

LA /ESSEX PRIMARY HEADS' ASSOCIATION WEST AREA

WEDNESDAY 4 MARCH 2026

MEETING SUMMARY: ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Agendas and minutes for these meetings available at www.essexprimaryheads.co.uk

Attendance List

DISTRICT AND EPHA AGENDA (a.m.)
(Notes below)
Chris Jarman, Chair

Welcome to the following Headteachers:
Nicki James Sheering CE Primary (Interim Headteacher)

Farewell to the following headteachers:
Julia Ferguson Epping Upland Primary
Andrew Price Manuden Primary

ARU teacher training programme
Essex Road Safety Education
WEPHA meeting
HR update

Dr Leanne Gray
Eleni Kyriacou and Naomi Woodruff
Chris Jarman
Nicki Harris, Juniper HR

AREA AGENDA

LA updates on current priorities including:

- | | | |
|---------|---------------------------------------|--|
| p 1-8 | • Director's LA updates | Clare Kershaw |
| p 9-12 | • South Year 6 – 7 transition project | Mat Harper, Maggie Elfenich and Lorraine Ramet |
| p 12-13 | • Year of Opportunity | Gareth Honeyford |
| p 13-14 | • Quadrant update | Nicola Woolf and Deb Bower |
| p 15-16 | • POWER update | Jethro Bogdanov and Gary Newell |

p 16 **Key dates**

WEST headteacher meetings 2026/27

Wednesday 24 June 2026
Wednesday 4 November 2026
Wednesday 10 March 2027
Wednesday 23 June 2027

WEPHA conferences – Manor of Groves

Friday 15 May 2026 – guest presenter, Jason Buckley
Friday 25 September 2026
Friday 29 January 2027
Friday 14 May 2027

Headteachers' Annual Conference 2026

Friday 20 March 2026 Chelmsford City Race Course

Deputy Headteachers' Annual Conference 2026

Friday 9 October 2026 Colchester Football Stadium

Small Schools Annual Conference 2026

Wednesday 14 October 2026 The Lion Inn, Boreham

*Page numbers refer to the full minutes (posted on the EPHA website) of the Spring term Area meetings with LA Officers and Headteachers.

LA /ESSEX PRIMARY HEADS' ASSOCIATION WEST AREA
DISTRICT AND AREA MEETING
WEDNESDAY 4 MARCH 2026
ATTENDANCE

Present

Gina Bailey	William Martin Schools
Emily Bartram	Radwinter CE Primary
Nikki Batt	Moreton CE Primary
Vicky Childs	Roseacres Primary
Sarah Cowley	Henry Moore Primary
Casey Cox	St James CE Primary
Caroline Crompton	Thaxted Primary
Michael Doughty	Milwards Primary
Lisa Gibbs	Leverton Primary
Claire Jackman	Great Easton Primary
Chris Jarmain	St Mary's CE Primary/West Chair
Chris Jarvis	Churchgate CE Primary
Claire Kearney	Dunmow St Mary's Primary
Anne-Marie Kendal	St Luke's Catholic Primary
Patrick Kenney	St John Fisher CPS
Alison Kerrell	Holy Cross Catholic Primary

LA Officers

Clare Kershaw	Director of Education
Nicola Woolf	Assistant Director West
Emma Jordan	Education Manager - West
Jo Barclay	Education Safeguarding
Debs Bower	ECC Senior IP
PJ Prince	ECC SEP
Sarah Foster	ECC SEP
Sally Allan	ECC
Jim Fotopoulou	ECC
Gareth Honeyford	ECC

Lucy Hays	Stebbing Primary
Katie Henson	St Andrew's North Weald
Christine Peden	Pear Tree Mead Primary
Teresa Phillips	Thomas Willingale School
Andrew Price	Manuden Primary
Colin Raraty	Rodings Primary
David Rogers	Bentfield Primary
Helen Russell	Chipping Ongar Primary
Linda Todd	Elsenham CE Primary
Kevin Watts	Great Dunmow Primary

In Attendance

Pam Langmead	EPHA Professional Officer
Joshua Chesterman	Manuden Primary
Lindsay Smith	Radwinter CE Primary
Leanne Gray	ARU
Eleni Kyriacou	Essex Road Safety Team
Naomi Woodruff	Essex Road Safety Team
Jethro Bogdanov	POWER
Nicki Harris	Juniper HR
Mat Harper	Beauchamps School
Maggie Elfenich	Grange Primary
Lorraine Ramet	Wickford Primary

Apologies

Dale Bateman	Coopersale & Theydon Garnon Primary
Marne Reynecke-Raybould	Ashdon Primary

Note: If your attendance or apologies have not been noted please contact the EPHA Professional Officer at pam@langmead.me.uk for amendment.

