

## COMPOSITE MINUTES OF THE 2025 AUTUMN TERM AREA MEETINGS OF THE LA AND ESSEX PRIMARY HEADS' ASSOCIATION

|                   |                                   |                                        |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| <b>West</b>       | <b>Wednesday 5 November 2025</b>  | <b>Manor of Groves, Sawbridgeworth</b> |
| <b>South</b>      | <b>Thursday 6 November 2025</b>   | <b>The Lion Inn, Boreham</b>           |
| <b>North East</b> | <b>Wednesday 12 November 2025</b> | <b>Colchester Football Stadium</b>     |
| <b>Mid</b>        | <b>Thursday 13 November 2025</b>  | <b>The Lion Inn, Boreham</b>           |

### 1. **WELCOME, THANK YOU AND NOTICES**

- a) Clare Kershaw, Director for Education, and the Area Chairs, welcomed those present, extending a particular **welcome** to the new (or new in post) headteachers in each area, who are:

#### **West**

|                 |                                                          |
|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Sarah Bailey    | Debden CE Primary                                        |
| Vicky Childs    | Roseacres Primary                                        |
| Jordan Coombes  | Lambourne Primary                                        |
| Kirsty Johnson  | Alderton Infants                                         |
| Andy Lorkins    | Matching Green CE Primary                                |
| Claire Smyth    | Flitch Green Academy (Executive headteacher autumn term) |
| Annie Stockdale | St Thomas More's Catholic Primary, Saffron Walden        |
| Nicola Wix      | Hatfield Heath Primary                                   |

#### **South**

|                 |                                            |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Brian Casey     | Waterman Primary (head of school)          |
| Max Davie       | Cherry Tree Primary                        |
| Georgina Elson  | North Crescent Primary                     |
| Kelly Hayes     | South Benfleet Primary                     |
| Rob King        | Woodham Ley Primary                        |
| Kelly Koller    | Millhouse Primary                          |
| Siobhan Lloyd   | Lincewood Primary                          |
| Helen Maynard   | Canvey Island Infants (Acting headteacher) |
| Toyah McHiggins | Leigh Beck Junior                          |
| Jo Sampson      | Wyburns Primary                            |
| Lucy Springall  | Wickford CE Academy                        |
| Hannah Walker   | St Peter's Catholic Primary, Billericay    |
| Amanda Watson   | Holt Farm Infants                          |

#### **North East**

|                 |                                                   |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Jayne Crowley   | Stourview Primary Academy (Head of School)        |
| Mark Millbourne | Gosbecks Primary (Interim Executive headteacher)  |
| Lesley Roche    | Stourview Primary Academy (Executive headteacher) |
| Chris Ruck      | Friar's Grove Primary                             |

#### **Mid**

|                 |                                                    |
|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Charlotte Bower | Gosfield Primary                                   |
| Lisa Dale       | Great Bradford's Infant and Nursery                |
| Lisa Instance   | Beaulieu Park Primary Academy                      |
| Sarah Letham    | Roxwell CE Primary (Head of School)                |
| Lucie Levett    | Howbridge Juniors                                  |
| Anna Macartney  | St Mary's CE Primary, Burnham-on-Crouch            |
| Jen Miller      | Trinity Road Primary (Acting headteacher)          |
| Julia Murray    | Holy Family Catholic Primary                       |
| Toby Power      | St John's CE Primary, Danbury (Acting headteacher) |
| Gareth Roberts  | Stock CE Primary                                   |
| Fiona Sapiano   | Terling Primary                                    |

|               |                       |
|---------------|-----------------------|
| Chris Speller | St Michael's Primary  |
| Sarah Tate    | Ford End Primary      |
| Aimee Walker  | Chipping Hill Primary |

- b) **Thank you and farewell** to those headteachers who are retiring or leaving their current post this term:

**West**

Lorna Stephenson      Sheering CE Primary

**South**

Neil Taggart              Ingatestone and Fryerning Juniors

**North East**

Mark Carter-Tufnell      St Osyth CE Primary

## 2. DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

### a) PUBLICATION OF THE CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT REVIEW

Clare explained that the Curriculum and Assessment Review was published on 5<sup>th</sup> November. She gave a summary of the proposed changes. The Curriculum and Assessment Review (2025) proposes major updates to the way the curriculum and assessments are designed and delivered across schools in England. It focuses on ensuring flexibility, relevance, and inclusivity in the curriculum while aiming for high ambition and excellence for all learners.

#### Key Curriculum Reforms

- The curriculum will put renewed emphasis on core subjects (reading, writing, maths) while broadening student access to arts, music, sport, drama, and vocational subjects.
- Progression and sequencing of learning are highlighted to avoid students moving between key stages without a secure grasp of subject fundamentals.
- There is a drive to reflect societal diversity more effectively within the curriculum so all students feel represented.
- An updated national curriculum is set for release by spring 2027, with new teaching implementation from September 2028.

#### Assessment Reforms

- The volume of exams at Key Stage 4 (GCSE) will be reduced by at least 10%, with a requirement for at least two separate assessment components per subject to reduce risk from single-exam performance.
- A new Year 8 diagnostic assessment for Maths and English is introduced, primarily for student benefit and not for school-level data comparison.
- Primary school assessments will see minimal changes, as the current system is considered effective, but improvements for SEND students and clarity in peer moderation are planned.
- Externally set and marked exams remain central, but there is strong consideration of fairness, access, and technology equity, especially regarding online assessment and generative AI risks.
- There is a review and forthcoming consultation on Progress 8 and Attainment 8 measures, while EBacc will be removed from accountability tables.

#### Overarching Themes and Systemic Findings

- The review finds that the current curriculum has lacked specificity, clarity, and sometimes fails to balance depth with breadth, particularly for arts and certain foundation subjects.
- There is a need to make education more cohesive, seamless, and responsive to learners' needs as they move across key stages.

- The final report upholds a commitment to high standards, broad educational outcomes, and building strong foundational knowledge while ensuring a rich, balanced education that better prepares students for life and work beyond school.

These changes are expected to significantly impact how schools structure their teaching and assessment in the years ahead, with updates to GCSEs following from 2029–30.

