

## COMPOSITE MINUTES OF THE 2026 SPRING 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**

Nicki James                      Sheering CE Primary (Interim Headteacher)

#### **South**

Emily Cannon                      Ingatestone Infants  
Leigh Johnson                      Ingatestone and Fryerning Juniors  
Gill Marrion                      Canvey Island Infants (Interim headteacher)  
Salina Ventress                      CEO Brickfields Trust

#### **North East**

Ben Asbridge                      Ardleigh St Mary's Primary (Head of School)  
Rosie Asbridge                      Rolph CE Primary (Head of School)  
Liane Heard                      Lakelands Primary – (interim head of school)  
Claire Jackson                      St Osyth CE Primary  
Claire Pallett                      Spring Meadow Primary (Head of School)

#### **Mid**

Andrew Gardiner                      Beehive Lane Primary (Acting head)  
Alex Russ                      Burnham-on-Crouch Primary (now substantive)

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

#### **West**

Julia Ferguson                      Epping Upland Primary  
Andrew Price                      Manuden Primary

#### **South**

Jenny Haken                      Millhouse Primary

#### **North East**

Julie O'Mara                      Chase Lane Primary  
Rachel Saunders                      Kings Ford Infants & Nursery

#### **Mid**

Jacqui Phillips                      Woodville Primary

There were a number of farewells to other colleagues who were acknowledged at the meetings:

Kerry McGrory is leaving the Local Authority to take up the role of Director of Standards at the Life Education Trust. She joined the LA in 2014 and has been the linked professional officer for over 100 schools, has been involved with at least 80 appointments of new heads, and has probably overseen about 200 safeguarding investigations. Her knowledge and experience will be a great loss to North East Essex schools.

Kevin Wilby, North East School Organisation Officer, is retiring. He was absent from the North East meeting, but sent a farewell message thanking colleagues for their support and commitment over many years.

Nicki Harris, Policy & Development Manager at Juniper HR, is retiring after 37 years working with Essex schools. Nicki joined the Education HR Team in 1989 and has supported Essex schools for decades, through many changes both in education and the HR team structure. She will be missed for her wisdom, experience and sound advice (and sense of humour), and we all wish her a very happy and long retirement.

## **2. DIRECTOR'S UPDATE**

### **a) ESSEX PRIORITIES**

Clare reminded headteachers of the current priorities, and the progress that is being made.

#### **i) Inclusion Strategy**

The Essex Inclusion Strategy continues to be a high priority especially as Inclusive Mainstream Education is a key focus of the DfE's Schools White Paper and SEND Reform plan.

The SEND Local Area inspection report will be published after the local elections in May.

#### **ii) SEND Improvement and Sufficiency Funding at week 20**

Schools Forum agreed that top-up funding should be paid to schools where an EHCNA has exceeded the statutory timescale at the point of reaching week 20 rather than retrospectively. The annual value of this top-up was set at £5,951 based on the average Pupil Top-Up funding paid to Essex mainstream schools at the time.

On 1<sup>st</sup> December 2025, a report was generated listing the pupils whose EHCNA had exceeded 20 weeks and where no Educational Psychologist (EP) had been allocated. It was agreed that pupils already allocated an EP would not be included because those Plans were expected to be finalised imminently, at which point funding would be agreed and backdated.

Work was undertaken to add Funding Provisions to MRi/Capita for the backlog of pupils who required backdated funding. There were some 1300 Funding Provisions added with funding totalling £5.5m.

Schools will have received that funding in their bank accounts at the end of January 2026. In January 2026, the SEN Provision Team identified that there were additional pupils that had an EP allocated but their status was 'under assessment'. It was agreed that the 20 week funding should be applied even though they had an EP. Funding Provisions have been added for these pupils for funding. There are around 200 pupils affected and these schools will be paid on the next payment run that is currently being worked on by the SEN Provision Team.

Clare noted that the team is continuing to work at pace to reduce the backlog of needs assessments; she explained that there are on average 350 requests for assessment each month. Of these, around 60% are agreed and so there are an additional 240-250 needs assessments adding to the system each month. The development of a Joint Assessment Meeting working with schools is increasing the number of needs assessments that can be finalised by Educational Psychologists. This will be rolled out from May 26.

### iii) **Wolsey and Chetwood Special School**

Clare confirmed that building is about to start on an ECC funded special school, the first for many years. The school will have places for 250 children with Severe Learning Difficulty and Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties and will be split across two locations. Preliminary work is now underway; the site is fenced off and building materials are being delivered. The school will also be at the former Chetwood Primary School site in South Woodham Ferrers.

The Zenith Educational Trust, which is led by Andy Hodgkinson the former headteacher of Sweyne Park School in Rayleigh, is about to launch a consultation for the annex to the school, which will be built on the old Chetwood Primary School site. This site will provide secondary-age pupil places.

Clare also noted that the LA is working with other schools to develop inclusion and specialist provision.

### iv) **Home to School transport**

Clare noted that ECC has set a £60m budget for 2026/27 reflecting the huge cost of home to school transport. This spending commitment is under review.