WEST EPHA AREA MEETING MINUTES 4 MARCH 2026

1. WELCOME

Chris Jarman, the West Area Chair, welcomed headteachers to the meeting.

Welcome to the following Headteachers:

Nicki James Sheering CE Primary (Interim Headteacher)

Farewell to the following headteachers:

Julia Ferguson Epping Upland Primary

Andrew Price Manuden Primary

Chris noted that Andrew is the current Vice-Chair for West, and thanked him for his commitment and contribution to EPHA. As Andrew is leaving Essex it will be necessary to appoint a new Vice-Chair at the area meeting in June.

If you are leaving please make use of the EPHA new heads' checklist, and complete it for your successor.

This is available on the EPHA website at

<https://essexprimaryheads.co.uk/info-and-documents/good-practice/>

2. TEACHER TRAINING AT ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

Dr Leanne Gray, Associate Professor and Lead for Initial Teacher Training at Chelmsford ARU, was welcomed to the meeting. She explained that ARU now offer a BEd (Hons) Primary Education with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS).

ARU was accredited to deliver QTS in 2022, and offers a 3-year undergraduate degree. This gives time to embed and develop theory and skills, and gives a Qualified Teacher Status Award. The first cohort of trainees started in September 2024.

ARU has campuses in Chelmsford, London, Cambridge and Peterborough, and many of the undergraduates live at home and aim to work locally.

The ARU ITT Partnership aims to develop highly reflective, ambitious and research-informed teachers who actively contribute to educational excellence in their communities.

Excellence in delivery	Excellence in partnership	Excellence in outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our provision and the provision of our trainees exceeds the quality benchmarks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality partnerships that reflect our values and ethos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employability for our graduates, achievement for their pupils, recruitment and retention in our region

School Placement

These take place in the spring term of each year, and total 125 days over the 3 year course. The next placement will begin on the 18th January to 19th March, 8 weeks in total.

ARU offers training and support for School Mentors, and there will be a School Mentor conference on Wednesday 2nd December, plus an online session.

The School Mentor meets with the trainee prior to the placement, and will be supported by Lead Mentor support from ARU. Leanne stressed that there is minimal paperwork, focusing in what actually makes a difference to the trainee.

ARU trainees

- There will be over 180 trainees on the BEd by September 2027:
Year 3 trainees 48
- Year 2 trainees 66
- Year 1 trainees 72 (to be confirmed)

Leanne noted that the course is becoming increasingly popular. Most do live locally, over 95% live at home and commute to university. All trainees are interviewed in person before being accepted on the course. Leanne noted that headteachers are very welcome to become part of the interview panels, and their experience and insight is invaluable.

How can headteachers and their schools get involved?

- Provide a placement for a BEd trainee in January 2027 (£350 payment per trainee)
- Contribute to the BEd applicant interview process
- Contribute to the taught programme
- Join ARU/s ITT Partnership Advisory Group

Leanne did note that registering may not guarantee a trainee (depending on the cohort), but the school will remain on the database for future possible placements.