## b) ATTENDANCE TARGETS FOR INDIVIDUAL SCHOOLS

Individual school attendance targets have been introduced in November 2025 as part of a national initiative to address persistent pupil absence and restore attendance rates to pre-pandemic levels. Each school in England now receives a bespoke minimum attendance improvement target, called the Attendance Baseline Improvement Expectation (ABIE), generated using AI that takes into account the unique context of the school, including location, pupil demographics, and levels of deprivation.

These targets are not published or shared with Ofsted and are intended to support schools with tailored improvement expectations, rather than being used for punitive measures. Schools that do not meet their attendance expectations receive targeted support through regional improvement teams and participation in Behaviour and Attendance Hubs, rather than facing direct inspections or sanctions.

Each attendance target report includes:

- A minimum improvement goal based on current performance and school context.
- Comparisons with high-performing, similar schools to provide practical insight and examples.
- Guidance and best practice toolkits, especially for transitional periods prone to attendance drop-offs, such as moving from primary to secondary school.

The overarching aim is a national “culture shift” that places attendance and engagement at the heart of school priorities, with a collegiate approach involving families, support services, and targeted government support rather than public accountability pressure.

## c) ESSEX PUPIL OUTCOMES

The presentation showed a number of slides outlining the pupil outcomes in July 2025. Key messages for 2025 attainment outcomes

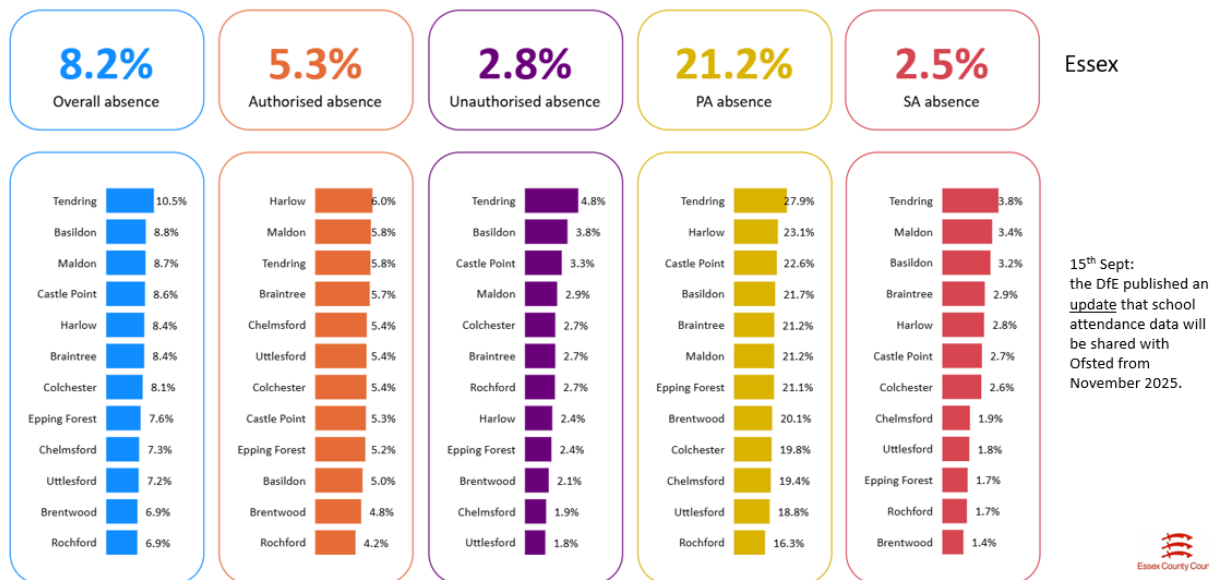
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|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>EYFS: % achieving a Good Level of Development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Performance up from 69.4% in 2024 to 70.6% in 2025.</li> <li>● Essex has exceeded the England average (68.3%) every year since 2013.</li> <li>● The span between districts remains low at just 8.0% points (Uttlesford 75.4% v Braintree 67.4%). Only two districts are lower than England average.</li> <li>● 49.9% of disadvantaged pupils achieved. Whilst this is up from 47.9% in 2024, it remains lower than the England average of 51.4%.</li> <li>● Essex SEN Support pupils only saw a 0.2% points improvement to 23.0%. Nationally the increase was 1.4% points to 26.4%.</li> <li>● Disadvantaged pupils perform lowest in Brentwood (42.2%) and Uttlesford (41.2%) - the two highest performing districts for all pupils.</li> </ul>                                                                       | <p><b>Year 1 Phonics: % achieving the required standard</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Just 10.2% points is between the highest performing district (Brentwood 84.9%) and the lowest (Tendring 74.7%).</li> <li>● Essex performance has always been +/- 1% point of the national average since Phonics Checks were introduced. 2025 data shows Essex to be 79.5% compared to 79.9% for England.</li> <li>● Essex disadvantaged pupils (60.7%) perform significantly below their national peers (66.7%). Performance is down 3.7% points on 2024 (64.4%).</li> <li>● Similarly, SEN Support pupils in Essex are nearly 6% points lower than their national peers (46.2% v 52.0%).</li> </ul>                                                                               |
| <p><b>KS2: % achieving the expected standard in Reading, Writing &amp; Maths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Since 2016, Essex has exceeded the national average for pupils achieving the expected standard in all three subjects. 2025 data shows Essex to be 62.7% compared to 62.2% nationally. Just three districts below England.</li> <li>● Essex SEN Support pupils were up by 2.3% points to 27.4% but remain below their national peers (28.8%).</li> <li>● Improvements over the last few years in Tendring have not been maintained. 2025 sees a drop of 0.2% points to 53.5% which extends the gap to the highest performing district (Brentwood 69.5%) to 16.0% points. Tendring is the only district with performance below 60%.</li> <li>● Disadvantaged pupils improved by 0.2% points since 2024 to 43.5%. Nationally improvement was greater - going up 1.5% points to 47.4%.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Overall Primary Phase</b></p> <p>Essex 2025 performance in the primary phase shows a very similar pattern to previous years. There is particular strength in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile, similar (to national) performance in Year 1 Phonics, and slightly higher than national performance in Key Stage 2.</p> <p>However, particular concerns remain about the performance of disadvantaged pupils which make up around a quarter of all pupils - thus having a significant impact on overall Essex performance.</p> <p>The differences between districts encouragingly remains low at the age of 5 and 6 but continues to increase as pupils get older. By age 11 this now reaches 16.0% points with Tendring no longer seeing the improvements of recent years.</p> |

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The slides, including detailed data for subject/key stages and districts, are available on the EPHA website at <https://essexprimaryheads.co.uk/files/south-epha-area-meeting-november-2025-ecc-slides.pptx>

#### d) ATTENDANCE DATA

The following attendance data was shared with the headteachers. It was confirmed that this data related to all phases, secondary as well as primary.



