

## ESSEX HEADTEACHER INCLUSION ROUND TABLE

MONDAY 24 FEBRUARY 2020

1.00 pm – 3.00 pm

Hamptons Sports and Social Club

### 1. IN ATTENDANCE

Ralph Holloway (RH)	Head of SEND Strategy and Innovation
Clare Kershaw	Director of Education
Councillor Ray Gooding	Cabinet Member for Education and Skills
Andy Hodgkinson	
Pam Langmead (PL)	EPHA Professional Officer
Matt O’Grady (MO’G)	Headteacher, West Horndon Primary
Andrew Smith	CEO/Headteacher Lyons Hall
Deborah Bailey	Headteacher, John Bunyan Primary
Teresa Phillips	Headteacher, Thomas Willingale Primary (West)
Becky More	Headteacher, Rivenhall Primary
Mike Wood	Headteacher, Elm Hall Primary
Marie Staley	Headteacher, Moulsham Juniors
Simon Thompson	ASHE Executive Director
Vic Goddard	Passmores Academy
Dan Woodham	Headteacher, Edith Borthwick School
Jen Grotier	Headteacher, Shorefields School
Ruth Sturdy	CEO SEAX
Philomena Cozens	PRU
John Hunter	ESGA
Ruth Bird	ESGA
Rod Lane	ESGA

### Apologies

Harriet Phelps-Knights	EPHA Chair/Headteacher Janet Duke Primary (South)
David Rogers	Headteacher, Bentfield Primary and Enhanced Provision (West)
Jane Bass	Executive Headteacher, Connected Learning

Ralph chaired the meeting.

### 2. PURPOSE AND RELAUNCH OF THE HEADTEACHER ROUNDTABLE

Clare noted that the group had not met for some time, the LA focusing on the SEND workforce restructure and the SEND area inspection. (The last meeting was in July 2019). She proposed a formal relaunch of the Roundtable, and suggested a name change: The Essex Headteacher Inclusion Round Table. She reminded the attendees that they were a “handpicked” group who were advocates for SEND.

Clare circulated a paper in advance of the meeting, setting out the context and background of the HT Roundtable, the journey so far and what has been achieved, and the key questions/areas that the group had agreed should be their focus. These are:

- The development of a strategy to support SEND provision in mainstream settings.
- A focus on inclusion in every school/academy- how can we best challenge schools who avoid or refuse to take and support pupils with SEND?
- A focus on effective working between partners- schools and teams in the LA
- A focus on how to best use scarce resources to ensure the best, most effective provision and outcomes for the young people of Essex.

Clare suggested that these had not changed as a focus for the group. The SEND strategy has 3 key strands:

- Delivery of the SEND Capital Programme
- Re-design of the ECC SEND workforce
- Development of a whole school SEND programme and outreach offer

She noted that the part that has been least developed (as evidenced from feedback in the SEND inspection) is the language and understanding of school-led SEND. Feedback suggested that some parents and practitioners were concerned that this meant that there would be a reduction in LA SEND provision and support and more responsibility and onus on schools.

She argued that the aim is to create a SEND system, where the whole school takes responsibility for SEND.

Clare proposed a revised purpose for the Roundtable:

- To be the lead professional group in Essex to champion and promote an inclusive high-quality education offer for every child and young person in Essex, that will meet their individual needs
- To develop and champion the benefits of Inclusive Schools
- To champion and promote the Essex Inclusion Statement and to set the target that every school in Essex will sign up to the Inclusion Statement
- To challenge at all levels evidence that demonstrates inappropriate exclusion
- To develop and deliver a set of tools that will support the improvement of inclusive practice across the system
- To design the Essex Whole School SEND Offer
- To act as a consultee to ECC on all SEND matters and new developments
- To monitor identified and emerging risks and advise on their prevention, mitigation and management
- To recognise barriers and enablers to inclusive practice in schools, and assist in developing initiatives to address these
- To be a voice for inclusion for school leaders and speak openly about the challenges and opportunities it brings to school leaders

She stressed the need for collective responsibility and a role for individual members:

- To own and champion the actions and outcomes of the Essex Headteacher Inclusion Roundtable
- To represent the interests of Essex School Leaders on all inclusion matters
- To proactively participate in all initiatives and outcomes pursued by the board
- To be an advocate for the program's outcomes
- To be committed to, and actively involved in, pursuing the program's initiatives and outcomes

MS questioned the statement: *To challenge at all levels*

Clare explained that the purpose of the Roundtable is to own what it does, for example commitment to the exclusion statement.

RL noted that in the current education landscape some MATs are located in and outside Essex – how can the Roundtable hold those schools/MATs to account. It was noted that the LA does have a relationship with CEOs of national MATs and is also making it conditional that any new school must be signed up to the Inclusion Statement.

Cllr Gooding argued that all schools should have the same aim, to achieve the best outcomes for all children in Essex.

RH conceded that some MATs may be one of the “barriers to inclusion” that the Roundtable will consider. It may be necessary to have discussions with RSC for example. AH suggested that there needs to be more discussion and clarity about the barriers, so that challenge is less nebulous.

MO’G noted that there is work to be done around the purpose and credibility of the group, so that headteachers/schools understand the remit and authority.

He stressed that some schools do struggle with high levels of SEN and a lack of resources – particularly small schools that are often deliberately chosen by parents. He argued that there should be challenge when an outstanding school apparently has a low intake of SEN pupils.