Find out more www.aru.ac.uk/ittpartnerships
Contact Traintoteach@aru.ac.uk

3. ESSEX ROAD SAFETY EDUCATION

Eleni Kyriacou and Naomi Woodruff were welcomed to the meeting. Eleni explained that they are part of the Safer Essex roads partnership, working across the county. Their purpose is to deliver a funded and coordinated programme of road safety enforcement, education, training and publicity for Greater Essex. They focus on a wide range of road users

ROAD USERS

<p>Parents & Children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child car seats • At school • Teachers 	<p>Young Drivers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning to drive • Buying a car • Insurance 	<p>Cyclists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cycle training • Staying safe • Dealing with junctions 	<p>Motorcyclists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motorcycle training • Street Spirit 	<p>Business Drivers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for local businesses • Training
<p>Mature Drivers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Driving with Confidence • Advice and help 	<p>Drivers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning your journey • Vehicle checks 	<p>Pedestrians</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highway Code • Crossing the road • Distractions 	<p>E-scooters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Owning an e-scooter • Rental e-scooters 	<p>Horse Riders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equestrian safety • Reporting an incident

Their mission is for there to be **no road deaths in Greater Essex**. Eleni accepted that this was ambitious, the 2025 statistics for injury and death of children and young people involved in road collisions are:

357 children – aged 16 and under	132 pedestrians 56 cyclists 5 motorcyclists	68 serious injuries 2 deaths
706 young people – aged 16 – 24	482 drivers/riders 168 passengers 56 pedestrians	191 serious injuries 18 deaths

How can the team support schools?

They are excited to introduce a Road Safety Education offer

- Recognising the vital need for early intervention and prevention to teach and safeguard the future of our children and young people
- Aiming to keep children and young people safe through their early years as pedestrians, passengers and as they become new drivers and riders

They offer a menu of interventions, all of which are free. Road Safety Education team are DBS checked and trained to deliver interventions. These support the statutory RSHE/PSHE curriculum from September 2026 to cover recognising risk and keep safe around roads, railways, including level crossings

Road Safety Menu of Interventions

- Road Safety Education teams are trained to deliver interventions and are DBS checked
- Interventions support the statutory RSHE/PSHE curriculum from September 2026 to cover How to recognise risk and keep safe around roads, railways, including level crossings

Age group	Content	Duration
EYF8 (Early Years Foundation Stage)	Interactive talk introducing road safety and key vocabulary for children which parent/carers are invited to attend. This session focuses on the importance of road safety and simple rules to follow as pedestrians.	15-minute talk with parent/carers available to attend, joined by the children for the remaining 30 minutes
Year 5	Pedestrian training for Year 5 students as they begin to make more independent journeys. We aim to equip students with knowledge of important road features, safe crossing checks and tools to keep themselves safe. Practical route walks are risk assessed and PPE is provided.	40-minute classroom session plus a supervised 15-20-minute walk of up to eleven children for putting into practise key learning points
School Speed Watch	Interactive talk with children enhancing awareness of speed and building confidence to be able to discuss the role associated with speeding. Practical practice sessions are risk assessed and PPE provided. Your school will be contacted if you are in a local area.	A 1 hour interactive session followed by groups of children being given the opportunity to see a police officer and a member of the Road Safety Education team using a speed camera and talking to drivers caught speeding
Year 7 Theatre In Education	Highly engaging, multi-media theatre event (provides key road safety messages to Year 7 students. Key messages include how to remain safe near roads by not being distracted as pedestrians.	30-minute performance followed by a 30-minute interactive workshop
Year 9 Theatre In Education	Tired Hacks session tackles the risks most relevant to young people including passenger and pedestrian awareness, distractions, peer influence, and the importance of making positive, responsible choices.	1 hour workshop that blends powerful short film with interactive discussion for whole year groups
Year 11 Theatre In Education	This highly engaging, multi-media theatre event (provides key road safety messages to Year 11 students. Key messages include how to remain safe as a new driver and how to be a responsible passenger.	30-minute performance followed by a 30-minute interactive workshop

SAFERESSEX
roads partners

Early Years

Interactive talk introducing road safety and key vocabulary for children which parent/carers are invited to attend.

This session focuses on the importance of road safety and simple rules to follow as pedestrians.

15-minute talk with parent/carers available to attend, joined by the children for the remaining 30 minutes

Year 5

Pedestrian training for Year 5 students as they begin to make more independent journeys.

We aim to equip students with knowledge of important road features, safe crossing checks and tools to keep themselves safe.

Forty-minute classroom session plus a supervised fifteen-to-twenty-minute walk of up to eleven children for putting into practise key learning points

School Speed Watch

Interactive talk with children enhancing awareness of speed and building confidence to be able to discuss the risks associated with speeding.

