

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE STANDARDS FUND MONITORING GROUP
HELD ON TUESDAY 12th SEPTEMBER 2006 AT PORTLAND SCHOOL**

Those present were: -

Lynda Brown – Head of Standards (in the Chair)
Jennifer Chart (Portland School) – Representing Special Headteachers
Peter Collins (Houghton Keping) – School Governor
Dorothy Elliott (Portland) – School Governor
Kathryn Elliott (Columbia Grange) – Representing Special Headteachers
Yvonne Gray – Representing Sunderland North Primary Headteachers (with their permission)
Mr D May – Finance Manager – Children’s Services
Tom Walker (Burnside Primary) – Representing Hetton/Houghton/Shiney Row Primary Headteachers
Stuart Scrafton – Governor Support Team

Action Points

MG06/25 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from:

David Alexander – Principal Finance officer
Elizabeth Ayres (Southmoor School) – Representing Secondary Headteachers
Sarah Conn – Senior Finance Assistant
John Lishman (Bexhill Primary) – School Governor
Gillian Mitchell (New Silksworth Infant) – Representing Sunderland South Primary Headteachers
Margaret Brabban (Usworth Colliery Nursery) – Representing Nursery Headteachers

MG06/26 Minutes of previous meeting held on 15th May 2006

The minutes were approved as a true record.

MG06/27 Matters arising from the minutes

MG06/11(Extended Schools) Lynda Brown reported that a report on Extended Schools Strategy would be included in the Agenda Booklet.

MG06/11 (workforce remodeling) A document on Remodeling Consultants was tabled from Jim Cook. Members of the group were concerned that the information provided did not answer any of the questions raised. There was some debate regarding whether schools had received value for money from remodeling consultants and what had they done and had money been well spent?

MG06/15 (school balances) Information on school balances was tabled at the meeting.

MG06/16 (Schedule of Meetings) Re-constitution of the School's Forum continued and some of the places were contested and a ballot had been arranged. It would not be possible to arrange a schedule of meetings until re-constitution had been completed.

MG06/20 (Grant 107 – further consideration) Members were tabled with documentation from Dawn Shearsmith which itemized how funding would be used.

MGO6/22 (Choice Adviser) A document was tabled at the meeting. It was noted that there was some deliberation regarding the naming of the post. It had been suggested that this should be re-titled as 'Admissions Adviser'. Some discussion took place on this issue and there was some concern that parents would see the re-naming of the post as linked to the LA. It was felt important that parents saw this post as being an independent adviser. Some deliberation took place regarding where the post sat with the Parent Partnership Officer.

MG06/28 Computers for Pupils – Grants 210 and 125

Clive Bulmer was welcomed to the meeting and invited to give his report.

Clive tabled a document from DfES, which detailed Computers for Pupils. This was a new initiative, which would provide access to ICT in the homes of some of the most disadvantaged secondary school pupils. In the March 2005 Budget, the Department for Education and Skills was allocated £50 million capital funding over two years to provide access to ICT in the homes of the most disadvantaged pupils in the most deprived areas. The March 2006 Budget included a further £10 million revenue funding over the same two years to enable those pupils benefiting to also receive Internet connectivity. In Sunderland's case this equated to Grant 210 - £306,800 per year for two years, capital grant used to support the purchases of ICT equipment and Grant 125 - £57,900 per year for two years, a recurrent grant which would be used to purchase Internet connectivity for one year only for each computer provided.

Clive referred to the documentation from the North East e-learning Foundation – working in partnership project. Members were given details of the make-up of the foundation and what it would cost to maintain the funding. The focus of the project was to provide all children in a project with the benefits regardless of family income levels, parents could contribute what they could afford and each project must provide and support ICT access in the home.

Clive detailed his vision for future wireless technology for Sunderland.

The chair thanked Clive for his attendance at the meeting.

MG06/29 Advanced Skills Teachers

Richard Hegarty was welcomed to the meeting and was invited to give his report.

Richard reported that the overall funding allocation to schools was £496,446 and was included in the School Development Grant. This was for 35 posts. There were currently 30 employed with 5 recent resignations to promoted posts. New posts would be appointed in Autumn 2006. Richard reported that if funding was not used it would be part of the balances identified by the Schools Forum. It was noted

that some posts were funded April to March and some September to March. Members were assured that all funding was accounted for.

ASTs appointments were focussed to identify specific areas of needs. It was noted that recruiting ASTs was not a problem, however, it was in the areas of focus.

In Primary and Secondary the Teaching and Learning focus was changed and this should be able to be supported generically across classrooms.

Richard reported that he had carried out evaluation of ASTs. He had interviewed 23 headteachers and 30+ ASTs. It was clear that there were benefits from having ASTs and CPD was a good example of this. It was stressed that ASTs could only operate if they were supported by their host school. Comments had been very positive.

There was some concern that there was not an overall strategy for the AST programme and it was clear that this needed to be linked into funding.

Members of the group would welcome the development of an AST Strategy and how this impacted on Standards Fund Grants.

Richard was thanked for his report.

