project is being created to look at buildings that are not being utilised in mainstream schools or schools with available spaces with a focus currently on primary school provisions. In terms of admissions, there are number of satellite provisions and ELPs at various stages of the process of opening, with one due to open in Autumn '26.	
5	AOB	ALL
	N/A	

AGREED ACTIONS

Actions from previous minutes		
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Next Meeting Date – TBC May