Groups of 10 children at a time join a Road Safety Technician and police officer to use a speed device to look at the speed of passing traffic.

Where appropriate and with support, children can ask the drivers pulled over for driving over the speed limit questions about the dangers and consequences of speeding.

Secondary School

Year 7 theatre in education focus on safe pedestrian behaviour.

Year 11 theatre in education focus on remaining safe as a new driver and how to be a responsible passenger.

Year 9 blends powerful short films with interactive discussion to focus on passenger and pedestrian awareness and responsible choices.

Colleges/Sixth forms

My Small Change: A one hour presentation covering the risks of speeding, distractions, not wearing a seatbelt, drink and drug driving. The session offers strategies and action planning tips to support compliance.

Roadster: A behaviour change programme based on research and psychology in pre-young driver safety (based on the successful Essex Risk Avert programme).

The intervention enables young people to identify and mitigate risks. Each of the four video-led sessions includes three short exercises

Eleni noted that the team is also developing a video for parents.

Getting in touch

The team aims to make contact via email with all schools with our Road Safety Education offer

General enquiries: SaferEssexRoads@essexhighways.org

Website: [Teachers - saferessexroads.org](http://Teachers-saferessexroads.org)

4. EPHA MEETING AND UPDATES

- a) Chris Jarman, the West Chair reminded headteachers that one of the EPHA priorities and concerns is how best to support and alleviate workload, stress and pressure. A number of suggestions will be developed, but key to headteacher wellbeing is the support of colleagues. Please make contact with other headteachers, particularly if you feel that they are struggling, and/or reach out to your EPHA representative and the Professional Officer, who can offer support and advice.

Chris reminded colleagues that he hosts a headteacher WhatsApp group and invited them to contact him if they would like to join the group. It has offered support and advice to West heads, and a growing number are finding this really useful. Please email Chris at head@st-maryscofe.essex.sch.uk if you would like to be added to the group.

b) **Ofsted support**

One of the EPHA priorities this year is to offer advice and support to Essex primary heads in relation to the renewed Ofsted framework. Around 220 heads have already benefited from training with Helen Youngman, an education adviser and Ofsted "specialist", and the Professional Officer confirmed that EPHA plans to offer a further date for training in the summer term.

In the meantime, Chris asked headteachers to discuss and suggest how EPHA could support them in relation to Ofsted. The following suggestions were made, and there were also reminders of how EPHA is already supporting heads:

It was argued that feedback from colleagues who have experienced an Ofsted inspection since November is helpful, but with a number of caveats: heads should try to avoid being too negative, and always recognise that every inspection is different, often depending on the approach of the Lead Inspector. It was agreed that information about case studies is particularly helpful as this is such a focus in inspection.

It is clear that there are expectations about how schools should be prepared for an inspection, and it was suggested that this could be a useful focus for training. The Professional Officer reminded heads that she has already produced an Ofsted checklist, setting out information that is needed before and during inspection. This checklist can be found at <https://essexprimaryheads.co.uk/files/ofsted-checklist-following-the-notification-phonecall-epha-january-2026.doc>

Headteachers noted that it had been helpful to hear directly from Peter Stonier, Senior HMI. The Professional Officer confirmed that he has promised to attend the headteacher meetings in June.

There is a great emphasis in inspection on knowing your pupils and, in particular, those who are vulnerable. It was stressed that schools should focus on disadvantaged pupils as well as those with SEND (and Looked After children) and be able to explain their story, and describe what the school is doing to support and educate those pupils.

There was a conversation about the role of governors in inspection. Feedback from one inspection described the governor interview as intense and long (90 minutes!) with the expectation from the Lead Inspector that all governors should have in depth knowledge of the school's priorities and development. It was advised that a good number of governors attend the meeting with the Lead, so that they can demonstrate their understanding of what is happening in the school. It appears that inspectors are particularly looking for examples of where governors have challenged the senior leadership, and Pam stressed the importance of including "challenge" in the minutes of meetings. The governor visit template is also a helpful way of demonstrating that governors ask challenging questions, and Pam suggested that all templates should include a question along the lines of "What are the barriers to learning and wellbeing for this child/group of children/cohort, and what is the school doing to address this?" A headteacher asked if a template for a Governor Visit form could be developed, and the Professional Officer **AGREED** to provide this. She also committed to writing and delivering online training for governors on the new framework.