MG06/30 Future constitution and the terms of reference of Standards Fund Monitoring Group in the light of re-constitution of the Schools Forum

Some discussion took place on whether the SFMG was a sub-group of the Schools Forum. It was noted that if this was the case it was suggested that SFMG should be made up from the membership of the Forum.

Peter Collins reported that the SFMG had been initially set up following consultation with the Governor's Association. Representation was from across all age ranges of school, however there was no governor representation from nursery as they had not received delegated budgets when it was set up.

A number of issues were discussed at the meeting on protocol. It was agreed that terms of reference should be formalised. It was important to have a formal constitution and an agreed remit for the group. Officer representation at meetings was discussed. It was agreed that Lynda Brown in conjunction with Gary Robinson would discuss the constitution and terms of reference of the SFMG and present their observations to the Schools Forum

MG06/31 Financial Reports

Standards Fund – LA budgets

LA Budgets 2005/06

The Standards Fund for 2005/06 ended on 31st August 2006 and the closedown process was currently underway. There were a number of under/overspends and these would be investigated during the closedown process. Once this has been completed a report would be presented to the Standards Fund Monitoring Group. The main underspends were as follows:-

Action Points

Members requested the development of an AST Strategy with clear guidance on how funding was allocated.

Constitution and terms of reference of SFMG to be considered by Schools Forum.

Grant 2 – School Standards Grant - All schools had been fully funded and the DfES would reclaim this balance being 100% grant funded.

Grant 4 – Advanced Skills Teachers - The target number set by the DfES was 29, schools currently employed 32 and they had all been fully funded. The balance had accumulated due to time delays between resignations and appointments and as this grant had now been subsumed within the School Development Grant it would not be allocated. It was 50% grant funded, thus the DfES would reclaim £56k and the LA would retain 50%. In the current year schools had been fully funded for these teachers.

Grant 6 - Teachers Threshold Grant - This grant was in respect of Teachers M6 to Upper 1 Threshold payment plus on costs only. The payments had been generated from payroll data and schools had received full reimbursement.

Grant 35 – Building Schools for the Future - The deadline for this grant had been extended to 31st March 2007 and the Capital Team had given assurances that the whole budget would be utilised.

LA Budgets – 2006/07

Information had been gathered up to the end of August and it was noted that due to the timing of the meeting the information had not been interrogated and budget managers had yet to be informed of the balances. Any budget holders that had excessive projected under/overspends would be contacted within the next week in order to find out if the under/spends were genuine or if their budgets needed reprofiling.

Standards Fund - School budgets

Information had been supplied on financial position as at end of August 2006. It was pointed out that there had been no financial validation of these figures and Liaison Officers would be discussing any issues with schools over the next few weeks.

New Grants

School Travel Plans Capital - £22,649 – Devolved to Washington Secondary £10,250 and St Anthony's RC - £12,399

School Standards Grant (Personalisation) - £1,334,745 Pro forma had been completed. Funding would be allocated to schools in mid-September following confirmation of data by the DfES.

Aim Higher Autumn Term - £157,185 - the grant holder Lorraine Johnson would confirm Specific school allocations.

Specialist Schools Capital – Sandhill View - £100,000 – This funding was allocated directly by the DfES.

Strategic Technologies (Capital) - £165,988 - Additional funding allocated to achieve the outcomes of Broadband Connectivity in support of the e-strategy.

Targeted School Meals Grant - £288,141

Grant Consultation – There was currently Officer consultation regarding the use of the Strategic Technologies Grant, related grants for computers for pupils, flexible funding to support 14-19 Partnerships,

Action Points

David May to investigate if further schools had received STP Capital.

Choice Advisers and school meals would be discussed at the next meeting.

School Development Grant (SDG)

In the current year the SDG was expanded to include a further 9 existing grants, and post LIG funding.

LAs were only permitted to retain the same level of funding as in 2005/6, for such areas as Special Educational Needs/Study Support/EiC etc, with no increase for inflation, but only after schools had been allocated their guaranteed increase, which was 3.4% per pupil, based on predecessor grants.

School allocations were calculated by an agreed formula, and they received them without the need to reduce LA budgets, using a provisional funding level provided by the DfES.

A final funding notification had now been received, with the following result:

Total School Development Grant	15,715,188
Initial allocation to schools	12,439,605
Retained by Local Authority	2,700,286
City Learning Centre	475,904
Balance	99,393

The regulations were specific on how to deal with balances – “Any grant that remained from the School Development Grant after meeting the above conditions should be allocated to schools on a fair and transparent basis, after consultation with the Schools Forum”

As schools received their grant based on pupil numbers (PLASC Jan 06), it may be fair to allocate this money on this basis for consistency – this would mean a school of 200 pupils receiving approximately £453. It was agreed to recommend to the Schools Forum that the method of devolving the balance of the SDG should be based on pupil numbers (January 2006 PLASC).

MG06/32 Timetable of Future Meetings

A schedule of meetings would be completed when the constitution of the Schools Forum had been finalised.

Action Points

Strategic Technologies Grant, related grants for computers for pupils, flexible funding to support 14-19 Partnerships, Choice Advisers and school meals would be discussed at the next meeting.

Schools Forum to consider that the method of devolving the balance of the SDG should be based on pupil numbers (January 2006 PLASC).