

ESSEX PRIMARY HEADTEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 9 JUNE 2020 from 10.00 am -11.30 am

The meeting was held virtually, as a conference call, as a result of the lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic.

* indicates attendance

Distribution *Lois Ashforth Dengie

*George Athanasiou West Vice-Chair *Dawn Baker Chelmsford West *Sue Bardetti Tendring South

*Nicky Barrand South Chair/Basildon East & Pitsea

*Isobel Barron West Chair

*Liz Bartholomew Harwich and Dovercourt

*Liz Benjeddi Billericay *Heidi Blakeley Wickford

*Amanda Buckland-Garnett South Woodham Ferrers

*John Clements Uttlesford South

*Anna Conley Witham

*Dawn Dack Mid Chair/Maldon *Ceri Daniels Colchester South

*Emma Dawson Castle Point and Benfleet

*Richard Green South Vice-Chair

Mary Jo Hall West Treasurer/Uttlesford North

*Nick Hutchings EPHA Vice-Chair/North East Chair/ Colchester West

*Pam Langmead EPHA Professional Officer/County Treasurer

Julie Lorkins Epping Forest Rural

*Ian MacDonald Tendring Mid *Kate Mills Braintree

*Nicola Morgan-Soane Mid Vice-Chair/ Chelmsford South

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Hayley O'Dea Rochford
*Donna Parker Tendring North

*Paula Pemberton Colchester East

*Richard Potter North East Vice-Chair

*Harriet Phelps-Knights EPHA Chair

*Amanda Reid Chelmsford North
*Angela Russell Basildon West
*Gary Soars Rayleigh

*Karen Tucker Canvey Island
Jonathan Tye Harlow

Vacancy Epping Forest South

Vacancy Halstead Vacancy Brentwood

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WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Action

Harriet Phelps-Knights (EPHA Chair) welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from:

Hayley O'Dea Rochford

Jenni Evans Warley Primary, Brentwood

Matt O'Grady West Horndon Primary, Brentwood

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS (7 MAY AND 19 MAY 2020)

a) The minutes of the meeting on 7th May were approved.

The following matter arising was discussed:

It was noted that the vacancies on the EPHA Executive (Halstead, Brentwood and Epping Forest South) will be addressed at the area AGMs, which this term will be conducted by email. (Minute 1 refers)

b) The minutes of the meeting on 19th May were approved.

The following matters arising were discussed:

i) Joint statement from Eastern Region (Minute 2 refers)

It was noted that the Executive had discussed the suggestion, which came from the MAT2MAT group, of crafting a joint statement from the Eastern Region education system. It was agreed that the statement was unlikely to be accepted by all schools, and might commit headteachers to undertake actions that they did not agree with, such as sharing their risk assessment with Union representatives. The Professional Officer noted that this decision had been shared with the LA and ASHE (at the regular conference call). A number of CEOs (including Tim Coulson, who initiated the statement) did publish a statement of principles.

ii) School transport (Minute 4 refers)

The Professional Officer noted that there are ongoing discussions about home to school transport, and it has been acknowledged by ECC and nationally that this is going to be an increasing problem as more and more schools reopen (particularly special and secondary schools). The Professional Officer raised the issue at the Children's Partnership Board meeting and a suggestion was made that Community Transport, which is funded by ECC but is currently not being used due to the shielding of elderly and vulnerable groups, might be deployed to support schools; Clare Kershaw is investigating this further.

iii)Webcast with Matthew Butler (Minute 4e refers)

The Professional Officer confirmed that she has been in touch with Matt Butler, consultant at Addenbrooke's hospital, about the possibility of running a webcast for Essex primary schools. Following the meeting, it was confirmed that the date of the webcast will be Wednesday 24th June, from 1.30 – 2.30 pm. The Professional Officer will send out a Zoom invitation to Essex primary heads.

Professional Officer

iv) Police contact with Essex schools (Minute 4f refers)

The Professional Officer confirmed that she had raised this issue with Clare Kershaw,



and also circulated information about how best to communicate with Essex schools to members of the Violence and Vulnerability Round Table (which include the police and other partner organisations).