Clare noted that around 5,000 children and young people in Essex are classed as Severely Absent.

#### e) ESSEX PRIORITIES

- Ongoing development of strong partnerships and promotion of collaborative working across all schools
- SEND – ongoing improvement of the system.
- Inclusion Strategy including
  - Attendance
  - Ordinarily Available Inclusive teaching framework
  - Inclusion Conference
  - Inclusion Reviews
- Essex Year of Opportunity
- School place planning

#### f) ESSEX YEAR OF OPPORTUNITY

The Essex Year of Opportunity aims to empower people of all ages to improve their skills, careers, and employability. This will be achieved by improving access to high-quality education, training, and employment, building on best practices, and scaling up current projects, aimed at both primary and secondary aged children and young people.

The Essex Year of Opportunity directory shares key events and resources. The project directory provides a more detailed summary of the individual projects and how to access them.

- What is included?
- skills and training opportunities
- resources for careers guidance
- employability programmes

<https://www.essexyearofopportunity.co.uk/project-directory>

### g) SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING

Clare noted that, despite extensive building development across the county in recent years (particularly in Chelmsford and Colchester), in some areas we are beginning to see a drop in primary-age pupil numbers; this is particularly noticeable in rural areas and on Canvey Island. The Local Authority is working closely schools to manage this reduction and, in some cases, is recommending an adjustment to the PAN for a school.

### 3. SEND UPDATE

The Ordinarily Available Framework continues to underpin the expectations of inclusion across the school system.



The Local Authority continues to collate valuable information from Inclusion Reviews; by February half term 170 reviews will have been carried out.

The completion of Education Health Care Needs Assessments within the statutory timeframe continues to be a challenge, but the Local Authority has taken significant action to mitigate the problem, including:

- Recruitment and retention of Educational Psychologists
- Commissioning of an agency to deliver EP assessments – *Liquid Personnel has been recommissioned to deliver an additional 1920 assessments.*
- Developing our approach to using 'virtual assessments' where appropriate
- Invested additional funding to expand our teams
- Work to improve parental confidence in the offer from some mainstream schools which is driving both requests for assessment and requests for special school places.
- Special schools being full or over capacity - additional challenges for the SEND teams.

Schools Forum has agreed a proposal from the LA fund at the point of week 20 when the assessment should have been completed. For the last year schools have been able to receive backdated funding (to the 20 week point) when an EHCP is agreed; going forward, there will be a pro-rata interim payment based on the average of the bands, an annual amount of £5,951.

It was agreed that the simplest and most transparent methodology to allocate funding for EHCNAs where plans have not been finalised at the 20-week stage is to apply a universal average banding rate (the average funding applied to EHCPs in mainstream schools in

the 2024/25 academic year). The value of this is £5,951 per year and will be referred to as '20wk Interim' funding.

It was also agreed at Schools Forum that there will not be any retrospective financial adjustment to the universal banding rate if the band issued in the final EHCP is higher or lower than the amount that has been funded. This is the simplest, least labour-intensive method. It will also mean that in a very small number of cases where the assessment does not result in a plan being issued there will not be a reclaim of any funding paid whilst the needs assessment has been underway.

Once the plan is issued and the band is agreed, payments going forward will reflect the agreed banding level.

How will this apply in principle:

Where a plan exceeds the 20-week period during a term, payments will be made to schools as follows:

- Autumn Term – where an EHCNA exceeds the 20-week period during the autumn term a 20wk Interim funding payment will be made to the school for the remainder of the autumn and spring terms. If the EHCNA is not issued by the start of the summer term, a further 20wk interim funding payment will be made for the summer term.
- Spring Term – where an EHCNA exceeds the 20-week period during the spring term a 20wk Interim funding payment will be made to the school for the remainder of the spring term. If the EHCNA is not issued by the start of the summer term, a further 20wk interim funding payment will be made for the summer term.
- Summer Term - where an EHCNA exceeds the 20-week period during the summer term a 20wk Interim funding payment will be made to the school for the remainder of the summer term. If the EHCNA is not issued by the start of the autumn term, a further 20wk interim funding payment will be made for the autumn and spring terms.

Therefore, in most cases, schools will be paid an element of 20wk interim funding in advance.

When an EHCP is finalised, no further 20wk interim funding payments will be made because the funding, as set out in the EHCP, will be applicable. The EHCP (Band) funding will be different to the 20wk interim funding, but no correcting adjustment will be made to backdate the Banded funding to the 20-week date. The only adjustment that will be made is where a school has been paid 20wk interim funding in advance for either the current or following term(s) and the plan is agreed during that term. The adjustment will be applied to take back the 20wk interim funding from the date the EHCP is finalised to the end of term, and the payment of the Band paid instead. This may result in a net reclaim being made.

Applying the new arrangements to children and young people moving forward will be a fairly simple process but the application to those assessments which have already exceeded 20 weeks is far more challenging. There is not an automated method for applying the funding changes and we will need to make all the payments manually.

There are in excess of 1,000 children and young people that the new process needs to be applied to, so this is likely to take some time to complete. To support the LA to focus on expediting the funding to you we request that you do not email team colleagues chasing payment or making queries about individual children; queries about the process itself can be addressed to [senstrategy@essex.gov.uk](mailto:senstrategy@essex.gov.uk). Individual queries will divert teams away from making sure we get the funding to you as swiftly as possible.



