

Chairs report for MID EPHA June 2020 – Dawn Dack

Review of the year

I have held the post of MID EPHA Chair for this academic year and have seen the strangest time in my teaching career. However, I have been very impressed with the organisation and commitment of EPHA representatives in MID area throughout these unprecedented times and would like to thank these colleagues for attending the area and Executive meetings. Each area representative is passionate about sharing Headteacher views in your unique areas and situations. These colleagues complete the role in a voluntary basis giving a great deal of their precious time.

I would like to thank Vice Chair of MID, Nicola, who was planning to leave her role as Headteacher in July, but has agreed to stay on until December 2020! She has held the Vice Chair role for many years and has always offered very well balanced views for the best outcomes for all pupils and staff. I hope she enjoys being a mum at the school gates when it finally happens!

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! How things have changed and our roles!

Move forward 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!!!

Firstly, 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, along with the hundreds of plans that have had to be put in place to stay open to key workers and further open to other year groups. The amount of stress that was placed on individuals during this time, and how they coped, is a testament to how resilient we are as a group of people. Well done!

I have very little memory of anything else that we have all achieved this year – not a surprise, I guess! My curriculum plans have halted and the School Improvement plan for next year looks very different!

However, some things have remained constant, I would like to thank Pam for her amazing work delivering sessions in each cluster and briefing notes on new expectations, guidance and the excellent EPHA website throughout this academic year. This is the first area I look for up-to-date information and answers!

During the Covid lockdown, Pam has continued supporting Essex Headteachers at all the local authority conference calls nearly every day, keeping us up to date and putting forward headteachers views. I am sure you will join me in sending her many emails telling her how brilliant she is!

I would also like to thank Clare Kershaw, Director of Education, for her daily emails and support throughout this lockdown. Many Headteachers in other authorities have not had this regular contact and leadership.

The next academic year is clearly going to be different. There will be many demands on Headteachers and how they best deal with the expectations from DfE, Unions, 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. 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.

The MID 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.

It has been a pleasure to chair this group and represent you.

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

Dawn Dack
MID Chair