## 3) **EARLY YEARS UPDATE**

The EYEPs, SEPs and EYEIPs are the workforce who provide **support for quality provision** to all Early Years settings . They also support

- LA schools who are due Ofsted – please speak with your SEP.
- Any schools where GLD is below national ‘overtime’ ( three years)– speak with your SEP if you feel you meet this criteria but haven’t had contact from your SEP or an EYEP.

We also have a range of activities being delivered in **localities for schools and settings** –

- Basildon, Harlow and Tendring specific projects focused on SLC .
- Locality Cluster Meetings – termly at a local school to you with EYEPs and other local services. Focus on effective transitions .

A wealth of resources linked to EYFS pedagogy is on the **EYEP page of Education Essex Online**. This is a rapidly growing resource – includes e learning for ease of access.

**Face to Face CPD Opportunities** – Essex EY Conference – May 2026 and ‘Meeting the needs of mixed R /Yr 1 ‘ Ruth Swailes 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2026.

The EY teams are currently finalising the ‘Best Start in Life’ Essex Local Plan that has to be sent to the DfE in the next month. Further information regarding ‘raising standards in reception’ and free training from the LA will be detailed over the next term and at next EPHA once we have had the funding approved by DfE .

## 4) **GOVERNMENT POLICY UPDATES**

Clare referred to the huge number of policies and strategies that are affecting education currently, both locally and nationally. These include

- Best Start in Life Strategy and Local Plan – see above. Clare reminded heads of the GLD national target of 75%, and the corresponding Essex target of 78.4% by 2028
- Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill – this continues through the parliamentary process and will start to impact schools over the next few months and years. There is a particular focus on Elective Home Education, strengthening the guardrails around this and introducing a Children Not in School register.

- Families First Partnership Programme - education focus on severely absent pupils – being led, in Essex, by Nicky O’Shaughnessy.
- RISE – DfE support for targeted schools, as well as universal support and sharing of best practice.
- National Year of Reading – Essex is linking in with a number of projects, and repeating some of the Essex YOR offer delivered a couple of years ago.

**i) Schools White Paper: Every child achieving and thriving, and SEND Reform: putting children and young people first**

The white paper and SEND reform consultation documents were published on the 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2026. The schools white paper sets out the DfE’s plans for:

- **SEND:** including layered support, new individual support plans (ISPs) and 'inclusion bases' in mainstream settings
- **Supporting disadvantaged pupils:** including using income data to determine disadvantage
- **Enrichment:** with a new enrichment entitlement and Enrichment Framework to be published this academic year
- **Engagement:** including a new Pupil Engagement Framework published later this year
- **Moving all schools to be part of school trusts:** including new trusts established by local authorities (LAs) or area partnerships
- **Engagement with parents/carers:** including new School Profiles, guidance on home-school expectations and an improved school complaints system
- **Data-driven improvement:** via a new digital platform
- **School workforce pay and conditions:** including an increase in maternity pay for teachers and leaders

Clare noted that there was a huge amount within the documents, though they draw on a lot of policy and strategy that is already in the system, such as the Child Poverty Strategy. The aims of reform are hugely ambitious. The SEND Reform is the beginning of a long journey, through consultation (until 18<sup>th</sup> may), eventual legislation and an amended SEND Code of Practice.

The vision and ambitions of the SEND reform set out a plan for:

- High Standards and high expectations for all children
- Building a genuinely inclusive education system
- Redesigning SEND pathways around early intervention and outcomes and a reduction in the number of EHCPs
- Rebalancing investment towards prevention and family support
- Strengthening evidence-based teaching and the importance of continued learning at home
- Tackling attendance, behaviour, disadvantage and narrow the attainment gap
- Stabilising and supporting the workforce and rebuilding parental confidence
- Halving the disadvantage gap
- Restoring attendance levels to 94% or higher
- Ensuring that, on average, pupils leave school grade 5 or higher across their GCSEs
- Boosting pupil engagement and levels of belonging

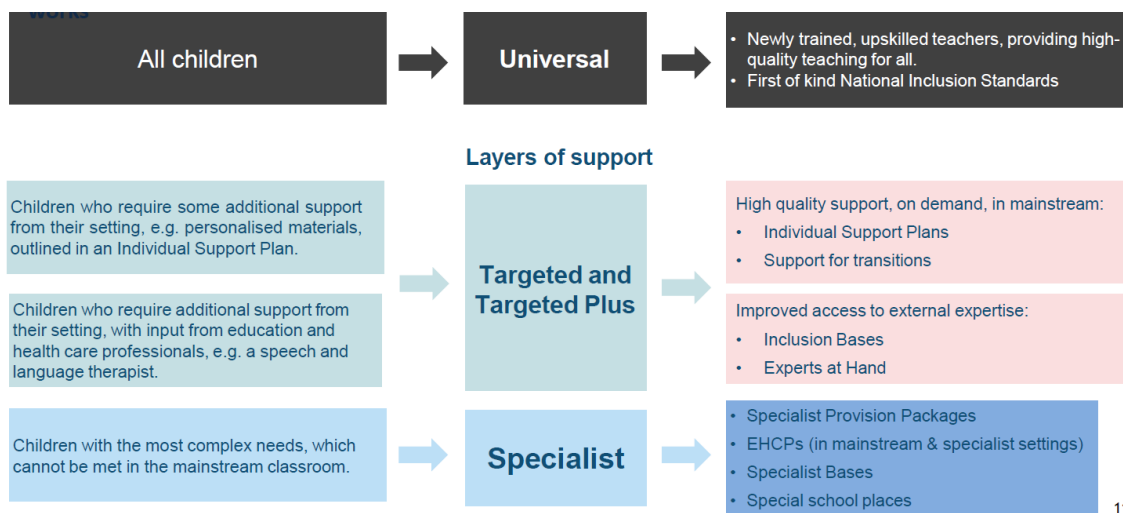
## Clare showed a number of slides setting out the scope of the White Paper: Every Child Achieving and Thriving