## **SEN provision update**

- 2015 to 2023 – 53% increase in Essex pupils in maintained special schools in the county
- Since 2015 four new special schools have opened in Essex (Chatten, Greenwell, Grove House and Hawthorns) with Sir Geoff Hurst opened earlier this year, and a consultation open for a new special school in Rayleigh.
- Investment in expansions and improved facilities at Cedar Hall, Glenwood, Harlow Fields, Kingswode Hoe, Langham Oaks, Lexden Springs, Market Field, Oak View, Ramsden Hall and Southview.
- Development of Market Field Farm – a unique and innovative new provision funded via a developer's enabling contribution.
- New PRU builds in North-East and South with Mid PRU in development (the first time there has been investment in our provision for children and young people who have been excluded or medically unable to attend school).
- Investment in specialist provision in mainstream schools (Grow/SEMH provision, autism support centres, new provision for children with severe learning difficulties).
- An overall capital investment of over £110 million and rising.

This Transformation Programme will sit on solid foundations of service improvement. The service lead continuous improvement has already delivered:

- Improved quality One Planning – leading to high quality EHCNAs and a low refusal rate
- High quality EHCPs, assured through a multi-agency quality assurance process
- Streamlined and consistent decision making
- Updated guidance, training and process improvements for Annual Reviews
- Improvements to Early Years oversight, One Planning and funding
- Improved oversight of children and young people receiving education other than in school (EOTIS)
- Ordinarily Available framework
- Support for mainstream schools with children awaiting specialist provision

Following the Newton review an additional £1.3m has been committed by ECC to support SEND transformation.

## **4. EDUCATION ACCESS TEAM UPDATE**

Clare noted that Julie Keating, the former co-manager of the Education Access Team, retired in the summer. Nicky Turp has been appointed as the full time manager, and she has reorganised the structure of the teams, as follows:

### **Medical team:** key responsibilities and contacts

- Arrange suitable alternative education where the section 19 statutory duty is met
- Attend planning & review meetings with schools, families and other professionals
- Plan and support a child's return to school where appropriate

Key contacts: Vicky Young, Melissa Brooker & Eloisa Dellas

### **Exclusion team:** key responsibilities and contacts

- Support schools with CYP on the cusp of exclusion to consider suitable alternatives
- Fulfil the LA statutory duty to provide education from day six following notification of permanent exclusion
- Review alternative provision to ensure it remains suitable to the CYP needs.
- Provide advice and guidance to schools on exclusion process.
- Triage all requests for support- supportive intervention for CYP who would benefit from a time limited intervention placement in AP.

Key contacts: Diane Kirsh & Deborah Barnard

## Section 19 “otherwise”: key responsibilities and contacts

- Consider all referrals for CYP who are not attending school under the LA wider section 19 ‘otherwise’ duty.
- Represent the Education Access team at the S19 panel- multiagency meeting to consider all cases where it is unclear whether our statutory duty has been met.
- Monitor all children on reduced timetables.
- Support children accessing non-school alternative provision, who are not on a school roll to find a suitable school place, where they have been identified as ready to reintegrate.
- Represent the Education Access team at MACE
- Represent the Education Access team at Behaviour & Attendance Partnership meetings.

Key contacts: Ross Thompson & Sharon Bryan

## QA team: key responsibilities and contacts

- Monitor daily attendance for all children who are not on a school roll accessing unregistered alt ed.
- Monitor all safeguarding and child protection matters for the not on roll cohort.
- FSM checks for not on roll children- issue weekly supermarket vouchers to eligible families.
- Quality Assurance including quality visits for providers on the IPES framework.
- Oversee the Essex Online school.

Key contacts: Megan Keeble & Anna Wightman

## Alternative Education provision

| 89 AV1s                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Registered alternative provision schools                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | IPES Framework                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Online school                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support the child to access their classroom. Can also be used to supplement an AP offer.</li></ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Four registered alternative provision schools in Essex:</li><li>• <b>Mid Essex Cooperative Academy (MECA)</b>- mid Essex</li><li>• <b>North Essex Cooperative Academy (NEECA)</b> – N/E Essex</li><li>• <b>Beckmead Moundwood Academy</b>- west Essex</li><li>• <b>Children’s Support Service (CSS)</b>- south Essex &amp; west Essex for medical support</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Often commissioned where registered AP school is at capacity or unable to meet need. IPES framework is divided into four lots:</li><li>• Lot 1: Tuition</li><li>• Lot 2: Vocational</li><li>• Lot 3: Online</li><li>• Lot 4: Mentoring</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Essex Online school is delivered by Tute education. The online school is often used to provide interim support whilst longer term options are being considered.</li></ul> |

## 5. GOVERNMENT AND DfE UPDATE

### DfE reforms

There is a new ministerial team at the DfE following the recent reshuffle.

- Bridget Phillipson, Secretary of State for Education, and Minister for Women and Equalities
- Georgia Gould, Minister of State for Education, school standards
- Baroness Smith, Minister of State for Education, skills
- Josh McAlister, Parliamentary Under-secretary
- Olivia Bailey, Parliamentary Under-secretary



- Seema Malhotra, Parliamentary Under-secretary

## Government Strategies

- The [RISE programme](#) (7 schools in Essex in targeted intervention)
- [Best Start in Life Strategy](#) published (Essex has received a GLD 78.4% by August 2028 (2025 71% GLD))
- [Ofsted revised framework](#)
- Curriculum and assessment final report due
- Schools White Paper
- [DfE Accountability reforms](#)
- Outlines DfE will move forward with school report cards

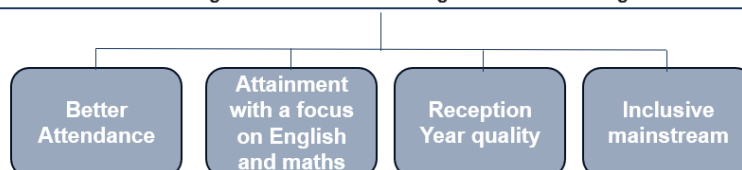
## Universal offer – national priorities



The government's **Opportunity Mission** is focused on breaking down barriers to opportunity. In the DfE our mission priorities are:

| Best start in life                                                                          | Every child achieving and thriving                                                                                                                                                                              | Skills for opportunity and growth                                                            | Family security                                                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| High-quality early education; early-child health; home-learning environment; family support | High school standards with a broad curriculum; focus on school belonging; excellent teachers and targeted interventions; mental health support; access to arts, culture and sport; youth services and provision | A strong skills offer; pathways into work – youth guarantee, work experience, careers advice | Removing underlying barriers to opportunity, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tackling child poverty and improving housing</li> <li>• Keeping children safe</li> </ul> |

The mission priorities inform the four national priorities for RISE universal support – all focused on raising standards and removing barriers to learning



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The goal of RISE teams is to raise standards for all schools, as part of the government's **Opportunity Mission**.