The Professional Officer noted that whilst there has been a decrease in some types of crime in Essex, county lines and trafficking are continuing and increasing. She reminded the Executive that there are 33 police officers working within the Youth Crime team, and a further 6 working on gang-related activity. Police Community Support Officers are continuing to work with local schools and a number of the Executive members have had contact from their PCSO.

The EPHA Chair thanked the Professional Officer for her continued work on behalf of the Association, including representing primary heads at numerous meetings.

3. DISCUSSION – SCHOOL EXPERIENCES OF REOPENING

Headteachers discussed their experience of reopening schools since the 1st June. This has varied widely across the county.

NB noted that there has been very low take up of available places so far, with only about 5% of eligible children returning to school. She is considering opening to Year 2 and Year 5, to ensure that they get some face to face time before the end of the summer term. She has opened up to Reception and Year 1, but not Year 6.

DB, CEO of two schools, has not yet expanded provision – they are due to start on 15th June. This will not include nursery as that would need 5 teachers to support the classes. They are currently considering inviting Year 1 in the morning and Year 6 in the afternoon, but that may be revised. Reception children are in school from 9.30 am – 2.30 pm.

AR, headteacher of an infant school, noted that she is particularly concerned about the transition of Year 2 pupils to junior school. The group discussed the possibility of offering places to different year groups and stopping provision for the "eligible" year groups in order to do this. It was **AGREED** that this question would be raised with Clare Kershaw in the follow up meeting.

Chair/PO

JC made the point that headteachers should exercise their authority and understanding of what is best for their pupils to make decisions about provision for the rest of the term. Many primary and junior schools are particularly concerned about Year 5 pupils and how much education and support they will have lost by the time they return to school.

The Executive discussed whether exams and assessments will be reinstated next year, and the challenges that schools and pupils will face if that is the situation.

The Executive also discussed the problem, and the contradictory guidance from DfE, about before and after-school clubs. The DfE is advising that on-site provision can reopen, but that pupils should then remain in the same group for the school day. However, a headteacher pointed out that external sports clubs are now re-opening and

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pupils are attending those, defeating the object of remaining in just one group and at home. It was **AGREED** that this issue would be raised with Clare Kershaw in the follow up meeting.

Chair/PO

ED noted that her MAT schools are mainly opening part time, and can expand provision if needed. Accommodating the key worker/vulnerable children is the key challenge, particularly if schools are being asked to expand those groups by parents who are only now sending their children to school.

The Professional Officer reminded heads of the need to stay open for key workers/vulnerable children full time, even if they are opening on a part-time basis for other year groups.

HO was unable to attend the meeting, but shared her comments by email: Our two schools are now open full time to key worker pupils and pupils in Reception and Year 1. We didn't have room for Year 6 but are hoping to sort something out before the end of the term. We took last Monday and Tuesday to train all of our staff and reopened Wednesday to Key Worker pupils. We then have around half of our Reception and Year 1 pupils returning today. We planned for the maximum number of children to return full time and this has really helped now as we can increase numbers if confidence and demand grow. We are still getting daily enquiries about places. We also have some schools in Rochford who have delayed reopening to 15 June in line with the information in the letter received from the NAHT rep last week.

Feedback to the DfE would be: we need plenty of notice to get things in place – please can we have guidance documents finalised and ready to go before announcements are made. We spent hours planning and then documents came out later that impacted what we had already done. We are thinking now about what's going to happen from September and when we will be given notice and time to plan this properly? Clare's updates have been really useful and very well received.

Some schools are also facing the challenges caused by nursery opening; if they are only able to offer a reduced number of hours, some parents are wanting to take their child to an alternative childcare provider, such as a childminder, as they argue they are entitled to 30 hours of provision a week. In that case the parent was asking the school to reimburse the funding for the additional hours that they were unable to provide, as they wished to use the fund to pay a childminder. It was **AGREED** that this issue would be raised with Clare Kershaw in the follow up meeting.

Chair/PO

Headteachers discussed the challenge caused by the need to avoid mixing staff within the school environment; this makes it difficult to plan provision and is very unnatural for staff, who are used to working collaboratively. The Professional Officer stressed the importance of this, however, to avoid the possibility of all staff having to isolate if there is a positive Covid-19 case, resulting in the need to close the school.