Curriculum and Enrichment	Exclusions and behaviour
Curriculum and Assessment review outcomes implemented	Re-integration support partnerships following suspensions
Transitions points strengthened – KS3 alliance launched as part of RISE	Update guidance on behaviour and suspensions and exclusions
RISE networks expanded & expand English and Maths Hubs	Race Equality Unit to research increases in racist incidents
Reading test in Yr 8 / strengthened Progress 8 measure	New dashboard to monitor behaviour and exclusion patterns
Enrichment benchmarks and new pupil engagement framework in 2029	
Disadvantage	Workforce
White working class / SEND / CiC focus	Plan to recruit 6,500 teachers published
Summer 2026 – consultation in funding model, move away from FSM	Enhanced maternity pay
Mission NE and Mission Coastal	£500K per year to support early headship coaching, and retention grants to teach in more disadvantaged places.
Admissions code to be reviewed and stronger FAP process	Introduce AI tools, assistive technology and digitised NC framework
Evidence base for effective use of PP to be developed	Wage increases in MATs to be monitored
Collaboration	Parental Engagement / complaints
Collaborative system leadership – no school an island	Minimum expectations for parental engagement
Schools expected to join MATs –no timeline / LAs to establish Trust(s)	Best Start Family Hubs
Trust Standards in inclusion, value for money, community partnerships	Annual parent forums in trusts
Local SEND Collaboration groups	Digital complaints process and mutual expectations for complaints handling

The White Paper suggests that all schools, including Single Academy Trusts, will have to join Multi Academy Trusts, but there is no time line on this and the paper notes “quality not pace” is the priority. The Local Authority has the opportunity to “establish” trusts, but there is little detail in the White Paper as to what this might look like.

The SEND Reform plans include a layered approach to SEND support. Support will be organised into tiers, built on top of a 'universal offer' of high-quality teaching and support for all pupils. The 3 layers of support for pupils with SEND are:

- **Targeted:** evidence-based support, provided within their mainstream school
- **Targeted plus:** support provided within their mainstream school, with extra input from education, health and care professionals (via a new 'Experts at hand' service)
- **Specialist:** for children with the most complex needs who receive support through an education, health and care (EHC) plan, in a mainstream or specialist setting



### All schools will be required to develop Individual Support Plans (ISPs)

These will be digital plans that capture the child's barriers to learning, the day-to-day provision they receive, any reasonable adjustments and intended outcomes.

ISPs will be a legal obligation for schools for **every** child with identified SEND, regardless of which 'layer' of support they're receiving. Under the government's plans, schools will be required to review ISPs at least once a year, and involve parents/carers in any discussions. EHC plans will be retained for pupils with the most complex needs.

From September 2029, reviews at 'transition points' (e.g. primary to secondary) will determine whether pupils move to an EHC plan or an ISP. The consultation document confirms that **all existing EHC plans will remain in place** until September 2030.

### Inclusion bases in every school

The DfE will make sure every secondary school (and the same number of primary schools) has an inclusion base. These will be dedicated spaces within mainstream schools where children with SEND can receive targeted support.

Inclusion bases will help children to:

- Access mainstream education in a way that works for them
- Gradually transition to full participation in mainstream classes (if that's right for them)

## SEND Reform: putting children and young people first

Individual Support Plans (ISPs) & Specialist Support Packages through the EHCP	Parental preference
ISPs - targeted and targeted plus layer (Experts at Hand Service)	Presumption of mainstream first
SSPs – most complex needs - Nationally defined SPPs will set out evidence-based support, outlining interventions, resource, curriculum adaptations, health and social care support	Disagreements over ISPs will be dealt with through the strengthened digitised schools complaints process
Specialist Support will be received through the EHCP in mainstream or special (ISPs will outline day to day provision)	Independent mediation services to be strengthened
Specialist Support Packages will be nationally defined. Support may be delivered through a specialist base.	Where SSP is needed, LA will set out list of suitable settings, parental preference is a consideration but LA to balance VfM, effectiveness and needs of other children in placement decisions
	Tribunals will remain the route of redress, regarding thresholds for specialist provision and settings, but will not name a placement for a child.,
	Independent Special Schools to be more regulated ( price and places)
Experts at Hand Service	Workforce
Targeted Plus	£200m national training
Multi disciplinary specialist teams working routinely with mainstream settings	Reframe role of the SENCo – more strategic
£1.8b over 3 years to LAs to commission and establish	Training expectations embedded within revised Code of Practice
Funding to recruit more SALT, OT and EPs	



The Local Authority is required to submit a LA SEND Reform Plan by 19<sup>th</sup> June, with an emphasis on mainstream school inclusion rather than expanding special school places.