There are three broad strands of work:

1. **Targeted Intervention:** Schools facing particular challenges ('stuck schools') improve rapidly through **bespoke targeted intervention for 12-24 months**.
2. **Universal Service:** Ensuring all schools can access high quality school improvement through improved signposting to hubs and best practice, facilitating connections, and promoting peer review and networking.
3. **Regional Planning:** ensuring every part of the country has **a coherent plan to deliver the RISE national priorities**.

Dr Tim Coulson (former Director of Education in Essex) was appointed as the Director General, Regions Group at the Department for Education on 8 September 2025.

## 6. DEVOLUTION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

The Devolution Priority Programme and Local Government Reform (LGR) are interconnected, forming two sides of the same transformation coin in England's governance landscape

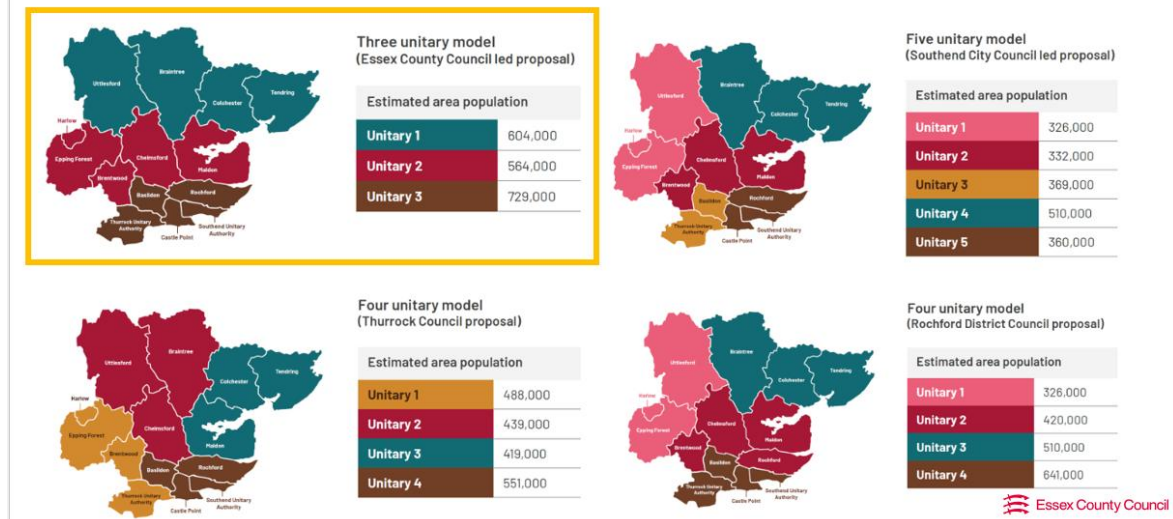
Devolution transfers new powers to Greater Essex from Westminster with control over functions essential for business growth; skills, transport and housing.

Local Government Reform (LGR) supports effective implementation of these services: streamlined structures and stronger councils working with the Mayor to drive growth.

The ECC proposal of three Unitaries aligns with economic corridors, making joint planning and delivery simpler.

- Without change, the Mayor inherits a fragmented system – slower decisions, weaker growth outcomes.
- With change, Essex can move faster and with more certainty through streamlined & larger unitary councils better positioned to receive and manage powers with the Mayoral Combined Authority.

## Four business case options from Greater Essex



## Our proposal: Three New Councils for Greater Essex



- **Geography:** Braintree, Colchester, Tendring, and Uttlesford.
- **Population:** 604,000; projected 10% growth by 2040
- **Economy:** £14.2bn GVA; 249,000 jobs.
- **Transport links:** A120, A12, Stansted Airport, Harwich Port.
- **Sector strengths:** clean energy, life sciences, digital tech, manufacturing, logistics, tourism.
- **Key growth sites:** Tendring-Colchester Garden Community
- **Additional homes needed by 2040:** 64,000



- **Geography:** Brentwood, Chelmsford, Epping Forest, Harlow, and Maldon.
- **Population:** 564,000; projected 4% growth by 2040
- **Economy:** £17.6bn GVA; 259,000 jobs.
- **Transport links:** A12 and M11 corridors and Great Eastern Main Line.
- **Sector strengths:** Life sciences, professional & financial services, construction, digital technology.
- **Key growth sites:** Chelmsford Garden Community, Harlow Gilston Garden Town.
- **Additional homes needed by 2040:** 67,000



- **Geography:** Basildon, Castle Point, Rochford, Southend, and Thurrock.
- **Population:** 729,000; projected 10% growth by 2040
- **Economy:** £19.1bn GVA; 317,000 jobs.
- **Transport links:** Thames Freeport, Southend Airport, A127, the A13 and the Essex Thameside rail corridor.
- **Sector strengths:** Logistics, construction, clean energy, advanced manufacturing.
- **Key growth sites:** Dunton Hills Garden Village.
- **Additional homes needed by 2040:** 77,000

The business case for three councils in Greater Essex

Essex County Council

### Why Three Unitary Councils?

- Aligned to real economic geographies (North, Mid, South Essex)
- Balanced size, strength & resilience
- £387m savings by 2040 – payback in 2.7 years
- Less disruption, lower risk, quicker transition

### Any more than three unitaries...

- Higher costs, diluted capacity
- More complexity, slower growth
- Mayor works with a fragmented, unstable system

# High-level timelines (LGR & Devolution)

| Local Government Reform                                | Date                         |  | Devolution                                            | Date           |
|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| Submission of formal unitary proposals submitted       | 26 September 2025            |  | Final Greater Essex proposals submitted to Government | September 2025 |
| Statutory consultation on Governments preferred option | November 2025 – January 2026 |  | Legislation laid before parliament                    | Autumn 2025    |
| Government decision to implement a proposal            | March 2026                   |  | Parliamentary scrutiny and approval                   | Late 2025      |
| New Unitary Authority Elections                        | 6 <sup>th</sup> May 2027     |  | Legal establishment of Greater Essex MCCA             | Early 2026     |
| Shadow period                                          | May 2027 – March 2028        |  | Mayoral Election                                      | May 2026       |
| New Unitary Authorities go live                        | 1 April 2028                 |  |                                                       |                |

The business case for three councils in Greater Essex



Essex County Council

## 7. WRAPAROUND CHILDCARE UPDATE

By 2026 the Government expects all primary schools to have onsite childcare 8am until 6pm during term time.