RM agreed, noting that there is not an even spread of SEN across schools, some schools are a “victim” of their own SEND success. MW noted that there is real frustration that there is growing evidence of non-inclusive practice in some schools.

CK suggested that in Essex there is still a view that SEND is a problem and not a positive thing; she wants to promote the idea that SEND is something that adds value to the system (e.g. in better teaching practice, behaviour management). She argued that there are 3 groups of schools: those that deliver SEND provision very well, those that are trying to (with barriers) and those whose SEND provision is “woeful”. However, it was noted that there is a tension in the system (propagated by Ofsted) around pupil outcomes versus progress.

MO'G noted that, in the meantime, it is hard for schools to manage their SEND and pupil outcomes because of the inherent unfairness and inconsistency of the system e.g. admissions. He argued that there is a fourth group of schools who simply don't "do" SEND.

VG reiterated that issues with the Ofsted framework, and asked if the LA is challenging the inconsistency of the inspection process (particularly given that we are a Conservative Authority). Cllr RG stressed that, although he is a Conservative, he does challenge Ofsted and DfE in respect of SEND etc

MS felt that the new SEND workforce structure will be very positive for schools. She has had a meeting with her inclusion partner which she felt was very productive. CK noted that the 3 strands of SEND development are interconnected, and there will be much more evidence and intelligence gathered by the SEND workforce.

However, still concerns that this may be inconsistent across the County, particularly where there are vacancies.

MO'G raised the issue of managing parental complaints about SEND. He suggested that there are many more complaints nowadays, and parents are much more clued up and have high (and sometimes unreasonable) expectations.

CK suggested amendments to the proposed purpose of the group:  
to define the process by which schools can be challenged;  
To design a whole-school SEND system, to create equity.

JH asked how issues could be resolved in the short term, for example there are no appeal process to admissions.

It was suggested that when a school is due inspection, the LA could send a letter of support in relation to excellent SEND provision. VG noted that this had been extremely helpful when facing an inspection.

PC noted that the Trauma Practice Programme is very important and all school should be encouraged to take part; she argued that this should be one of the criteria for excellent SEND provision in a school.

PL noted that any challenge must be based on evidence, not just anecdote, and argued that the development of the outcomes framework is a vital part of this work.

AH suggested that he start to develop a list of good practice, evidence of SEND.

CK summed up so far:

- Promote inclusion as a positive to schools (and parents)

- Develop an evidence base to enable challenge, which must be overt and not subjective.

PC argued that an additional proposal should be that Essex becomes a county where no child with a permanent exclusion is ever excluded.

There was a discussion around the expectations of parents, sometimes for schools this can be around meeting the needs of parents, rather than the real needs of the child. It was agreed that information and guidance to parents is key – e.g. a video similar to the one produced for parents around admissions.

It was noted that there is also a need to consider admission of children with SEND from out of county, and the challenges and expectations that they bring.

There was further discussion of the inclusion statement and the survey conducted with primary heads in the autumn term. CK feels that this is still an essential part of the commitment to inclusion, and was developed by the Roundtable not the LA. It was agreed that it should be relaunched at a later date, but can't be promoted in isolation – needs to be on the back of other work carried out by the Roundtable, including the need to

- articulate and define good and poor SEN;
- Indicators and measures;
- a toolkit for whole-school SEND;
- management of parental expectations.

#### **4. AGREEING NEW PROTOCOLS WITH PARENT ADVOCATE GROUPS**

Andy Hodgkinson explained that he has worked with one of the SEND Parent Advocate groups in Essex to discuss and agree new protocols going forward. At the moment, this group has an automatic default position to take any parent request for an EHCP that has been refused directly to appeal. They are one of the more reasonable groups, and there are others that take an even more aggressive stance. It costs the LA something in the region of £440k simply to respond to appeals, and significantly more if the appeal goes on to Tribunal.

AH's remit was to consider changing the current stance and, following discussion, this group has agreed a new protocol going forward; now, if a letter is received refusing assessment or an EHCP is presented by a parent, they will delay at least 7 days and will work with the SEND Operations Leader, to try to avoid escalating the case to a legal process with resulting costs. It was agreed that this was a positive and proactive way forward, that should be tested with other advocate groups.

#### **5. ROUNDTABLE RESPONSE TO SEND AREA INSPECTION**

CK reminded the group that the SEND inspection in November noted three areas of serious weakness in the county:

- Joint recommissioning;

- Quality and effectiveness of EHCPs;
- Over-identification of MLD.

It was agreed that the Roundtable would have a particular focus on EHCPs, and the **identification of MLD**.

CK noted that, for example, one school had identified 111 children on School Support and had identified 71% as MLD.

Following discussion, it was agreed that there was a need to characterise and clarify what MLD means, and the importance of understanding and recognising speech and language as a category of need.

It was AGREED that headteachers on the Roundtable should analyse their own census records, to identify whether the categorisation is being completed accurately.

It was also suggested that there should be training in relation to early diagnosis of speech and language, use of screening tools etc

It was agreed that a small sub-group should consider this further: including Marie Staley and Matt O'Grady.

The group discussed the review of EHCPs – linked to one planning. It was suggested that a sub-group should consider this: including Philomena Cozens, Ruth Sturdy, Vic Goddard.

## **6. ELECTION OF A CHAIR**

It was agreed that, going forward, the Essex Headteacher Inclusion Round Table should be chaired by someone independent of the Local Authority. Andrew Smith nominated himself for the role, and this was accepted unanimously.

## **8. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

Monday 27 April 2020  
1.30 pm Hamptons Social Club