### New inclusion standards will inform best practice

The National Inclusion Standards will set out what support should be available in every mainstream setting, and will outline strategies to make schools more inclusive. An independent panel of experts will oversee the development of these evidence-based standards, to inform best practice in identifying barriers and meeting needs. Schools will also be required to publish an inclusion strategy outlining how resources are deployed to benefit children with SEND (replacing the current SEN information report).

### SEND Code of Practice will be updated

The DfE will update the SEND code of practice, to clarify the responsibilities of schools and local partners, and make the guidance easier to use. The new national inclusion standards will provide a framework for how the updated Code will be delivered in practice. The updated Code will set out a requirement for all schools to make sure their staff receive training on SEND and inclusion.

### ‘Experts at Hand’ (EaH) service

This new, national offer will provide mainstream schools with direct access to experts (such as speech and language therapists and educational psychologists), where needed. This will be supported by funding to enable LAs and integrated care boards to establish an offer, and fund professionals to work with schools. The DfE anticipates this will be operational by 2028/29. Clare noted that the Expert at Hands Service will be a key aspect of delivering effective SEND provision and support in mainstream schools.

### New model of specialist provision

For children with the most complex needs, the DfE plans to introduce new specialist provision packages, supported by EHCPs. These will be nationally defined, evidence-based sets of support that will form the basis of all future EHC plans.

The DfE aims to publish final specialist support packages in 2027/28, to make sure children with SEND receive the same high-quality entitlement regardless of where they live in the country.

Clare explained that there is additional Government funding to support the reforms, but without specific detail at the moment:

<b>Funding</b>
Additional £4b investment over 3 years
- £1.6b Inclusive mainstream Fund direct to schools
- £1.8b Expert at Hands Service
- £200m National Training Programme
- £40m workforce expansion
£3.7b Capital investment – Inclusion bases and 60,000 additional specialist places
2028 - £3.5b increase in HNB. Funding to be rebalanced with more going direct into schools

There was a discussion about whether there is an inherent risk for schools who will have the responsibility for creating a legally binding Individual Support Plan. Clare noted that it not clear what “legally binding” will look like in reality and she didn’t feel that this would lead to schools being taken to court. Schools will be able to draw on the Expert at Hands Service to deliver provision, and the development of the service will be the responsibility of the Local Authority.

There was concern expressed that schools will receive even more complaints from parents about the delivery of SEND support, and a headteacher asked if the LA would work with a group of heads to develop support for complaints, including drawing on the LA’s experience of managing these complaints. Clare agreed to this, and noted that there is likely to be a spike of requests for EHCP needs assessments which the LA will need to manage. Parent will still have recourse to a Tribunal, but this will be focused on agreed thresholds, rather than giving them the right to name a named school (parents can still express a preference).

## ii) **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. These powers are discharged through a Combined County Authority (CCA) which will be set up later this year.

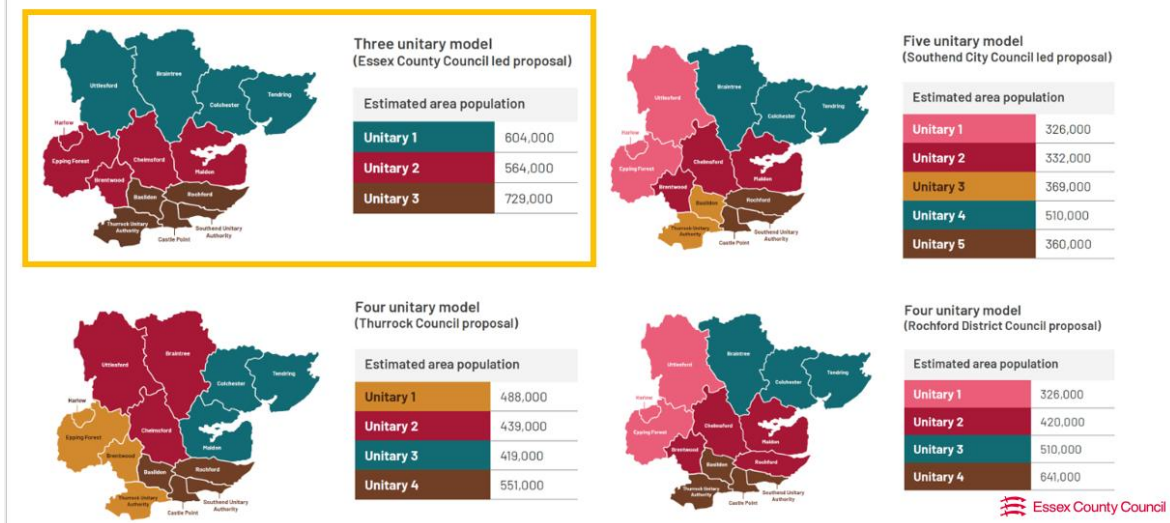
However, it was noted that Mayoral elections have been postponed until 2028, so although there are plans to have a combined authority (Southend, Essex and Thurrock), this will not be a mayoral authority.