Schools are required to signpost local wraparound provision on their websites.

- 88 schools in Essex still offering no or unknown wraparound childcare
- 152 Schools offering partial wraparound (either before/after school or not full hours)

### Updated DfE guidance

DfE have introduced greater flexibility to fund partial wraparound childcare places, aiming to support the final schools to join the initiative. The priority remains to delivery full wraparound childcare, and any settings currently offering partial provision should be encouraged to move toward a full offer.

#### Minimum offer:

- ✓ 3 days/week
- ✓ Breakfast club: ≥ 30 mins before school
- ✓ Afterschool club: ≥ 90 mins after school

#### SEND Considerations

- ✓ Case-by-case exceptions for SEND settings
- ✓ May include shorter hours or fewer days
- ✓ Out of School Inclusion Funding (OOSIF) is available to support wraparound providers with children who have a SEND need identified within the EHCP, one plan or similar process.

<https://eycp.essex.gov.uk/funding/funding-to-support-inclusion/out-of-school-funding/>

For general enquires and more information please contact:

[Wraparound.childcare@essex.gov.uk](mailto:Wraparound.childcare@essex.gov.uk)

For support on applying for funding please contact:

[Caroline.brown@essex.gov.uk](mailto:Caroline.brown@essex.gov.uk)

## 8. ATTENDANCE – A ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION

Headteachers were asked to contribute to a discussion about attendance, focusing on practice that was in their control. They were asked to consider the following aspects:

Celebrate: What is working well with your school's current approach to attendance?

Explore: what isn't working well with your school's current approach to attendance?

Barrier: What could work well and what is the barrier to this currently?

Opportunity: What would make the biggest difference to whole school attendance for you?

The feedback from headteachers will be collated and fed back at an attendance summit in the spring term.

## 9. THE NEW OFSTED FRAMEWORK

Peter Stonier, Senior HMI for the Eastern Region, was welcomed to the meetings.

Steve Woodley, HMI, also attended at the Mid meeting.

Peter explained that the inspection of schools has to have rigour, but the renewed approach feels and looks different. He noted that there are a small number of **key documents** that inspectors will refer to during full inspections:

- [State-funded schools inspection toolkit: for use from November 2025](#)
- Inspection information for state-funded schools
- School inspection operating guide for inspectors

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-toolkit-operating-guide-and-information>

In addition, the operating guide for monitoring inspections has been published [School monitoring operating guide for inspectors: for use from November 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

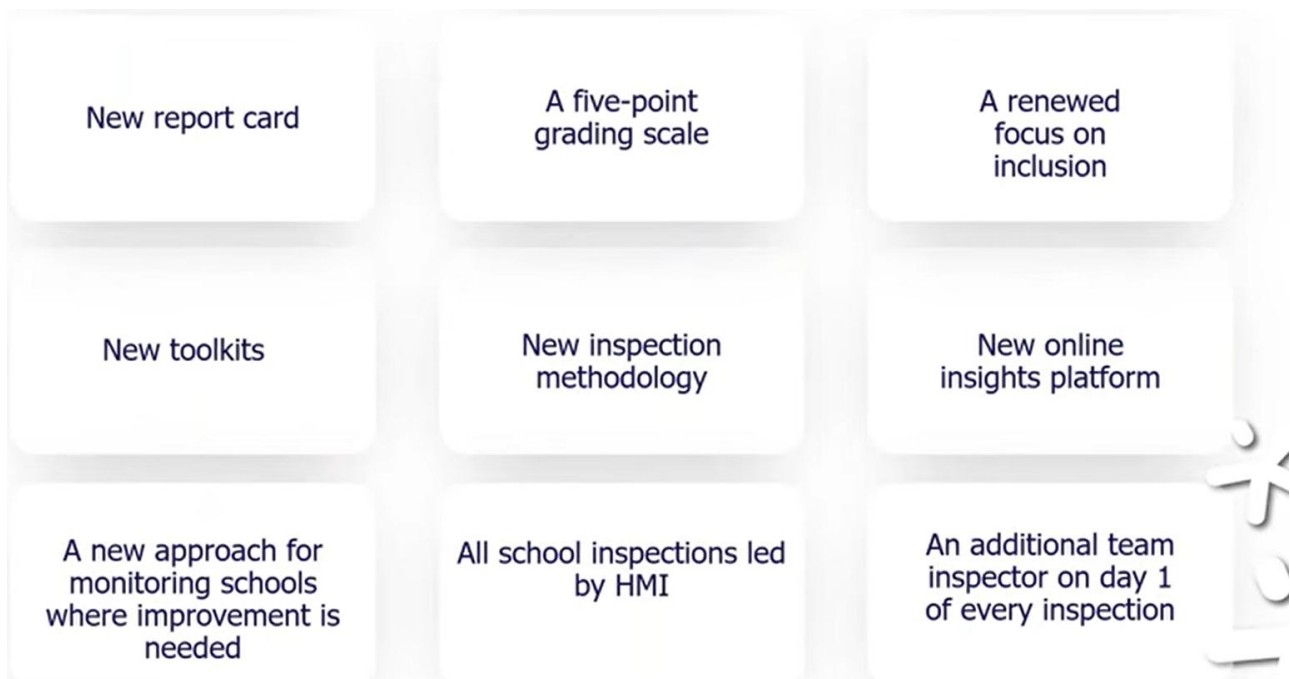
He noted that, collectively, we want to achieve:

- high-quality, inclusive education for every child, pupil, learner, apprentice and trainee
- great outcomes for everyone, including for those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND, those known, or previously known to children's social care, and those who face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing
- better information for parents and carers
- a collaborative and transparent approach to inspection
- high and rising standards of education and care

Peter stressed that children who are vulnerable are a strong focus of inspection. This will include those who are "temporarily" vulnerable due to a wide range of circumstances. This could, for example include children who are bereaved, suffering financial disadvantage on a temporary basis, Young Carers and so on.