Professional
Officer

Another suggestion for a workshop or training was focused on writing an effective and accurate SEF (Schools Evaluation Form). There is some evidence that some schools are too optimistic about their SEF outcomes in some areas. Headteachers were reminded that schools have to demonstrate a secure fit in every descriptor at "expected standard" before they can be considered for "strong standard" and failing to meet every descriptor will push a school into the grade below.

The Professional Officer reminded heads that EPHA is able to offer some capacity support, particularly to small schools, to release senior leaders and help them prepare for Ofsted. Anyone who feels they could benefit from this should contact Pam at pam@langmead.me.uk

c) **Children's Parliament and Positive Action Roadshow**

The Sir David Amess Children's Parliament is a national initiative designed to place children at the heart of democracy, giving them a meaningful voice in how society works and how decisions are made. Inspired by the lifelong vision of Sir David Amess, the programme enables primary-aged children to learn about Parliament, debate real issues and participate in democratic processes long before they reach voting age. The Children's Parliament is proposing a 90-minute, child-led takeover of the House of Commons chamber on a non-business day in October 2026. The proposed date will mark five years since the death of Sir David Amess and will stand as a living tribute to the values he championed: participation, debate, respect and democratic education.

A summary of the project can be found here [Summary UKCP Project](#).

Please also see the further information on the Children's Parliament <https://childrensparliament.uk/>.

Essex Primary schools are invited to get involved in the project, which will be supported by EPHA and four Headteacher Ambassadors across Essex:

South – Harriet Phelps-Knights – Janet Duke Primary

North East – Nicky Patrick – Spring Meadow Primary

West – Chris Jarmain – St Mary's CE Primary, Saffron Walden

Mid – Amanda Buckland-Garnett – Collingwood Primary

Positive Action Roadshow with Essex Police

This year the Positive Action Roadshow will be a community event supported by Essex Police and the Active Essex Foundation and sponsored by the Children's Parliament. The Virtual event will take place on the 29th and 30th of June.

More information to follow, including how your pupils can get involved with both projects.

d) The spring term EPHA newsletter was circulated to headteachers at the meeting -these can also be found on the EPHA website www.essexprimaryheads.co.uk.

e) Transition agreement with secondary schools

Headteachers were reminded that the Year 6 transition week will be during the week commencing 22nd June 2026, and they were asked not to book Year 6 events during this week. It has been agreed with ASHE that the transition week will always be the LAST full week in June each year. The transition template was circulated at the meeting; this has been reviewed by the EPHA Executive who decided that no changes should be made this year. The form should be sent out by secondary schools, either electronically or in paper form, at the beginning of the summer term, and information returned by May half term at the latest.

f) Conferences

Headteachers were reminded that Headteachers' conference will be held on Friday 20th March 2026 at Chelmsford City Race Course and next year's Deputy Headteachers' conference annual will be held on Friday 9th October 2026, at the Colchester Football Stadium. There are still some places available for the headteacher conference and heads were reminded to contact Pam if they want a place.

A reminder of other EPHA conferences during the year:

- Deputy Heads Conference – Friday 9 October 2026, Colchester Football Stadium
- Small Schools headteacher conference – Wednesday 14th October 2026, The Lion Inn

g) Free training for headteachers, staff and governors

Suspensions and permanent exclusions training for governors and staff – online – Wednesday 18th March, 4.00 pm – email Pam for link.

h) Restrictive Force guidance – 7-minute staff meeting and model policy

The Professional officer confirmed that she has written a 7-minute safeguarding staff meeting based on the new DfE Restrictive interventions guidance, coming in to force from 1st April. This highlights the main information and requirements in the document and will raise staff awareness and ensure that they understand the guidance, including the statutory requirement to record and report incidents. The slides and the handout can be found on the EPHA website at <https://essexprimaryheads.co.uk/info-and-documents/seven-minute-staff-meetings/>

At the termly headteacher briefings Pam has advised that schools should do three things in preparation for the new guidance:

- Adopt a policy, a requirement from 1st April. This can be part of your behaviour management policy or a standalone document. Pam confirmed that she will be send out the ECC model policy which has

been rewritten by Jo Barclay, in line with the new guidance, which you can choose to adopt if you wish.

