

## ESSEX PRIMARY HEADS' ASSOCIATION

**SEND MEETING WITH LA OFFICERS AND NORTH EAST HEADTEACHERS AND STAFF**  
**MONDAY 25 SEPTEMBER 2017**  
**10.00 am – 12 noon**  
**Willow Brook Primary, Colchester**

### 1. IN ATTENDANCE

#### LA Officers

Clare Kershaw	Director of Education
Ralph Holloway	ECC Manager of SEN, Psychology & Assessment
Elaine White	Manager of SEN, Psychology and Assessment Services
Ruth Sturdy	Lead School Effectiveness Partner – Inclusion
Ros Somerville	Principal Educational Psychologist
Lyn Wright	North East Lead School Effectiveness Partner
Carolyn Cairns	STT Manager
Diana Kelly	STT Manager
Tony Sale	ECC Statutory Assessment Manager
Mike Mc?	ECC SAS
Shirley Mawer	Deputy Principal Educational Psychologist

#### Headteachers/school representatives

Liz Bartholomew	The Mayflower Primary
Vicky Bonner	Broomgrove Juniors
Alex Candler	Lexden Primary
Ruth Cornell	Kings Ford Infants
Belynda Fellow	St James CE Primary, Colchester
Kathryn Gilbert	Kirby Primary
Alison Grigg	Broomgrove Infants
Julia Hunt	Brightlingsea Infants and Juniors
Claire Holmes	Monkwick Infants
Justine Holmes	Kirby Primary
Nick Hutchings	Hamilton Primary
Kerry Malcolm	St Lawrence Primary, Rowhedge
Jacq Martin	Langenhoe Primary
David Milligan	Gosbecks Primary
Deb Knight	Spring Meadow Primary
Jo Newitt	Willow Brook Primary
Suzy Ryan	Fingringhoe Primary
Susan Shipp	Friars Grove Primary
Steven Turnbull	Hazelmere Infants

Joel Shaljean                      Essex Steps  
Helen Dudley Smith      Headteacher Round Table

### **Apologies**

Ryan Kendall                      Hamford Primary

## **2. CONTEXT**

At the headteacher meetings in June 2017 there was a preliminary discussion and review of SEND, including seeking feedback from headteachers about their experience of the Specialist Teacher Team, the Statutory Assessment Team and SEND support and provision in general. As the discussion was not concluded, it was agreed to schedule a dedicated meeting to continue the discussion. Clare reminded the attendees of the SEND capital investment programme, which must link with a review and whole service improvement. However, she recognises that schools are coping with existing challenges and need support now, as well as change in the future.

Clare Kershaw introduced the LA Officers attending the meeting. She asked for attendees to share their concerns as generically as possible (whilst using individual cases to illustrate their experiences). A meeting has already been held in the West of Essex, when many issues were raised by headteachers.

## **3. ISSUES RAISED AT THE MEETING**

### **Pressures on schools**

One headteacher noted that the support from many of the teams in the county is really valued. However, the most pressing issue for schools is the sheer number of children coming into schools – sometimes from other areas, and from a range of pre-schools – who have complex needs and require support. She noted that there is only a limited amount of IPRA funding available, and asked “how many lots of 13 ½ funding is it reasonable to expect a school to find? What is considered reasonable and viable?” A SENCo echoed this, noting that lots of children of all ages are moving out of London – in her school the SEN register has doubled in 18 months.

One headteacher argued passionately that there are many issues around the youngest children starting school, and he asked about the pre-school support and identification of need – from the early years team and, critically, from health. Children’s problems are simply not being picked up by 2 year old health checks any more.

He noted that schools need more space and more staff to cope with these children – and in many schools this is simply not an option. He asked what schools are meant to do when they can’t even keep children safe, never mind educating them?

Another headteacher agreed with his, noting that in his school there have just been 5 diagnoses of ADHD. He argued that there is insufficient transparency around what

support is available and what changes are being made.

### **Autism Spectrum Disorder**

One headteacher stressed that ASD needs more exploration and understanding. In 20 years she has never seen such a number of cases of children diagnosed with autism. Another key increase has been around anxiety behaviours. She noted that mainstream schools are not equipped to cope with the needs of these children – schools have classrooms, not numerous break out rooms or areas. The capacity and fullness of schools makes them a poor and inappropriate environment for these children. They need control over their space and may become distressed or violent when they don't have that. She argued that these children are entitled to full time, quality education and when this becomes impossible there is an impact on the whole family as well as the child themselves. Schools resort to permanent exclusion because they simply don't have the resources to offer the right environment and support. She also noted that in some cases these children are high achievers and so are not suitable for special schools.