4. SECONDARY SCHOOL TRANSITION

Headteachers explained that they are experiencing very varied transition arrangements with local secondaries. In a number of cases primaries are being asked to give a huge amount of paper-based information about Year 6 pupils, including data, assessment,



information about social groups and so on. This is creating more work for school staff, as normally some of this information would be shared through conversations and meetings with secondary school staff.

A number of secondaries did offer on-site Year 6 visits, but have withdrawn these following the publication of the DfE guidance saying that this should not happen.

SB noted that her school has had no direct contact from the secondary school apart from requests for paperwork and forms. She argued that parents are becoming anxious and really want some type of transition so that their children will have some familiarity with the secondary school before they start in September. She noted that pupils were expecting to go to secondaries for visits this term and as this isn't happening they are not attending school at all.

Other comments (on the chat) included:

We have been told first day back at local high school will be transition day for new year 7 - no one else in. But that's it.

The senior schools seem to be doing zoom chats with the children but a bit vague. They are asking for lots of data. We are organising google meets for a member of the senior schools to answer questions from Y6 who are at home and in school in the coming weeks.

We have sent the usual data, but nothing else. Promised virtual tours etc, but nothing has actually happened yet.

Only a zoom call with the head of year! A virtual tour for pupils at home and usual data sheet. Very disappointed. It is all the pupils in school are talking about. Do not even know what a form tutor is, where the toilets are etc. Feel very sorry for them. They had not even realised some pupils are at home. We have 13 out of 60 pupils in.

I have heard from all of my secondary schools saying they are trying to think about transition offers but no arrangements yet. We have been asked for safeguarding information from some of them and we have given general information to our main feeder school.

It would be good to have a data sheet which was common to all - tricky to manage all the different expectations and forms.

The Executive questioned whether all secondary schools were planning virtual tours, meeting new teachers online etc, in line with DfE guidance.

There were some examples of good and helpful practice from secondaries:

- One was emailing weekly activities for Year 6 pupils.
- Hylands are considering some form of summer school and then not starting the children in Y7 until later in September.
- Woodham schools are working well with the secondary. Usual handover took place virtually. Difficulty is mixing bubbles from different primaries.
- HO emailed: We haven't had much contact with our secondaries electronic forms for teachers to return and a meeting between year 6 teachers and key secondary staff. Some schools have been chasing to make transition arrangements particularly for pupils with SEND and vulnerable pupils.
- One local secondary school closed their childcare provision for key workers which caused some issue with support staff returning to work. They were told that the



children didn't need childcare and some staff weren't happy with that or couldn't then extend their working hours.

It was **AGREED** that this issue would be raised with Clare Kershaw in the follow up meeting.

5. SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN WITH SEND

On the whole the feedback about SEND support was reasonably positive. GROW provision is beginning to reopen and there is a helpful and useful contact in North East (Rachel Bell).

However, another headteacher noted that the school has been told that the EP cannot come in to see a child until September. Even though they have offered to set up social distancing etc! The head commented: "This is too long. This is for an ECHP which is going through!"

6. SUMMER HOLIDAY PERIOD

The EPHA Executive were unanimously against the possibility of schools being asked to stay open in the summer holidays. One headteacher pointed out that they needed to have essential work done, and this could only take place during the holiday period. Everyone agreed that staff, and headteachers in particular, have not had a break since February half term and the constant pressure and demands, with no break, are taking their toll. It was agreed that even if staff are not expected to be on site (for example, if the school is asked to host a summer school) the headteacher is still "on duty" and will be unable to take a break. One head said he would be prepared to go to the high court to oppose having to open in the break.

HO emailed to say:

We would want to know what the purpose of remaining open would be? If it is childcare then the responsibility for this could now pass to alternative providers via the LA to give our leaders a break.

Our site and admin and leadership teams have worked through, without a break, with an increased workload and I am concerned about their wellbeing – we also owe staff annual leave.

The workload for school leaders during the closure period and in planning for the reopening, and the stress that this responsibility has given, have been immense and they need a break. The personal responsibility that we have felt for the wellbeing of our staff, children and families has been really tough to switch off from – it still is. Our heads are only able to have a real break when they know that their schools are fully closed as otherwise they are permanently on call.