- Raise staff awareness, e.g. by using the 7-minute staff meeting.
- Ensure that your recording and reporting systems are up to date and in line with the new statutory guidance. The model policy includes a template letter to parents, and a framework about what must be recorded and reported.

5. HR UPDATE

Nicki Harris, Policy Development Manager at Juniper HR, was welcome to the meeting. Chris noted that Nicki retires at Easter after 37 years supporting Essex schools, and she will be a huge loss to the education system. He stressed his thanks on behalf of the West heads to Nicki for her support, advice and experience that she has generously shared with Essex schools.

a) Dealing with complaints about staff

Nicki noted that she had recent discussion with the Professional Officer about the increasing number of complaints and how schools should manage a complaint about the conduct of a member of staff. She stressed that, rather than following the Complaints Policy, the school should be using Disciplinary/Dismissal Procedures or the Dealing with Allegations Against Adults Policy, and it should be made clear from outset to the complainant that the Complaints Policy is not being used. In these cases, governors will usually only become involved if there is a need to hold a Staff Disciplinary Committee meeting. If the complaint is about the headteacher then the Chair of Governors is involved, but under the disciplinary procedures.

The EPHA Professional Officer noted that she has updated the model Complaints Policy to include reference to the recently published Parent Guide to Complaints, and a mention of the use of Artificial Intelligence and Subject Access Requests. She agreed to circulate the model policies (separate ones for maintained schools and academies) following the meeting.

b) Teacher pay update

The Government evidence to the School Teachers Review Body, has proposed an increase of 6.5% over three years, weighted to the last year. No additional funding is proposed to support the pay rise.

c) **The Crime and Policing Bill will remove the exemption for DBS checks for supervised volunteers.** Nicki explained that, if this goes through, all supervised volunteers will have to have an enhanced check (as currently) with “barred” check.

Governors have DBS checks but not Barred List checks. One headteacher asked if there was a different requirement for Chairs of Governors, but it was confirmed that Keeping Children Safe in Education does not distinguish between Chairs and other governors.

Chairs of governors are required to have an enhanced DBS check in the same way as other governors; there is no separate “more enhanced” level for the chair, though there are some additional process requirements in certain settings.

Maintained schools

- All maintained school governors must have an enhanced DBS check under the Constitution Regulations (as amended in 2016).
- Governance itself is not a regulated activity, so a children’s barred list check is not usually required unless the governor (chair or otherwise) also undertakes regulated activity with children in another capacity.
- The statutory guidance (KCSIE) expects governing boards to ensure all governors have the relevant up-to-date enhanced DBS checks; it does not create a higher level specifically for the chair.

Academies and trusts

- Model articles and the independent school standards require enhanced DBS checks for members, trustees and local governors, again not distinguishing a “more enhanced” level for the chair.
- The key difference is procedural: for academy trusts, the chair of trustees’ enhanced DBS must be countersigned via the Secretary of State/DfE as a suitability check, but the underlying level of check is still an enhanced DBS, not a different or stronger product.

Nicki noted that there are a number of changes to employment law that are being introduced over the next couple of years. These include:

d) **ACAS Early Conciliation**

The ACAS Early Conciliation period is being doubled, which in turn lengthens the overall window for bringing many Employment Tribunal claims.

- From 1 December 2025, the maximum period for ACAS Early Conciliation increases from six weeks to twelve weeks for cases where ACAS is first notified on or after that date.
- As now, most claimants must go through ACAS Early Conciliation before they can submit an Employment Tribunal claim, and ACAS must issue a conciliation certificate before the tribunal will accept it.

Impact on tribunal time limits

- During Early Conciliation, the normal tribunal limitation period is “stopped”, and the final deadline is extended to reflect the length of the conciliation period, with at least one further month after the certificate.
- Because the Early Conciliation window can now last up to 12 weeks, the practical time in which a claimant can start a tribunal claim will often be significantly longer than under the old six-week maximum.

Linked change in 2026

- Separately, under the Employment Rights Act 2025, the standard time limit for bringing most Employment Tribunal claims is due to increase from three months to six months from October 2026, which will sit alongside the extended 12-week ACAS period.