Local Government Reform (LGR) is the bringing together of the two-tier system of local government to create a larger, financially sustainable single tier of local government. Four



business cases were submitted to the Ministry of Communities, Housing and Local Government (MCHLG)

## Four business case options from Greater Essex



The Government will issue a “minded to” notice by the end of March, which will indicate which, if any, of the business case options will be adopted. The implementation timeline is still April 2028, with shadow arrangements being in place from April 2027.

### iii) ATTENDANCE CONFERENCE

Essex County Council is running an *Essex Attendance Summit*, on 17th March 2026 in Colchester. This event is dedicated to strengthening strategies and sharing best practice for improving school attendance across the county.

This summit will bring together Attendance Leads and Officers from all four quadrants of Essex for a day of collaboration, learning, and practical solutions.

The conference will include:

- Networking opportunities with colleagues from similar settings.
- Keynote speakers exploring the current attendance landscape and showcasing impactful changes in schools.
- Interactive workshops tailored to your role, interests, and development priorities. Workshop selection will be on a first-come, first-served basis.

### 5). SOUTH YEAR 6 – 7 TRANSITION PROJECT

West meeting: Mat Harper (Beauchamps School), Maggie Elfenich (Grange Primary) and Lorraine Ramet (Wickford Primary)

South, North East and Mid meetings: Mat Harper (Beauchamps School) and Heidi Blakeley (Abacus Primary)

Mat Harper introduced himself, and explained that he has been involved in a transition project in Wickford for the last three years, which is proving extraordinarily beneficial to pupils in Year 6 and 7.

Wickford is in the south of the county in the Basildon district and has two secondary schools and eight main primary/junior feeder schools: Beauchamps and Bromford’s secondary schools, Abacus, Grange, Hilltop, North Crescent, Oakfield, Runwell, St Lukes and Wickford.

The schools are a mixture of LA Maintained, Academies in MATS and a LA Federation (Wickford Primary and Beauchamps High) schools. There is a strong and well-established partnership of Headteachers in Wickford, and their termly meetings are very well attended.

Mat explained that he is part of the Inclusion Strategy Team and has been involved with many Inclusion Reviews across the county in primary and secondary schools. An Inclusion Review in one of the schools in Wickford matched what has been seen in many other schools across the county and even in schools that have a clear commitment to inclusion, transition is still a barrier to effective inclusive practice. The barriers are sometimes seen from an inclusive primary/junior school not being mirrored by the receiving secondary school; and vice versa.

Mat noted that the project is central to all the Pillars of the Inclusion Framework  
“Relationships and Wellbeing”  
“Attending and Participating”  
“Achieving and moving on”

Back in the Spring of 2024, he approached Jochen Tree, headteacher at Bromfords School, to look at the emerging themes that was being seen from the ECC Inclusion Reviews – their views were totally aligned – they knew they had to improve the transition offer in Wickford. Mat acknowledged that transition days used to be much more formal, and even included CAT testing, which only served to increase the anxiety of children transitioning to secondary school. The days were often used for “marketing” and it was recognised that this was also unhelpful and inappropriate. The two secondary heads met with all Primary Headteachers, and all agreed with this view. It quickly became apparent that if they got this right, that all of the schools would benefit, as would the families they serve.

### **There are three main themes of the pilot**

How well does the Y5/6 curriculum support students in developing the essential skills needed for transition?

To strengthen and enhance the physical transition, especially how are we engaging with parent/carers of complex/vulnerable families? How can we support them to better support their children with transition?

How can we improve the transfer of information for our more complex students – and how can this continue into Y7?

#### **i). Transition curriculum**

Running a thematic project over the summer term of Y5 in all the primary schools – devised by Y5 leaders across the schools.

Sessions done with a paired primary/junior school, so children are meeting and working together.

Some vulnerable students working with students from other primary schools for extended periods, supported by SENDCo's.

An overview of the content

Week 1 - Teamwork & communication	Team Building: Introductions, fast paced, lots of activities, carousel style.
Week 2 – Independence & resilience	Play team games – playground games, allowing children to learn and play games with new children.
Week 3 - Creativity & cultural awareness	Outdoor Art (different art piece linked to a different value?)
Week 4 - Leadership & responsibility	Positivi-tree / negativi-tree activity. Children look at each other's negativi-tree and think of solutions to overcome this (turn them into positives). Each child will have a chance to be the spokesperson for their group.
Week 5 - Risk taking and determination	Teamwork competition where they get from one side of the field to the other (hoops – make choices on how many travel e.tc.
Week 6 - Respect and bravery	Group work reflection.