We are concerned that the DfE will suddenly announce that schools will be open, regardless of the views that we have shared. Our heads will then feel morally compelled to try to make it happen and will be concerned that not opening will make them look as though they either don't care or are thinking about their own holiday above the education and welfare of their pupils, which obviously couldn't be further from the truth. I think that there is a significant risk to the wellbeing of staff if this is announced. I also think it will impact on retention of school leaders going forwards.



The Professional Officer asked the Executive to give their view on three different scenarios that might be proposed by the DfE:

- 1. Total closure of schools unanimous agreement
- 2. Critical workers only everyone against, and it was argued that as the national emergency is not now at peak critical workers should be able to organise shifts and childcare as they normally would in the holiday period.
- 3. Summer schools/clubs opening on school sites not reasonable or viable for primary schools. It was suggested that secondary schools could be asked to host local provision.

It was noted that, since the reopening of schools there has been a lot of negativity in the national press, complaining that schools are failing to deliver the DfE promises. The Professional Officer agreed, but noted that this has not been the view that she has heard from Essex LA and partner organisations who have all expressed their admiration and concern for primary schools.

7. THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION

The Professional Officer explained that Helen Lincoln, Executive Director for Children and Families, and Clare Kershaw are keen to take the initiative and contribute to a national debate about the future of education. At a time when normal education, accountability, assessment and testing has paused, there is a feeling that the educational establishment should be reviewing and considering the purpose of education and how it should be delivered in the future.

IB noted that most primary heads share her view that schools should be offering a well-rounded education, and that the wholly knowledge-based curriculum is a political stance. She felt that one result of the pandemic could be a shift towards increased home learning; this may be difficult to regulate and achieve, but should be part of the discussion and planning.

NB suggested that primary school children could repeat this year; this would free up secondaries to develop citizenship for their pupils. This creates a practical problem, the 4 year olds waiting to enter school, but it was argued that this could be an opportunity to alter the current approach in this country which starts formal learning at a very young age.

IM suggested that, rather than re-doing a year, the curriculum should be reviewed and changed, so that each year is not dependent on reaching (arbitrary) stages of knowledge acquisition.

The Executive discussed when and whether exams and other accountability, including Ofsted, should be reintroduced, and in what format. It was accepted that accountability is essential, but this might be in the form of peer to peer review, for example.

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The Executive members **AGREED** that they wanted to be fully involved in future discussions with the Local Authority about the future of education.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS



- i) A Mid headteacher raised the matter of a social worker who attended a meeting with a child at her infant school wearing full PPE. This had caused a lot of fear and upset with children. The Professional Officer noted that she had asked partner organisations to produce protocols around PPE, including acknowledging the guidance that schools are being asked to follow. It was **AGREED** that this issue would be raised with Clare Kershaw in the follow up meeting.
- ii) The Executive discussed the expectations around the start of the autumn term and agreed that a strong steer from the Local Authority about the first few weeks back would be helpful. The general feeling was that the DfE was unlikely to give clear or rational guidance, so support from the LA would be essential.
- iii) One headteacher raised the issue of schools budgets, and said that her school will lose a considerable amount of anticipated funding due to the loss of lettings. Another headteacher noted concerns about the receipt of funding for free school meals. One head suggested moving to a 2-year budget cycle to help strategic planning.
- iv) NB noted that the School Comms on 4th June signposted resources in relation to shielding, including video clips. However, her school nurse was unaware of these resources.
- v) The Executive discussed the problem of children who are being admitted mid-year, but who are not in year groups that are eligible for a place at their new school. This is presenting a challenge to the new school who is expected to undertake welfare checks on a child and family who they have never met. It was **AGREED** that this issue would be raised with Clare Kershaw in the follow up meeting.
- v) IM asked who is monitoring the local R-rate and who will take the decision if this impacts on the local area. The Professional Officer noted that her understanding is that this responsibility, along with "test and trace" will, at some point, be delegated from central government to regional Public Health areas, and so any decision to lockdown areas in the country is likely to be made locally.
- vi) Headteachers discussed the DfE survey, including the workload it places on schools, and questioned whether it is mandatory or not. A number of headteachers stated that they are not filling in the survey, because it is onerous and impossible to complete accurately.
- vii) JC suggested that the plural of "syllabus" (questioned earlier by the Professional Officer) should forthwith be known as SillyBubble.