### **The journey so far: a summary of changes**

There were over 6,500 responses to the consultation held in February 2025, a 12 week consultation which set out a series of proposed changes to the inspection framework. In addition Ofsted held workshops with focus groups and test inspections.



Peter stressed that there is no correlation between “requires improvement” and the new “needs attention” grade – he gave the analogy of an MOT recommendation. However, the monitoring guidance states that schools with evaluation areas graded as ‘needs attention’ will normally have a monitoring inspection no later than 24 months after the publication of the report card. Leaders can ask for a monitoring inspection earlier should they feel that they have compelling evidence to support an improvement in grade. This should be submitted in writing to the school’s assigned HMI. The decision on whether to carry out an earlier monitoring inspection rests with the relevant Ofsted regional director.

For schools with evaluation areas graded ‘needs attention’ following a full inspection, inspectors will carry out the following:

- **introductory monitoring call** – this marks the start of contact between you (as the assigned HMI), school leaders and, where applicable, the nominee, which will continue throughout the monitoring programme.
- **ongoing monitoring calls** – these are to maintain ongoing contact between the HMI, school leaders and the nominee. They are used to check in on progress and evaluate readiness for the on-site monitoring inspection(s). The frequency of these calls will be determined by the HMI and school leaders/the nominee.
- **notification and planning calls** – these are to set up individual monitoring inspections in the programme.
- **on-site monitoring inspection** – the specific inspection programme will vary depending on the extent of the issues identified at the last full inspection – the vast majority of schools will only receive 1 monitoring inspection.

Peter confirmed that if it is decided during a full inspection that safeguarding is not being met, the inspection can be suspended and schools will be given a 3-month correction period and a follow up inspection.

There is no overall effectiveness grade for schools. Instead the five grades are

- Urgent improvement
- Needs attention
- Expected standard
- Strong standard
- Exceptional



The Complaints hub and independent body is now run by a central team, rather than within the region the inspection is taking place. Following a complaint the National Inspection Team (NIT) may Gather Additional Evidence (GAE) to determine the fairness of outcomes from an inspection.

Quality assurance activities are continuous following inspections, and additional and increased training for inspectors will drive quality and consistency.

The new Online Insights platform – Ofsted explore an area – which gives parents key information about the education and care services in their area.

All inspections will be led by an HMI, with an additional inspector to add capacity to the team. This will enable Lead Inspectors to spend more time with leaders (including the nominee, if there is one), as well as quality assuring the inspection.

Peter reminded headteachers that they can appoint a nominee to share the organisation and running of the inspection. However, he stressed that this is not a requirement, and may well be more common in secondary and FE phase inspections.

The new approach puts children first, whilst taking into account the wellbeing of school leaders and staff during inspection:



The Monday morning notification call continues, with a few exceptions. For example, emergency, monitoring or deferred inspections could be notified later in the week (and emergency inspection may give no notice at all).

## Before an inspector arrives

**Notification call**  
Provider leaders invited to identify an individual(s) to act as **nominee(s)** – not compulsory.

**Timetable for inspection**  
to enable inspectors to gather evidence relevant to the provider's context.



**Nominee**  
help the inspection process run smoothly and collaboratively through planning, communication and engagement with the inspection team

**Planning call/s**  
the lead inspector will work collaboratively with the nominee(s) and leaders to identify any necessary reasonable adjustments and understand the context



Peter noted that in advance of the inspection, inspectors will ask for a list of children within a number of key categories: SEND, LAC, FSM and otherwise vulnerable. During inspection they will choose six children from that list and look in detail at their experience in the school, including associated paperwork, cross-referencing to safeguarding and referrals, behaviour, attendance and so on.

The team reflection meetings will be more frequent and longer, and will be a discussion with the headteacher, allowing for sharing information and responding to the inspectors' findings. This is a key difference from the previous inspection framework, when school leaders were not able to participate in these discussions.

- Single central record will be checked early on day 1.
- Gathering first-hand evidence of pupils' experiences through:
  - discussions with pupils at the start of the day and social times
  - learning walks with leaders (including discussions with pupils and looking at their work)
  - considering, in detail, the experiences of pupils identified for case sampling.
- Dedicated reflection meetings with leaders.
- Focused leadership meetings, including safeguarding.



Peter stressed that inspectors may carry laptops during their visit, but more often will take notes and type them up in the team rooms after conversations and interviews have taken place.

## What will this look like for all primary schools?

- Inspectors will prioritise learning walks in EY and KS1 on the morning of day 1.
  - The curriculum, teaching and achievement focus will be on 'strong foundations' which is needed for successful learning across the rest of their education.
  - Inspectors will consider leadership, inclusion and the experiences of pupils in the case sample.
  - Inspectors will hear some pupils read.
- Learning walks in KS2 will usually begin during the afternoon of day one.
- An inspector will meet with the SENCo/inclusion leader on the afternoon day one.

He noted that learning walks on day 1 will largely focus on Early Years and Key Stage 1 (or, in junior schools, on ensuring strong foundations for their youngest pupils). He referred headteachers to the Ofsted research paper, **Strong Foundations in the first years of school**. This report examines how schools secure the [foundational knowledge](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/strong-foundations-in-the-first-years-of-school/strong-foundations-in-the-first-years-of-school) and skills that every child needs by the end of key stage 1 to give them the best chance of educational success. Schools are facing significant challenges in dealing with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children currently in Reception and key stage 1. This report identifies what might be particularly important for schools to focus on.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/strong-foundations-in-the-first-years-of-school/strong-foundations-in-the-first-years-of-school>

Day 1 ends with a final reflection meeting, and typically inspectors will leave the school site at 5.00 pm.