## ii). Improving engagement with vulnerable families

A wide range of improved activities for ALL children including:

- At least one visit for all in Year 5
- Two Year 6 transition days - ensures that pupils feel more confident by the end of two days, and are much happier about progressing to secondary school.
- Meet the tutor days in last week of August and tour of school with parents and children
- Additional events aimed at parents of Year 5 vulnerable children held at neutral venues, supporting with secondary school choices:
  - Understanding the Common Application Form
  - Understanding admission criteria
  - Unbiased information about both secondary schools and if relevant, other providers such as special schools
  - Local charity SNAP working with us to support these families

## iii) More effective transfer of information

A SENDCo conference held each term with a focus on pupils and transfer of information. Professionals from the secondary schools invited into Year 5/6 SEND review meetings. Agreement from all Wickford heads that they would complete the Inclusion Framework Matrix for every vulnerable child transferring to secondary school initially and now all children.

## liv) Impact of improved exposure to secondary school

Starting secondary school can be one of the biggest emotional shifts for a child. Proactive transition work helps pupils:

- Understand what to expect, reducing fear of the unknown
- Build familiarity with routines, buildings, and key staff
- Feel more secure and confident before September
- Develop coping strategies for change

96% of parents felt students were more confident, less nervous and more excited to attend than before

100% of parents felt the pre-visit helped their child settle in

Incredibly high take up from Year 7 families attended the August “Meet the Tutor Day”, over 80% in both secondary schools

Key take-aways that helped: touring the school again, finding their form room, meeting their form tutor, asking questions

### **v) Impact of improved transfer of information**

Earlier identification of vulnerable pupils - proactive transition and use of the matrix has allowed us to better:

- Highlight pupils with SEND, mental health needs, or safeguarding concerns early
- Put effective provisions in place before September (e.g., nurture groups, TAs, safe spaces)
- Reduce the risk of pupils becoming overwhelmed or unnoticed in the larger setting

This clearly strengthens inclusion and ensures support starts on day one.

In both schools, there has been a positive impact on attendance data, particularly with PA figures and SPA figures in vulnerable groups.

Smoother academic continuity has led to a stronger, faster academic start in Year 7.

### **vi) Impact**

Greater equity for pupils and their families – the proactive approach has been particularly important for:

- Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- Those with social or emotional needs;
- Pupils who are the only child coming from a particular primary school.
- No student is “left behind”
- Student/Parent Voice:
- Pupils felt part of the community earlier
- Parents/Carers have developed trust in the new school earlier

This is no longer a pilot project in Wickford, it's here to stay because it's had clear impact and is the right thing to do for the kids and the families

- It has strengthened relationships with Leaders and SENDCOs across the town
- All schools can create the capacity to strengthen transition – the wins are so clear to see

The primary headteachers talked about how positive the project had been for their pupils, particularly the stronger partnership with neighbouring primaries which developed relationships and understanding. (Heidi noted that children were particularly interested in the different uniforms at other schools!)

### **vii) Next steps - How do we continue to improve our practice?**

Embed our pilot as common practice – it's how we do it in our town!

Strengthened alumni

Ex-students visiting ex primary schools to support with Y5/6 students

Extended to include Y10/11 SEND students supporting Y6 SEND students with transition

Has given a great foundation to further strengthen transfer of information – which will be so useful with new areas of foci like Oracy development

Share our experience – encourage more of this partnership transition work across the county

The Harwich pilot started in the summer of 2025. Liz Bartholomew, headteacher at Mayflower Primary, noted that their pilot had focused on including more transition opportunities, including a series of short mornings in the secondary school after which the pupils returned to their primary school. This has helped them cope with the challenge of arriving at “big school” and has been helpful when they eventually start at the secondary school. The secondary school has reported a significant drop in absenteeism in Year 7 this year, with 50% less persistent absence.

At each meeting, the Professional Officer noted that the success of the programme depended on the commitment and buy in from the secondary schools, and asked Mat whether other secondary school headteachers had been approached and whether they had responded positively to the transition project. Mat confirmed that he had presented at the ASHE meeting and the secondary heads had been very positive about the idea; they recognised the impact and benefits of the programme, in particular improved attendance figures and wellbeing for Year 7 pupils. Clare Kershaw confirmed that the programme had the backing of the Local Authority and they would be willing to discuss and encourage the introduction of this effective transition model in other areas. It was recognised that each area was different, but that the model demonstrated excellent practice with really positive results for pupils.

6). **ESSEX YEAR OF OPPORTUNITY**  
**Gareth Honeyford – West meeting**  
**Robin Harbord – South, North East and Mid meetings**

Starting Early  
My Future  
Step into STEAM  
Careers newsletter and Roxie's journey  
Primary Times  
Eco Refill Shops  
Essential Skills Support  
Oracy training and competition

## Why Start Early?

### Limited Exposure, Limited Aspirations

- Children **form career ideas by age 6–10**
- The patterns of jobs chosen by seven-year-olds mirror those selected by [17-year olds](#)
- Disadvantaged pupils often **lack role models and career awareness**
- Family, TV, radio and film have the biggest influence on children's choices
- 75% of aspirations are shaped by **gender and socio-economic stereotypes**
- Children's career aspirations have little in common with projected workforce needs, which could have serious implications for the **Essex economy**
- Multiple Aspirations = **Greater Resilience**

- **Embedding essential skills** in primary education supports both **academic success** and **future employability**, preparing pupils for a changing world.
- These skills are transferable across subjects and **help children connect learning to real-world contexts, improving motivation and engagement.**
- Countries like **Singapore and Germany** integrate career-related learning early, resulting in **higher employment rates** and **better transitions to work.**
- "Only 1 per cent of children knew about a job from someone visiting their school. This has real implications for social mobility, as children from poorer backgrounds may not have successful role models from the world of work and their aspirations are limited as a result."

