

## Chair's report for SOUTH EPHA June 2020 Nicky Barrand

### Review of the year

In the Autumn term, our meetings 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.

Spring term 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.

Some of you may remember the image I shared last year at the start of the summer meeting. I have a new image for this year which resonates over some of the recent challenges we have faced.



I'm particularly thinking of the search for hand sanitiser and other cleaning materials! I was quite determined to get that last bottle on the shelf!

2020 will always be remembered as the year of the pandemic, when headteachers had to respond to unprecedented situations and demands. I would like to acknowledge the fantastic work that all heads and senior teams did in closing schools with 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.

This has not ended yet and as the pandemic develops and evolves so does our work and how we respond and cope with it. I, as I am sure you do too, feel that I have done nothing else over recent months but read or listen to government briefings, daily updates, DfE daily updates, union reports and letters, scientific advice and argument. I have drafted and re-drafted risk assessments and strategy documents for what my

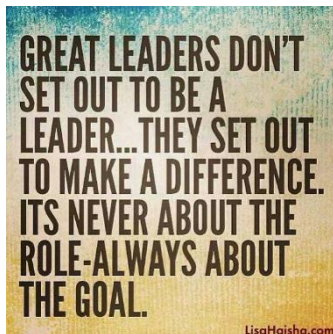
school can provide. I have tried to keep my staff informed but not frightened and anxious when trying to implement wider opening and I have had many conversations with parents who are also frightened and anxious in trying to make the best decisions for their children. There have also been a few conversations with those who have told me that this is a conspiracy and is not really happening but that is for another time!

I would like to thank Clare Kershaw, Director of Education, for her daily emails and unwavering support for us throughout this lockdown. Her communications have summarised the key information and actions and given support.

During all of this Pam has been a voice of reason and calm. She has been fantastic 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 congratulating her for a job very well done! Thank you Pam.

### **What is to come?**

That is the big question for all of us to consider. I am not convinced that anyone has, as yet, really thought through some of the, at times very odd, suggestions that are being put out there. Certainly 2020 could be the year that offers education an opportunity to re-invent itself, to remove elements of practice that are so wrong and inappropriate and to consider what is of real value in teaching and developing our citizens of the future. I believe it is an opportunity for EPHA to put forward your ideas for a better education system.



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.

Now is the time for us to stand strong and ensure our voices, our professional, informed voices, are heard and respected.

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.

It has been a pleasure to chair this group and represent you. I am happy to help in any way that I can.

You have been amazing and deserve to be recognised for your hard work and dedication.

I wish you all a restful, safe and happy summer break when it comes. Take time for yourselves and family and friends and hopefully this will be in person rather than via technology.