9. SUMMARY OF ISSUES TO RAISE AT THE FOLLOW-UP MEETING WITH CLARE KERSHAW

The following issues would be raised at the follow up meeting with Clare Kershaw, the EPHA Chair and the Professional Officer:

a) The possibility of offering places to different year groups before the end of the summer term and stopping provision for the "eligible" year groups in order to do this.



- **b)** The contradictory advice around pupils accessing more than one group, for before and after-school provision, and external clubs.
- c) The challenges caused by nursery opening; if they are only able to offer a reduced number of hours, some parents are wanting to take their child to an alternative childcare provider, such as a childminder, as they argue they are entitled to 30 hours of provision a week.
- d) Secondary school transition.
- e) Executive views on the future of education and their engagement in the debate.
- f) Use of PPE by Social Workers and other school visitors.
- g) Mid-year admissions.

10. NOTES FROM THE EPHA CHAIR AND PROFESSIONAL OFFICER'S FOLLOW UP MEETING WITH LOCAL AUTHORITY OFFICES (10/06/20)

3.00 pm - 4.45pm

In attendance: Clare Kershaw, Alex Abercrombie, Lisa Fergus, Harriet Phelps-Knights, Pam Langmead

Clare welcomed everyone to the meeting. She noted that the expanded opening of primary schools since 1st June has generally gone well, but the LA is receiving a number of parental complaints, mostly around schools that are not providing full time provision for the year groups that the DfE has indicated should return to school. She stressed, again, that the Local Authority will consider these complaints, but will support a school's reopening plans if they are backed by a robust risk assessment. The LAs first action is to contact the school directly to discuss the complaint and to ensure that the school has acted properly.

The EPHA Chair fed back the following issues that were raised at the EPHA Executive meeting:

i) School transport guidance (Minute 2bii above refers)

This related to a matter arising from the Executive meeting held on 19th May. It was agreed that the South Assistant Director and SEP had discussed the specific concerns raised by a headteacher of an enhanced provision and these had been resolved. More generally, CK advised that under public procurement rules, all contracts to transport operators have been paid by the Council. As more schools increase their provision, safe transport becomes a growing issue, particularly for children with special and additional needs. The request is that, in the first instance, the school liaises with their usual transport operator to manage the changing demands. If that fails to resolve individual cases, the school should contact School Comms for guidance. An emergency transport fund has been established, and transport should not be a barrier for children with SEND returning to school. CK **AGREED** to republish the guidance on PPE and cleaning in school transport vehicles.

CK



General guidance on the use of public transport has been produced by the government, but it is not specific to schools. Young children are exempt from wearing masks, but the age limits are not specified. It may be possible that, in future, pupils that rely on public transport (mainly secondary) may need to access face masks/coverings from their schools.

ii) External sports clubs and the integrity of the school "bubble" (Minute 3 above refers)

There continues to be confusion and questioning around social distancing between
groups in schools. CK explained the guidance around external sports clubs; these should
not compromise the integrity of the school "bubble". There is clear guidance about
some sports clubs: they can now re-establish training groups of up to 6 participants,
which must retain 2m social distancing. They are not allowed to play games, but may,
for example, pass a football between players.

In schools, the assumption is that a "bubble" or protected group cannot maintain social distancing in the same way, hence the requirement not to cross or mix these groups. CK stressed that schools can only be expected to maintain, monitor and manage their own protective measures, and cannot be control what is happening outside school.

iii) Nursery funding (Minute 3 above refers)

We asked that if a school is only able to offer partial provision in a nursery, thereby failing to provide the full 30 funded hours, is a parent entitled to receive a monetary refund so that they can purchase alternative childcare, such as with a childminder. It was noted that this has implications for funding, and also the integrity of the school nursery's "bubble". CK will confirm with Carolyn Terry (ECC lead for Early Years and Childcare), but her instinct is that schools do not have to refund parents for unused hours, even if the provision is currently unavailable. She noted that her understanding is that financial rules would not allow for funding to be redirected to parents as this is part of the contract with Local Authorities who manage funded childcare provision. CK agreed to follow this up.