Practical implications for employers

- Employers will have longer exposure to potential claims, may see older incidents still in time, and will need robust record-keeping to deal with disputes arising over an extended period.
- The policy aim is to reduce pressure on ACAS and the Tribunal system by giving more time to settle cases before litigation, but some commentators note it may also prolong uncertainty for employers in negotiations.

e) **Unqualified teachers**

The Children’s, Wellbeing and Schools Bill will prohibit the employment of unqualified teachers in all state-funded schools other than in certain prescribed roles, such as instructors, overseas trained and trainee teachers. HLTAs can still be used. Unqualified teachers who are currently employed will be exempt. It amends section 133 of the Education Act 2002 so that the existing QTS requirement for “specified work” in LA-maintained schools is extended to (specified) academies, bringing them into line with maintained and special schools.

The requirement is framed so that new teachers in primary and secondary state-funded schools must have QTS, or be working towards it, rather than banning all “unqualified teachers” outright.

The new QTS/induction requirements only apply to teachers who commence employment after the implementation date. This is likely to be introduced from January 2027.

f) **Strike action**

Nicki explained that the key change is that the Employment Rights Act 2025 repeals the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023 and removes the special “minimum service level” regime and related dismissal risks for workers who strike in certain public services.

What has been removed:

- The 2023 Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act allowed ministers to set minimum service levels in sectors like health, fire and rescue, education, transport, border security and nuclear decommissioning during strikes.
- Employers in those sectors could issue “work notices” naming individuals who had to work to meet the minimum level during a strike.
- If a union did not take “reasonable steps” to ensure compliance with a work notice, it could lose its immunity from being sued, and workers could lose their automatic protection from unfair dismissal while taking part in that strike.

The Employment Rights Act 2025 repeals the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023, so the minimum service level and work-notice framework no longer applies to strike action in the listed services.

As a result, employees taking part in lawful industrial action revert to the usual protections (for example, the standard unfair dismissal protections linked to lawful industrial action under the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992), rather than facing the additional dismissal risk created by the 2023 Act if they were named in a work notice and refused to work

g) Paternity leave entitlement

Paternity leave has become more flexible from April 2024, and it will become a **day-one** employment right (with extra flexibility around shared parental leave) under the Employment Rights Act 2025 from 2025/26.

Paternity leave becomes a **day-one right**: the previous requirement for 26 weeks’ continuous service before qualifying to take paternity leave is removed in the Employment Rights Act 1996.

Unpaid parental leave also becomes a day-one right (no 1-year service requirement).

h) Statutory sick pay (SSP)

Statutory sick pay is being expanded from April 2026 so that more staff qualify, it is payable earlier, and the way it is calculated changes.

- SSP becomes a **day-one** right: the three unpaid “waiting days” are abolished, so eligible employees receive SSP from their first full day of sickness instead of from day four.
- The Lower Earnings Limit is removed: all employees qualify for SSP regardless of how little they earn (so many part-time / low-hours staff who were previously excluded will now be eligible).
- SSP is set at the lower of 80% of an employee’s normal weekly earnings or the standard flat SSP rate (rather than just a single flat figure for everyone).
- These reforms are due to take effect from 6 April 2026 under the Employment Rights Act 2025 framework.

i) Harassment

From October 2026 the legal duty on employers tightens so that they must take **all** reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment, rather than just “reasonable steps”, and liability for third-party harassment is also extended.

- The existing proactive (anticipatory) duty under equality legislation currently requires employers to take “reasonable steps” to prevent sexual harassment of employees in the course of employment.
- From October 2026 that is upgraded so that employers must take “all reasonable steps”, raising the bar: an employer will need to be able to show there were no further realistic preventative steps it could reasonably have taken.

j) Third-party harassment from October 2026

- From the same date, employers will also become liable if their staff are harassed by third parties (for example pupils over 18, parents, contractors, visitors, customers or clients) in the course of employment, unless the employer can show it took all reasonable steps to prevent that harassment.
- This duty applies to all forms of harassment covered by equality law, not just sexual harassment, though the original focus of the reform is workplace sexual harassment

k) Informing employees of the right to join a trade union

From October 2026 employers will have a new legal duty to give workers a written statement telling them they have a right to join a trade union.

