

Professional Officer Report for EPHA Annual General Meeting 2023

The 2022/23 school year saw life in Essex primary schools almost back to normal with far fewer cases of Covid, though the tail end of the pandemic continued to affect pupil attendance and staff sickness, along with the continuing need to focus on skills and knowledge that pupils had lost. The year continued to be exceptionally demanding for headteachers, and saw the new challenges brought about by industrial action, which is now, hopefully, resolved. Heads are also managing difficult complaints from parents, and an increasing number of suspensions and permanent exclusions. All of these issues take time and can often be very time-consuming.

EPHA takes the wellbeing of Essex primary, infant and junior heads very seriously and our aim is to support and add value through the work of the association; my role as Professional Officer is as busy as ever and, I hope, has added value for headteachers and their schools. We have responded to the increased number of complaints and exclusions by providing training and support, including all-day training from Tanya Callman (attended by about 220 headteachers and senior leaders) and also offering free training to governors. 300+ governors took advantage of the online training on exclusions, and around 120 attended the training on managing complaints. I have also delivered a number of in-person training sessions to groups of staff and governors, which has raised some income for EPHA.

The EPHA Colleague Supporter programme continues to support headteachers across the county. At the time of writing I am arranging Colleague Support for the new headteachers and heads of schools who have taken up posts this term – there are around 49 new heads and at least 30 of them are brand new to headship and/or Essex. Thank you to those serving headteachers who continue to give their time and expertise to the programme.

During the year we expanded the programme to offer support to any headteacher who wanted this, and also offered financial support to enable schools to free up leadership time, particularly in those schools where the headteacher has a significant teaching commitment. This has had a really positive impact on the wellbeing of heads, and their ability to cope with a huge workload. One headteacher told me that he was convinced that it had enabled his school to get through Ofsted successfully (having given him the time and space to update the website, school development plan and curriculum planning), and another simply said “Having that time simply changed everything!”.

The “Seven minute staff meetings” remain popular with headteachers and school leaders. Although they mainly focus on safeguarding issues, they also include topics such as data protection and Ofsted; recent subjects have included filtering and monitoring, a particular issue highlighted in the 2023 version of Keeping Children Safe in education. Last year KCSiE introduced the requirement for all new governors to undertake some form of safeguarding training, so that they understood their key role in safeguarding as leaders in their school. I wrote and recorded a presentation that headteachers could use with new and existing governors to introduce them to the topic, and I have updated and recorded a new version for the beginning of the autumn term 2023, along with updated safeguarding resources reflecting the new version of KCSiE.

I believe that EPHA offers real value when we can offer free resources that save individual headteachers time and energy, allowing them to focus on leading their schools effectively. As part of that, the headteacher briefings continue to be an important of my role, taking up lots of time in the first few weeks of each term, delivered as a mix of online or in-person meetings, depending on

the preference of each partnership. I am delivering the briefings to 27 clusters across the county, plus an “overspill” meeting for those who can’t attend a local meeting. I have calculated (very approximately) that about 360 headteachers across the county attend these briefings; that’s a lot of people wading their way through the “do-list” each term!

The Small Schools Support Group, formed in March 2022, has gone from strength to strength and offers small school headteachers support, information and resources, such as paid-for membership of NASS (National Association of Small Schools) and also access to FundEd. (We have recently extended the offer of membership of this useful resource to all EPHA schools.) The Small Schools Support Group comprised of around 60 headteachers in schools with fewer than 120 pupils. We hold two meetings a term, and are running our second conference in October, following a very successful event last year. The meetings focus on the particular challenges that small schools face, but we also aim to celebrate the positive aspect of these schools.

Headteacher wellbeing continues to be one of EPHA’s key priorities and we have subsidised a number of headteachers enabling them to take up coaching, counselling, supervision and focused programmes such as the HeartHealth programme delivered by Pursuit Wellbeing.

Our annual conferences for Headteachers and Deputies continue to be very popular and the conference in March was extremely well attended – I was so pleased to be back after a gap of four years due to Covid.

I attend numerous meetings on behalf of EPHA, as detailed in my termly report to the Executive. In addition to attendance at those meetings, my work for the Association has included:

- Information, emails and communications with all headteachers;
- Responding to queries and actions from the Executive, ECC, other association officers, interested companies;
- Individual support for headteachers when issues arise;
- Identifying and supporting new headteachers;
- Managing the Colleague Supporter programme and capacity support opportunities;
- Termly briefings to headteacher groups
- Managing the Small Schools Support Group, running those meetings, planning the annual conferences;
- Writing and delivering training to governors;
- Planning and organising Deputy headteacher conference and WEPHA conference;
- Planning the Headteacher conference;
- Updating support materials for schools, including statutory policy lists, website checklists, and the Support Directory;
- Organisation and management of the area meetings in the spring and summer terms;
- Managing requests for headteacher wellbeing support;
- Managing the EPHA finances: paying claims and invoices (including from Colleague Supporters), supporting area treasurers, producing reports, paying in cheques;
- Updating EPHA records and website;
- Other tasks as required.

As ever, it is a great privilege to work for and support primary-phase headteachers in Essex and I look forward to another busy year in 2023/24.

Pam Langmead, EPHA Professional Officer, October 2023