### Oracy opportunities

Oracy is the word on everyone's lips, but what does it really look like in the classroom? Oracy for All gives your staff a practical, high-impact hour of CPD that focuses on key principles that can be applied in all contexts and subjects.

Explore how to embed oracy techniques into existing curriculum time rather than adding extra workload, unpick issues for pupils and unlock speech confidence.

Free access to Debate Planet | Debating Done Differently resources

Proposed dates:

21-23 April – Oracy for All Zooms, 3.45 p.m. to 4.45 p.m. Schools can register in advance and receive copies of the mini-books for distribution to staff. – designed for groups of staff

for interaction – practical and fun activities and copies of the ‘Help Me Find My Voice’ minibook – free to schools.

29 April - full day primary face-to-face training to help primary teachers embed oracy strategies into their existing practice.

26 May, 3.45 p.m. – Zoom for staff who are supporting the oracy competitions

15 - 17 June Primary Oracy Competition The Essex Oracy Network Competition — Oracy for Schools

### **The National Year of Reading in Essex**

- ECC will promote NYoR activities through EYoO
- ECC will plan NYoR projects with Partners from the Essex Year of Reading (EYoR)
- Projects planned with; Libraries, Music Service, Active Essex and more.
- Reprise some EYoR activities – eg Tell me a Story
- National events can be signed up for at: [What's On For Schools | National Year Of Reading 2026 | National Literacy Trust](#)

## **7). WEST QUADRANT UPDATE**

Nicola Woolf, West Assistant Director, gave an update on a number of issues relevant to the West quadrant.

### **i) Strategic Planning Meetings: a time for change**

Strategic Planning Meetings are an opportunity for schools to meet with their link IP, and EP where appropriate, to reflect on and review inclusion improvement work over the last academic year and discuss strategic priorities for the coming year and agree what support is required, linked to whole school approaches to inclusion, with a lens on SEND.

For some time, these meetings have been held well into the Autumn term, where the focus is more on transition than whole school improvement planning.

A test and Learn Project in North East Essex looked at the potential impact of moving SPM to the summer term.

Results have shown better alignment to:

- School improvement planning
- Inclusion priorities
- CPD planning

With inclusion high on the agenda, including within the new OFSTED Toolkit, the school's link IP and EP can be pivotal in supporting the embedding of inclusive practice.

Due to the combined strategic and operational elements to the meeting, it is most effective when wider leadership are present, as well as the SENCO and Head e.g. DHT Inclusion or DHT Teaching and Learning.

The IP team are well equipped to support schools to audit, plan and implement change, linked to ECC's Inclusion Strategy, with additional input from the EP team and others as appropriate.

As well as delivering elements of the ECC Core Training Offer, IPs and EPs can also support embedding learning and reviewing impact, as part of your ongoing reflective practice



## ii) Essex Research School Current Initiatives & Focus Areas

**Purposeful & Effective Questioning**  
FREE Online PD EVENT hosted by Essex Research School's ELE, Susan Marbe  
21 April 2026, 4pm - 5pm

In this session we will look at the misconceptions and mistakes that teachers often make when using questioning as a pedagogical tool and present practical tools for questioning that can be embedded into your practice the very next day.



**10 June 2026 - Lacey Davis ELE and Head Teacher at Pear Mead Primary School**  
Metacognition and Self-regulated learning



**1 July – Don Wry ELE and CEO of Hearts Academy Trust –**  
Leadership and Disadvantage



**6 July 2026 Elizabeth Millane Research Advocate and NCETM Primary Maths Specialist / Venn Maths Hub**  
CfC Effective Assessment in KS1 Maths webinar

Essex County Council

## Harlow Early Years Event

Transforming Early Years Language and Communication: Harlow Futures Lessons and Next Steps

Transforming Early Years Language and Communication: Harlow Futures Lessons and Next Steps

Event for PVI settings, including Pre Schools, day nurseries, childminders and School nursery and reception classes. The audience we would like to capture is school senior leadership teams, for example, head teachers, deputy head teachers and EYFS leads working in Harlow.

**23<sup>rd</sup> March 10am to 1pm**

**Venue**

**Latton Bush Centre, Harlow Southern Way, Harlow, Essex, CM18 7BL**

Link to Book

<https://educationessex.essex.gov.uk/Event/290290>

### Description

1. We will start with an introduction to the Harlow Futures project, with an explanation of the aims and objectives and what was set out to be achieved.
2. We will then hear about how Essex County Council has for the last two years invested resources in supporting settings, schools and chairmen to improve their ability to support children's speech, language and communication outcomes.
3. The Early Years Education Partner will explain how the training was organised and supported to be implemented with the Early Years sector, including monitoring the progress of 3 initiatives: WHACOM, Delta, and Talk Boost.
4. The Council's Evaluation team will explain how they set about collecting data to understand who engaged with the training and the impact it had, and what we've learned to date.
5. We will hear direct from settings and schools, who will tell us first-hand how they've used the training to benefit children and help reduce the word gap between peers and disadvantaged children.
6. Sarah English, EYFIS, will then present plans for selecting and launching the 2 St. C Communication hubs in Harlow.
7. Our providers from across the system will also have slots at the event to showcase the different training, tools and support on offer to the Early Years sector.
8. Senior Leaders will be at the event to talk about the importance of this work, how it fits with the national focus on Early Years, CQUO data and reflect on how the work can impact practice across the county.