We discussed the issue of parents accessing multiple childcare providers, and the problem of mixing groups of children.

LF noted that DfE advice to parents about accessing childcare is as follows:

To minimise contact between groups of children and staff, children should attend just one setting wherever possible and parents and carers should be encouraged to minimise as far as possible the number of education and childcare settings their child attends.

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/preparing-for-the-wider-opening-of-early-years-and-childcare-settings#Section8

iv) Mid-year admissions (Minute 8v above refers)

The issue of mid-year admissions was raised at the EPHA meeting; this has been a concern for a number of schools. The Admissions regulations and guidance have not changed during the Covid-19 pandemic, but schools are being asked to receive and take responsibility for children (and their families) who they have never met. This is of particular concern if a new pupil is in a year group that is not eligible to return to school. Undertaking welfare checks and providing home learning to these new children is difficult and unsatisfactory.

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СК



CK agreed that this was an issue, and noted that schools need to communicate effectively when a child moves; she suggested that both the former and the new school could continue to make welfare checks, and that if the child/family is known to social care those welfare checks should continue. She **AGREED** to talk to the Admissions Team to ask them to provide further guidance to support schools and would include guidance in the School Comms.

CK

v) Flexible re-opening to more year groups in the summer term

It was agreed that we are currently awaiting further guidance from the DfE about expanding provision for additional year groups, following their announcement that they do not now expect all pupils to return to primary schools for a month before the summer holidays.

Many headteachers are considering whether they could offer some time at school for key year groups, such as Year 5 and Year 2 (the latter particularly in infant schools). CK noted that her personal preference would be to enable every child to have some time in school, in order to conclude the year and possibly "meet the teacher" for the following year. However, any position from the LA will need to take into account the DfE guidance. Once that guidance is published, it is likely that schools will need to review their risk assessment in order to determine whether and how additional pupils can be accommodated. CK stated that it is essential that schools continue to offer effective home learning for those children who cannot attend school.

vi) Re-opening schools in September

HPK stressed the Executive position that headteachers want a strong steer from the Local Authority around re-opening in September. CK agreed that she will share thoughts and discussions in the next few weeks, but accepted that schools will need time to plan for the autumn term. She argued that, in order to offer any meaningful expanded provision, the current social distancing requirement of 2 metres will have to reduce. PL argued that the government will also have to drop the requirement for schools to provide childcare for key worker children, as this makes expanding provision for all children particularly complex, particularly in primary schools.

CK noted that the Unions are promoting a blended offer, with part-time provision at school and continued home learning. This will need to become consistent, and it was agreed that we need to get to a stage where education takes priority over childcare, as the core business of schools.

It was agreed that the Critical Worker list hasn't fundamentally changed, but that as parents return to work more are deciding that they are critical workers, giving schools the challenge of making decisions about their status. It was agreed that the definition of a critical worker should continue to be "someone whose job is critical to the Covid-19 emergency response".

vii) The future of education (Minute 7 above refers)

HPK fed back the preliminary thoughts of the Executive, including a strong view that the nature of education should change, there should be a comprehensive review of the content and purpose of the curriculum, and that Ofsted and SATs tests should be removed entirely or at least radically altered. The accountability of schools is essential, but could be done differently such as employing independent peer to peer review.

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She stressed that the EPHA Executive definitely wants to be involved in conversations about the future of education.

viii) Budgets and school funding (Minute 8iii refers)

Some schools are losing considerable amounts of income, for example through lettings, income from before and after-school clubs and so on. AA noted that the finance guidance is complex, and an update would be helpful. It was noted that providers or contractors should not be accessing school funds when they are already furloughing their staff (therefore accessing public funds twice over).

ix) Testing in schools

LF noted that a school in the South has just been informed that their staff and pupils will all be tested for Covid-19. This is not as a result of a positive case, and seems to be a spot-checking exercise. The school was contacted by Public Health England by email and a follow up phone call. There has been no mention of this happening in government or DfE announcements or guidance, and the LA was not informed that this would happen. We asked if the school was being offered support to undertake this exercise, and noted the challenge that this would present, particularly where staff and pupils are not attending school.

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Pam Langmead
EPHA Professional Officer

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