## How the inspection will be structured: Day 2

- Begins with a reflection meeting with leaders and nominee.
- May continue to:
  - involve some focused meetings such as governance or speaking to the local authority or diocese
  - gather evidence as confirmed at the end of day 1
  - include reflection meetings with leaders/nominee
  - adapt inspection activity accordingly to explore further as/if required.
- Concludes with a grading meeting followed by a final feedback meeting.
- **Case sampling and learning walks will support throughout.**



## What will this look like for small primary schools?

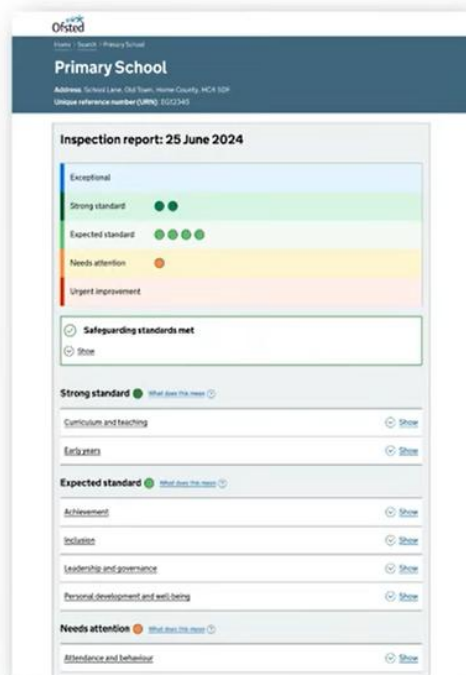
- Inspectors will recognise that published data for small cohorts is likely to fluctuate considerably or that there may be no published data.
- Inspectors will want to understand the school organisation and staffing, including mixed-age classes.
- Inspectors will be sensitive to the demands:
  - on leaders' time
  - of an EYFS/KS1 focus on the morning of day 1.

## In summary

- Sharper focus on a school's context.
- Inspectors will prioritise seeing the start of the day accompanied by relevant leaders.
- Learning walks begin in the morning of day 1.
- Case sampling activities.
- Some focused leadership meetings will happen in the afternoon of day 1.
- Leaders are able to join reflection meetings, and hear and contribute to inspectors' discussions of the evidence.

The Ofsted logo, featuring the word 'Ofsted' in a dark blue sans-serif font, with three stylized human figures in blue above the 't'. The logo is positioned on a white circular background that is part of a larger graphic on the right side of the page.

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## Report Cards

- Our new report card will make findings clear and accessible.
- The report card will provide a summary overview as well as a detailed explanation for each of the evaluation areas the provider has been evaluated against.
- Colours ranging from red, for urgent improvement, to blue, for exceptional will provide a visual overview.
- The next steps will be written in a constructive way to make clear what the priorities for improvement are for the provider/phase.

At the end of the inspection, the lead inspector will write a report which will:

- reflect the evidence gathered
- be clear, concise and focused on what matters most, as informed by the school's context, leaders' evaluation of their school, and the toolkit
- explain the grade given for each evaluation area
- make clear what the school should improve
- be consistent with the verbal feedback given to the school at the end of the inspection

Peter confirmed that full inspections will be introduced gradually:

Inspections start in the week commencing 10<sup>th</sup> November, and the first 3 weeks will involve volunteer schools. There have been relatively few volunteers in the Eastern region.

The framework will start to be rolled out more widely from the 1<sup>st</sup> December, and there will be no inspections in the last week of the autumn term.

Ofsted – the presentation can be found here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFGaGBr71Ug>

Following the meetings Peter shared additional information and links, as a result of questions from headteachers. He reported the following:

### **Inspection timescales - GUIDE**

**This is the guidance of when schools can *likely* expect their next inspection:**

1. Outstanding (graded) or remains outstanding - 4 years from publication of most recent report
2. Good (graded) or remains good - 4 years from publication of most recent report
3. Pre-September 2024 Overall effectiveness RI - 2 and a half years from publication of last graded report
4. Post-September 2024 at least one sub judgement RI - 2 and a half years from publication of last graded report
5. Pre September 2024 Overall effectiveness Good but one sub judgement RI - 4 years from publication of last report



The following document explains the question about volunteer schools in the first 2 weeks of December: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ofsted-confirms-changes-to-education-inspection-and-unveils-new-look-report-cards>

The new parent view questions look like this:

- 1. My child is happy at this school
- 2. My child feels safe at this school
- 3. The school makes sure its pupils are well behaved
- 4. My child has been bullied at this school. When the bullying took place, the school dealt with it quickly and effectively
- 5. My child has Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities. The school gives them the support they need to succeed
- 6. The school communicates well with me about the things I need to know
- 7. When I have raised concerns with the school they have been dealt with properly
- 8. When the school makes decisions, it has the child's best interests at heart
- 9. The school gives my child the right support to enable them to learn well
- 10. Would you recommend this school to another parent?

*NOTE: More than one parent/carer can complete the Ofsted Parent View questionnaire so the results may show more respondents than pupils attending the school.*

*I was asked about our engagement with parents/carers and how we are planning to engage with them and explain the renewed framework and gradings. Our policy colleagues have this in hand and there are 'plans in place'.*

*I was also asked how the 'needs attention' grade would be considered with the curriculum review set up for launch in September 2028. There was a concern that schools might be penalised as their curriculum implementation would be new and therefore in its 'infancy' and not yet 'embedded' as per the language of the toolkit grades. I have emailed this question to our strategy team for their consideration.*

This link is also helpful for colleagues:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/improving-the-way-ofsted-inspects-education>

Peter encouraged headteachers to contact him if they have any questions. His email address is [peter.stonier@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:peter.stonier@ofsted.gov.uk)

Peter was thanked for attending the four meetings and sharing his insight and advice about the new inspection framework.

## 10. DATES AND TIMES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

### **EPHA Annual General Meeting**

Thursday 1 October 2026 – The Lion Inn, Boreham

### **West EPHA – Manor Suite, Manor of Groves, Sawbridgeworth**

Wednesday 4 March 2026

Wednesday 24 June 2026

### **South EPHA – The Lion Inn, Boreham**

Thursday 5 March 2026

Thursday 18 June 2026

### **North East EPHA – Colchester United Football Stadium**

Wednesday 11 March 2026

Wednesday 17 June 2026

**Mid EPHA – The Lion Inn, Boreham**

Thursday 12 March 2026

Thursday 25 June 2026

**EPHA Conferences**

Headteachers' Conference

Friday 20 March 2026 Chelmsford City Race Course

Deputy/Assistant Headteachers' Conference

Friday 9 October 2026 Colchester Football Stadium

EPHA dates for the 2025/26 academic years can be found on the EPHA website at  
<https://essexprimaryheads.co.uk/events/>

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