## 8) SOUTH QUADRANT UPDATE

Maz Norman, Head of Education and Early Years for South, gave an update on a number of issues relevant to the South quadrant.

### Strategic Planning Meetings: a time for change – Minute 7 refers

#### i) Provision Development in South Essex

New RPs will sit alongside all sufficiency planning including expansion of existing special schools (MLD and SLD), changing cohorts in our special schools and the building of the new SLD school (Wolesey Park).

The aim is to develop a coherent network of provision – and providers.

The Complex Needs Practitioner Network Group is running very successfully in South. The aim is to start a new Provider Network Group for school/SEND leaders to run alongside: this would be open to all schools with a complex RP and ISP, for support, development and good practice sharing at a leadership level e.g. curriculum and assessment.

Contact [kerry.howard@essex.gov.uk](mailto:kerry.howard@essex.gov.uk) to express an interest in the new network.

We have a new, highly experienced Strategic Lead for Cognition and Learning (C&L)  
[maggie.loveday@essex.gov.uk](mailto:maggie.loveday@essex.gov.uk)

She is supportive of all our developments and will also be running a network: termly sessions the same as ASCs, for school colleagues acting as teacher lead for C&L RPs.

#### ii) **Provision Development: EOTIS/C**

Headteachers were told previously about a South project to improve the approach for CYP who have an EHCP and may need to be Educated Other(wise) than In School/College. The South Essex work is now being rolled out across Essex via a collaborative, multidisciplinary approach. The impact of this contributed towards positive feedback from Ofsted and the CQC in the Essex Local Area SEND Review.

Several workstreams will deliver outputs including training for school staff and documents/tools for wider publication for use by families and professionals.

Contact [kerry.howard@essex.gov.uk](mailto:kerry.howard@essex.gov.uk) if you wish to be part of early use, review and development of the training and tools, or to find out more about the work in general.

Two former Essex Headteachers continue to be part of the work as consultants to ECC.

#### 9) **NORTH EAST QUADRANT UPDATE**

Dan Gee, North East Assistant Director, gave an update on a number of issues relevant to the North East quadrant.

**Strategic Planning Meetings: a time for change – Minute 7 refers**

#### 10) **MID QUADRANT UPDATE**

Catherine Hutley, Mid Assistant Director, gave an update on a number of issues relevant to the Mid quadrant.

**Strategic Planning Meetings: a time for change – Minute 7 refers**

#### **Specialist Support Assistant Pilot**

Catherine explained that as part of the Inclusion Strategy, the LA has looked at best practice in other authorities. Devon holds a bank of HILTA level support staff who can be seconded to schools as part of a traded service. Essex is running a pilot of this approach, and Catherine explained that there is one Specialist Support Assistant available to support a school for 6-10 weeks. Schools who wish to apply to benefit from this pilot project support should have a clear purpose for this support.

Email Catherine Hutley at [catherine.hutley2@essex.gov.uk](mailto:catherine.hutley2@essex.gov.uk)

#### 11). **POWER UPDATE**

Jethro Bogdanov and Gary Newell were welcomed to the quadrant meetings. They reminded headteachers that the POWER project is a targeted early intervention and prevention in Essex Youth Justice Service across Southend, Essex and Thurrock. POWER practitioners offer direct support to children aged 8 – 13 and their parents and carers, to help them develop the emotional resilience to cope with challenging situation at home, at school and in their communities. POWER also supports schools to develop effective methods to enable children to be successful in school.

Typically the children will be struggling to engage at school. They will also be known to Essex Police, perhaps as a victim, a perpetrator, through anti-social behaviour or through issues at home). However, they will not have been charged for an offence.



Children who are already receiving statutory support from Social Care, the Youth Justice Service or CAHMS are not eligible for support from the POWER Project.

Referral and contact information – email both  
[Jethro.bogdanov@essex.gov.uk](mailto:Jethro.bogdanov@essex.gov.uk) and  
[Louise.hughes1@essex.gov.uk](mailto:Louise.hughes1@essex.gov.uk)

## 12). 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 24 June 2026

Wednesday 4 November 2026

Wednesday 10 March 2027

Wednesday 23 June 2027

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

Thursday 18 June 2026

Thursday 5 November 2026

Thursday 4 March 2027

Thursday 17 June 2027

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

Wednesday 17 June 2026

Wednesday 11 November 2026

Wednesday 3 March 2027

Wednesday 16 June 2027

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

Thursday 25 June 2026

Thursday 12 November 2026

Thursday 11 March 2027

Thursday 24 June 2027

### **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/>

Pam Langmead  
EPHA Professional Officer  
pam@langmead.me.uk  
01621 786359  
07791 143277