

# **COLLEAGUE SUPPORT PROGRAMME**

**for new and acting headteachers in  
primary-phase schools  
and for established headteachers  
who are new to Essex**

## Introduction

Being a new or acting headteacher can be a daunting challenge, particularly if you are new to Essex or have been thrown in at the deep end! Having a fellow headteacher on your side can help you survive and thrive.

A Colleague Supporter is someone who you can rely on and talk to in complete confidence, about the early days of headship, your worries, what you need to know and what you don't know you need to know! They have the experience of being a headteacher in an Essex primary school (and are doing the job now) and fully understand the challenges and responsibilities you are facing, as well as knowing the satisfaction and sense of pride that the role gives every head.

Your Colleague Supporter will be a confidante and sounding board, who you can use to share your concerns and questions about being a new head. They will know the systems in Essex, be able to tell you which meetings are "unmissable" (and which you can avoid!) and make sure that you can access the help that is available. You can even ask them whether you have made the right decision taking on the enormous task of being a headteacher, without feeling judged. Every head will have asked themselves that question at some point in their career!

However, an effective Colleague Supporter knows that their main job is to listen and seek to understand, rather than immediately jumping in with solutions and recommendations. Their role is to support you, not to undermine your own practice and approach or tell you what to do. It is also important to emphasise that the discussions you have will be confidential, although your Colleague Supporter may at times recommend other people that you could (or should) reach out to for additional support.

If this is not your first headship but you are new to Essex, you may still benefit from our support – see page 6 for how we can help you in your new role.

## What's in it for you, and the Colleague Supporter?

You will benefit from:

- having someone experienced and confident to work with
- the transference of expertise
- direct access to the local network, including EPHA and the local authority
- support for the development of your practice
- having a sounding board
- exploring ideas and learning from another headteacher's successes - and mistakes
- having an independent person to get to know you and your school, without judgement or an agenda

Your Colleague Supporter gains:

- a professional development opportunity
- an opportunity to reflect on their own practice
- a space to generate ideas
- the chance to help and encourage a new headteacher
- funding for their school to reimburse their time out

## How does the EPHA Colleague Support programme work?

This service is *absolutely free* to new and acting primary, nursery, infant and junior headteachers in Essex. EPHA recognises the importance of supporting new heads in their early days of headship and wants to ensure that every new head feels able to connect with a Colleague Supporter, without having to draw on their school's budget.

At the same time, EPHA remunerates a Colleague Supporter's own school, so that they are able to commit to a professional role knowing that they are contributing financially to their school, as well as benefiting professionally.

## **We match you with the right Colleague Supporter**

The EPHA Chair or Vice-Chair of your quadrant (or, sometimes, the EPHA Professional Officer) will contact you as early as possible in your new headship to welcome you to your new role in an Essex school and to let you know what support EPHA can give you.

During that conversation they will talk to you about organising a Colleague Supporter and will ask you a number of questions about who will be right for you. For example:

- Do you want to link up with a headteacher in your local partnership or cluster, or would you rather your Colleague Supporter was more removed geographically?
- Do you want them to have experience of a similar size and type of school, or do you just need a friendly professional colleague with loads of experience and empathy?

EPHA has created a directory of Colleague Supporters who are all experienced, serving headteachers, and we will match you with the right person to ensure that you feel properly supported. If at any point the relationship is not working, we will reassess the partnership and make sure that the support you are being offered is positive and what you need to survive and thrive.

You are under no obligation to continue the process at any point – but we hope, and expect, that the Colleague Support programme will prove invaluable to you.

Once we have identified a “match”, your Colleague Supporter will contact you and will set up a programme of support.

## **Getting to know each other – the first session**

The first session will be a meeting with your Colleague Supporter for up to half a day. You can use this time any way you choose to. You could show them your new school or hide in your office, discuss your initial priorities, bombard them with early questions or just take the opportunity to reflect on the start of the term. How you use this time is for you to decide.

## **Regular Phone Calls**

Your Colleague Supporter will ring you once every two weeks in your first term at a time you have agreed. Many mentor programmes fail because they rely on the mentee making contact when they think they need help. As a new headteacher you will be frantically busy and have a long list of things you have to do; many new heads simply won't make time to make a call focused on themselves as they are the lowest priority on their own do-list. For this reason, your Colleague Supporter will ring you every two weeks, at an agreed time. Putting the telephone call in your diary ensures that you prioritise yourself and focus on your leadership at least once a fortnight.

You decide when that call works for you and your Colleague Supporter will do their best to make it happen.

We also know that in an emergency, as a new head, you may not know who you should contact, particularly when faced with a crisis that you can't share with other staff. If you don't know who to talk to, you can ring your Colleague Supporter for advice. If you can't get through – perhaps because your Colleague Supporter is dealing with their own emergency – then you should call the EPHA Professional Officer, Pam Langmead, for help. She will either be able to advise you herself, or will put you in touch with another headteacher straight away.

## **Two more meetings in the year**

Your Colleague Supporter will meet with you at least twice more during the academic year. These meetings will give you time to analyse your leadership at the beginning of headship and ask a non-judgemental and impartial colleague what you could have done differently, if decisions have not always gone well. You can also plan the support that you need the following term, and make sure that you haven't missed anything critical in the early days of headship. Remember, the only "agenda" that your Colleague Supporter brings to the meeting is to support you as a new or acting headteacher.

Don't forget to use the meetings to celebrate what has gone well during the term, and to share the successes and good times (and funny moments) that you will have as headteacher of your school.

## Future support

At the end of the final meeting you and your Colleague Supporter will discuss whether you want to extend their professional support for another term, or whether you feel ready to “go it alone” – knowing that you can always call on EPHA and other headteachers for help in the future.

And in time, you may feel ready and want to become a Colleague Supporter to other new and acting headteachers!

## New to Essex – but not to headship?

If you are an experienced headteacher, but this is your first post in Essex, you may not need or want the full package of the Colleague Supporter programme. However, every local authority does things a bit differently, and you will probably have questions from time to time about the local systems. Your first port of call is the EPHA Professional Officer who can give you advice about the people and structures in Essex Local Authority. If you would also like to link with another headteacher to act as your buddy in the early days, please let us know, and we will match you with a colleague.

## About the Essex Primary Heads' Association

**The Essex Primary Heads' Association** (EPHA) aims to support all primary-phase headteachers - both in maintained schools and academies - in their leadership and management roles and to promote and improve primary education in Essex, in collaboration with the Local Authority and other education partners. The Association is led by the EPHA Executive, a group of headteachers elected by their peers, supported by the Professional Officer.

### Key contacts:

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EPHA Executive    Current membership list on the EPHA website  
EPHA website    [www.essexprimaryheads.co.uk](http://www.essexprimaryheads.co.uk)