It was felt that parents sometimes want or need to have a diagnosis – or label - of autism, in order to access support, but any diagnosis has serious implications for a school's resources. (This is rarely understood by parents.) Staff are trained about how to work with children, but the child's underlying needs are not being addressed and there is insufficient support from County.

### **Reaction to the Spend-to-Save capital investment**

One headteacher noted that there has been lots of discussion about the spend-to-save investment to provide provision in Essex for children/young people who are currently being sent out of county to meet their needs. He argued that this provision does not address the in-county problems in mainstream schools.

It was agreed that those children/young people who are currently in placements out of county won't be brought back into Essex as a matter of course. Clare noted that there are a number of reasons that children/young people are moved to out of county provision: they either have extremely complex needs that can't be met in Essex, or an existing placement breaks down.

The spend-to-save programme included the development of 4 new schools focusing on SSEMH and AHD. There is also the addition of some residential provision because, in some cases, the Local Authority can meet the educational, but not the care, need.

Part of the transformation programme is the development of ASD and ASC hubs, along with a development of the capacity for mainstream schools to host additional facilities, such as GROW.

Whilst it is accepted that building new special schools won't immediately offer places for all the children in mainstream schools with complex needs, the intention of the

spend-to-save investment is to reduce the current dependency on the High Needs Block funding (£23 million currently spend on out of county placements) to ensure that, in time, there is more money available to spend on schools within the county.

Part of the review and transformation is a need to achieve more and better out-reach working with Special Schools – improving the access from mainstream schools to their expertise, and upskilling staff in both sector.

Clare noted that the Council is in the process of bidding for additional funding from the School Improvement Grant to focus on disadvantaged and pupils with additional needs.

During the discussion, Clare suggested that there needed to be a **mainstream schools strategy** to run alongside the capital programme.

### **Alternative Provision**

Clare suggested that in the county we probably place the most disadvantaged pupils in the least appropriate settings in the county (in alternative provision) – although these are led well. If a child is permanently excluded there may not be a place within a PRU and the County has to find alternative provision, often at huge cost and with great difficulty.

Part of the capital programme is the establishment of a Mid-Essex PRU, plus increased GROW provision.

One headteacher noted that there doesn't seem to be a consistent or transparent system of referral to a PRU – this simply seems to be a matter of luck, or timing, or “who you know”. There also doesn't seem to be a waiting list.

It was noted that some pupils stay in Pupil Referral Units for years and years – highly questionable whether this is a good outcome for them, but also blocks referrals for other children. It was accepted that fundamental concerns of the LA in respect of PRUs is the appropriateness of provision, their capacity and the re-integration of children back into mainstream schools.

It was agreed that there needs to be clarity, around:

- The referral process – what provision is available?
- Where is the best practice and response to a child's needs (may be out of county)?
- What is the hierarchy of need and what level of support is available to schools?

### **Training and expertise**

It was noted that there are some really exceptional levels and examples of expertise across the county in mainstream schools, and the Local Authority and other schools are not aware of where and what that expertise is.

Clare accepted this and noted that, currently, schools over-rely on the County services for support and advice, whilst in fact there is excellent practice in schools or clusters. She mentioned the Thrive programme, run by Coast2Coast, as a good example. She agreed that schools should be able to access support from a range of experts, not just rely on the county services.

It was accepted that the capacity of special schools is currently limited and there need to be more specialist staff to provide support. Clare explained that the LA is working with ESSET to try to increase capacity.

### **Budgets and premises**

It was stressed once again that mainstream school buildings are generally not conducive to provide appropriate space for children with complex needs. Clare accepted this and explained that the LA is trying to find ways to resolve this problem. One consideration is around the development of “pre-GROW” provision - for children who need additional support but are not reaching the criteria to access GROW.

### **Essex Steps**

Joel Shaljean, who runs Essex Steps (within ESSET) was at the meeting. He accepted that the need in mainstream schools is huge. To date, he has trained staff in 300 schools. ESSET is about to roll out Essex Steps tutor training so that primary staff can receive appropriate training. He will contact schools shortly and reminded everyone that information about training is also on the ESSET website.

<http://eset.org.uk/>

### **Planning and admissions**

It was noted that Special Schools are currently given information (a list of the schools that are being consulted) when they are named as one of the schools that a parent has stated as a preferred choice – this information is not given as a matter of course to mainstream schools.

It was noted that the SEN Code of practice says that the LA must consult with any school that a parent expresses a preference for, whether or not it is an appropriate setting. RSm noted that it is unusual for more than one mainstream school to be included in the consultation.

