

Chair's report for NE EPHA June 2020 – Nick Hutchings

Review of the year

Who knew what would happen a year ago! I was recently rereading the minutes from our EPHA Executive meeting in October. The minutes were dominated with discussion about the Ofsted Framework and how schools were dealing with deep dives, and what the impact of the first inspections under the new framework were looking like.

Move forward by 6 months, and all schools in the UK were closed to all but 'key worker' children, we had developed a new language around 'social distancing', we were all beginning to provide home learning via electronic platforms and trying to diagnose coughs across the phone!!!

The education climate in the country, county and local area has changed beyond recognition. It is definitely going to take us all some time to start recovering and supporting children, staff and parents.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the fantastic work that all heads and senior teams did in closing schools with just 2 days' notice. This had never been done before and I truly hope that it will never be done again. The stratospheric amount of stress that was placed on individuals during this time is a testament to how resilient we are as a group of people.

I have very little memory of anything else that we have all achieved this year – not a surprise, I guess!

During the crisis I would like to thank Pam for her amazing work in supporting Essex Heads at all the local authority conference calls and keeping us up to date and putting forward heads' views. In the midst of all of this, she also managed to produce the excellent briefing notes to ensure we kept up to date with funding, governance and HR issues. EPHA would not run without Pam and I am sure you will join me in sending her many, many emails telling her how brilliant she is!!!!

What is to come?

Who knows?!! A second peak? PPE? Sanitizer?

The next academic year and those to come are clearly going to be difficult. There will be many demands on Headteachers and how they best deal with the demands from parents, children and staff. How we negotiate with the Local Authority and the various agencies that work with schools will also be paramount to the well-being of pupils and staff.

As always we will have a very tricky route to negotiate. Past lessons tell us we do a pretty good job and that strength is certainly held in numbers. Communicating with each other and choosing a strategy that is agreed by a number of heads, rather than just one, will provide protection and safety for us all. This is now the time where the

'bunker' mentality of some colleagues needs to be recognised and support proactively offered by us all, even if we think we are being a pain!!

My thoughts

The North East EPHA group is a particularly passionate one and I know we will work together to navigate through the coming months and years. Having a clear message about accountability, testing and transition of children will enable us to shape the Local Authority's agenda and communications with the DfE. Stand strong and do not be afraid to voice your opinions.

EPHA will continue to support you, represent you at meetings and try to get the best deal that it can for children and staff across Essex.

As always it has been a pleasure to chair this group for another year. I've now been doing this since 2015. I love it; but am happy to hand it over to anyone that feels they would like the experience of running the group. If this is the case, please do contact Pam or myself. I am grateful for all of your support as always.

Do try to get some rest over the summer - you deserve it!!!!!!