Nicki noted that this is already within the existing model contracts provided by Juniper.

l) Two tier code of practice for in-sourcing and out-sourcing services

The new law (October 2026) re-introduces and strengthens the “two-tier” protections so that, when public services are outsourced (or later brought back in-house), workers doing the same contract cannot be kept on significantly worse terms and conditions simply because they are direct hires of a contractor rather than ex-public-sector staff.

m) Unfair dismissal

The qualifying period for ordinary unfair dismissal is being reduced from two years’ continuous service to six months, with effect from 1 January 2027 (subject to the commencement regulations confirming that date).

- At present, most employees need 2 years’ continuous service to bring a standard unfair dismissal claim (day-one rights already exist for discrimination and “automatic” unfair dismissal reasons such as whistleblowing or trade union activity).
- Under the reforms agreed as part of the Employment Rights Act 2025 package, this 2-year period will be cut to **6 months’ service** for ordinary unfair dismissal claims.
- Government statements indicate that the intention is for the new six-month entitlement to apply from **1 January 2027**, so workers employed from around July 2026 will typically benefit as soon as they reach six months’ service

Nicki noted that Juniper HR is considering reducing the probation period for staff from 6 months to 3 months to avoid unfair dismissal claims; contracts for new staff will be introduced in June. She stressed that it is **essential** to follow probation procedures properly.

n) School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB)

The new School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB) is being created to provide a national, statutory forum to set minimum pay and conditions, and to advise on training and career progression, for school support staff in state-funded schools in England.

Core purpose

- To negotiate and recommend **minimum** national pay, terms and conditions for school support staff (for example teaching assistants, admin staff, catering, site staff), creating a contractual “floor” across maintained schools and academies.
- To advise the Secretary of State on training, professional development and career-progression frameworks for support staff so their roles and progression are better recognised.

Why it is being introduced

- Support staff currently sit in a patchwork of arrangements (NJC/local government scales, local academy scales, bespoke MAT structures), which has led to variation and perceived inequity in pay and progression for comparable roles.
- Re-establishing the SSSNB is intended to deliver greater consistency and fairness, give support staff a stronger sector-specific voice, and support recruitment, retention and standards in schools.

How it will work in practice

- The body will bring together employer representatives (local authorities, MATs, governing bodies), recognised unions (e.g. UNISON, GMB, Unite) and government/independent members.
- When agreements on minimum pay and conditions are ratified by the Secretary of State, they will be implemented through regulations and incorporated into individual contracts, without preventing schools or trusts from offering more favourable local terms

o) Changes to the support staff pay scale

For April 2026 there is no single, new statutory “School Support Staff pay scale” being imposed, but there are two key changes coming through the local-government (NJC) route that most LA schools and many academies still follow:

- From 1 April 2025: a 3.2% consolidated increase on all NJC pay points 2–43 and on all NJC allowances (this is already agreed and underpins 2025/26 support-staff pay).
- From 1 April 2026: spinal column point 2 on the NJC spine will be deleted, which in practice moves staff currently on SCP2 up to at least SCP3 and slightly reshapes the bottom of the scale.

Those are national NJC changes, not a separate schools-only award, but for most support staff in maintained schools they drive the April 2026 position unless you are on a different trust-specific scale.

Nicki was thanked again for attending the meeting, and Chris passed on warm wishes for a long and happy retirement. Nicki will be very much missed.

6. FUTURE DATES

WEST headteacher meetings 2026/27

Wednesday 24 June 2026

Wednesday 4 November 2026

Wednesday 10 March 2027

Wednesday 23 June 2027

WEPHA conferences – Manor of Groves

Friday 15 May 2026 – guest presenter, Jason Buckley

Friday 25 September 2026

Friday 29 January 2027

Friday 14 May 2027

Headteachers’ Annual Conference 2026

Friday 20 March 2026 Chelmsford City Race Course

Deputy Headteachers’ Annual Conference 2026

Friday 9 October 2026 Colchester Football Stadium

Small Schools Annual Conference 2026

Wednesday 14 October 2026 The Lion Inn, Boreham