

Chair's report for West EPHA June 2020 – Isobel Barron

Review of the year

Well, we were all looking forward with hope....2020 was going to be THE year... little did we know at the start of it that the new year and a new decade would be marked by such a monumental event that it will go down in the history books as one to remember!

This time last year we were dominated by the big 'O' with the new Ofsted framework; now it is the big 'C' with Coronavirus quite literally taking over our lives.

I could add to the list with a big "S" for stress and a big "RA" for risk assessment! We have all certainly done our own fair share of wading through the copious amounts of information, trying to make sense of it ourselves so that we can lead, cope and calm others through uncharted waters.

The primary education profession has once again shown itself to be extraordinary resilient, creative and solution-focused – getting a superb job done and in just two days rewriting the entire curriculum and educational landscape to make home learning a reality for the majority rather than the minority.

Little did I know that I would be having virtual staff meetings and learning how to host and zoom, but bit by bit I have learnt new things and found other ways of managing, as have most of the staff, who have just got on with it and made the best of what they can in the circumstances.

School staff have been utterly amazing in adapting to the 'new normal' and there will be much more of that to come in the coming months. Quite when we can expect to be back to the normal that we know and, dare I say, love – who knows?

Clare Kershaw has shown great leadership and strength throughout and has worked very much in partnership with EPHA, fighting for what she felt was right for Essex schools and heads, championing our cause. She has continually recognised and understood the efforts, stresses and strains being placed on head teachers and has sought ways to support us through with daily updates, letters, model policies and the like.

The daily calls with Pam, and the regular meetings with the EPHA Executive have been helpful allowing us to share ideas, concerns and actions. Clare listened, responded and challenged those at the DfE, the Unions and others.

Pam has been amazing again this year- in all the conferences organised (though sadly not all were able to occur), training and head teacher briefings. Her constant presence and ability to listen, respond and take up the mantle on our behalf during the national crisis has been invaluable. Thank you Pam – we could not survive without you!

What is to come?

Who knows?! Who could ever have predicted this?! I would rather not have a crystal ball.

What I do know is that we are always stronger together. We need now, more than ever, to support one another. We must look after our own wellbeing and that of other headteachers as the demands of the last few months and this year are likely to take their toll, if they have not already done so.

We need to share and develop best practice... what have we learnt about home learning and VLE and our pastoral role during this time?

If it happens again and we go into a second lock down, what would we do the same or differently?

(Well at least I would have a head start with an 80 page Risk Assessment!)

Joking aside- wellbeing is the most important aspect that we need to take care of ourselves, our families (really our own families) and wider, our school families and our children. Who knows what damage this situation has created long term?

We need to be able to spot the signs of stress and distress early, be able to signpost to professional organisations and help, or have developed a range of strategies and solutions ourselves.

We need to rest, recuperate and recharge our batteries over the summer to be able to cope with what happens next. And cope we will, as primary always does.

Primary school leaders and YOU should be holding your head up, proud.

Well done for all that you have achieved in very challenging and stressful circumstances, and you are still standing!

So, I am standing up to salute you all for your enormous energy, dedication and resilience.

Well done!

We may not have completed 100 laps round our own garden and been publically recognised with a knighthood for our efforts BUT everyone has done their bit and we should all be justly proud of ourselves and each other. We did it for our children and our school communities.

Put your feet up, enjoy the sun and have a well-earned rest this summer.

Cheers!