Another headteacher argued that the process is not really one of consultation, as schools are unable to assert lack of capacity or resources as a reason to refuse the admission. It is extremely difficult for schools to meet the legal criteria for refusal.

It was noted that the consultation period for consideration of an EHCP is 15 calendar days – if this is received at the end of the summer term (as is often the case) this is a considerable problem for headteachers. It was accepted that this should be altered to

15 school working days.

One headteacher pointed out that, now that schools are sharing data as a matter of course, the number of children with additional needs and SEND in a school is much more transparent.

It was noted that in some cases schools are receiving admissions information from Planning and Admissions, that doesn't include sufficient (or any) information about a child's specific needs. This can add significantly to the problem of finding appropriate staff.

### **Staff training**

It was noted that the skill set of NQTs is low, with very little training and support around SEN offered to them on training courses. It was noted that in some areas the EP Service has offered NQT training and group coaching.

### **Education Psychologists**

Headteachers asked if there continued to be a shortage of EPs across the county. RSm noted that the overall situation has improved, but there was still one vacancy in North East (and three in South).

One headteacher asked what the timeframe should be around receipt of a report from an EP – RSm stated that 3 weeks was the service standard (6 weeks being the statutory time limit).

### **Early Years**

Headteachers asked for clarification about how mainstream nurseries access support for the EY specialist team. It was noted that the funding available for early years settings is completely different from that accessed from schools. There were also concerned about the need to re-refer when a child moves from EY to schools.

It was argued that many pre-schools don't have sufficient knowledge, experience and advice to identify children's problems at an early age. Headteachers questioned how effectively the Area SENCos were working with Early Years?

### **Speech and language therapy - inconsistency across CCGs**

In the North East one CCG does not accept speech and language referrals beyond the age of 7- this varies across the Essex CCGs.

### **Input of health and social care**

Headteachers asked whether the LA is working with health and social care on their input to EHCPs. Clare confirmed that there are ongoing discussion about this. The LA has established a SEND Strategic Group to bring education, social care and health together, but it remains a challenge to ensure that health understands and meets the

requirements of the Children's Act in relation to SEND.

There has been a turn-over of commissioners, which has made the links with health more of a challenge, and having 5 CCGs across the county also adds to the difficulty of reaching a consistent approach. Clare noted that the engaging of health was raised as a key challenge in the recent peer review. The LA is expecting a SEND inspection and the input from health is likely to be criticised. There has been useful training with health professionals in the south of the county to develop their understanding of their responsibilities in this area, and this needs to be consistent across the county.

The One Planning system is to be relaunched in January, as a result of a recommendation from the Peer Review.

### **Outcomes for children with SEN**

One headteacher stated that there is a key agenda around raising the outcomes of children with SEN, and what is needed educationally and in the classroom to support them may be at odds with their medical diagnosis. She argued that there needs to be a greater focus on how to support the strategies for teaching and learning children with SEN, in order to accelerate progress and remove their barriers to progress and achievement. There is too much funding focused on the bureaucratic EHCP system, which would be better spent on school support.

Clare stressed that the SEND transformation is as much a cultural change as a physical one, and agreed that the emphasis must be on teaching first, rather than diagnosis and funding. She explained that the establishment of a Headteacher Round Table is around changing the current debate and dialogue around SEND.

It was noted that the Ofsted inspection system can be at odds with this approach, as schools may need to explain behavioural issues in their schools by noting that children have a diagnosed SEND label.

## **4. SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS AND NEXT STEPS**

1. Agreement by LA officers that there needs to be greater clarity and transparent working practices with shared key information and other data around SEND for quadrants
2. Schools need assurance that there is a clear culture in all SEND teams that children should have the right provision for their needs – a more cooperative system where schools and the LA work together
3. Clearer criteria around the EHCP process and a need for health to get involved.
4. Consideration of space and capacity in schools, particularly in relation to the management and support of autism in mainstream schools
5. As part of the directorate re-design there is a commitment to ensure that the

- specialist teacher teams work effectively to support schools
6. Commitment to a new education advice and guidance hub as part of the re-design so that schools have access to swift response to concerns and requests for help
  7. The re-design will bring more services together in quadrants – school improvement and SEND services so that there is a “wrap around” support for schools and school leaders
  8. Better training, support and link with Early Years, and transition into primary
  9. Commitment from CK to keep the conversations going – further meetings in clusters with LA officers – **to develop and agree a mainstream strategy for SEN and a provision map across the county**
  10. The development of an Essex Headteacher Round Table – possibly one in each quadrant - will drive strategy forward – please volunteer by contacting Ruth Sturdy or Clare Kershaw (or via Pam Langmead)