

**MINUTES OF THE LA AND EPHA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING
THURSDAY 7 MAY 2020 starting at 2.00 pm**

The meeting was held virtually (using Zoom) as a result of the lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In attendance	Representing	email address
Clare Kershaw CK	Director of Education	clare.kershaw@essex.gov.uk
Lisa Fergus LF	Assistant Director – South	lisa.fergus@essex.gov.uk
Alison Fiala	Education and EY Lead Mid	Alison.fiala@essex.gov.uk
Jo Barclay	Schools Safeguarding Manager	Jo.barclay@essex.gov.uk
George Athanasiou GA	EPHA West Vice-Chair	head@greatsampford.essex.sch.uk
Nicky Barrand	EPHA South Chair/Basildon East & Pitsea	headteacher@cherrytree-pri.essex.sch.uk
Isobel Barron	EPHA West Chair	head@roseacres.essex.sch.uk
Liz Bartholomew	EPHA Harwich and Dovercourt	head@mayflowerprimary.com
Heidi Blakeley	EPHA Wickford	Head@abacus.essex.sch.uk
Liz Benjeddi	EPHA Billericay	head@southgreen-jun.essex.sch.uk
Dawn Dack	EPHA Maldon	drdack@wentworth.essex.sch.uk
Ceri Daniels	EPHA Colchester South	Head@eightashgreen.essex.sch.uk
Paula Derwin	EPHA Colchester East	headteacher@hazelmere-jun.essex.sch.uk
Richard Green	EPHA South Vice-Chair	Head@grovewood.essex.sch.uk
Nick Hutchings	EPHA Vice-Chair/NE Chair	head@hamiltonprimary.com
Pam Langmead PL	EPHA Professional Officer	pam@langmead.me.uk
Nicola Morgan-Soane	EPHA Mid Chair	head@trinityroad.essex.sch.uk
Harriet Phelps-Knights	EPHA Chair	Head@janetduke.essex.sch.uk
HPK		
Richard Potter RP	EPHA North East Vice-Chair	admin@perryfields-inf.essex.sch.uk
Amanda Reid	EPHA Chelmsford North	admin@perryfields-inf.essex.sch.uk
Gary Soars	EPHA Rayleigh	gsoars@edwardfrancis.essex.sch.uk
Matt O’Grady	Representing Brentwood	Matt@westhorndon.essex.sch.uk

1. WELCOME AND ATTENDANCE

Clare welcomed everyone to the meeting. It was noted that this meeting was being held following the four area meetings in the morning, each one held online, to capture the experiences and concerns of EPHA representatives across the county. EPHA Chairs and Vice-Chairs were asked to attend the afternoon meeting, and other representatives were given the option to join.

Clare started the meeting by thanking Essex headteachers for the phenomenal job they were doing in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. She acknowledged headteachers’ professionalism, forbearance, energy and determination to do the best for their pupils, staff and families.

In return, the Professional Officer thanked Clare for her leadership, guidance and support during the crisis, and stressed how much this has been appreciated by Essex school leaders.

Action

2. COVID 19 UPDATE AND DISCUSSION

CK referred to the list of primary and secondary concerns around reopening, and noted that some of the questions were not easy or possible to answer at this point. There has been lots of rumour and conjecture around the possible reopening of schools from the 1st June. The unions have been asking for at least 3 weeks' notice of reopening, but CK pointed out that one of these weeks is a school closure week (half term). She noted that the DfE has been listening to feedback from local authorities and the unions, but that there is no clear indication at this point as to what the relaxation of the lockdown, due to be announced on Sunday 10th May, might mean for schools.

CK said that she has stressed to the DfE that they need to clearly articulate the reason and rationale for opening schools, and how this will be done. She argued that, otherwise, it will be impossible to engage with families and school staff to implement any changes effectively.

The most significant challenge is how to achieve social distancing within a school environment. She explained that one area the LA is working on is a risk assessment framework, in relation to the premises, staffing and other challenges around reopening.

She noted that the DfE seems to be set on a phased return at some point, but it is likely that attendance will be encouraged but not compulsory. This will present its own complexities and challenges, but managing this will probably result in low (though increasing) numbers. Parental concerns and feedback would suggest that not all pupils in a year group will return at once.

The Executive discussed, and questioned, the rationale behind a whole year group returning. This may be understandable if the focus is on education (notwithstanding the likelihood that not every child will return) but it does not solve the economic argument, of schools helping to restart the economy by providing childcare for parents who need to return to work. It was argued that, due to social distancing and staff numbers, schools will probably only be able to take a finite number of pupils anyway and so may have to offer provision on a rota or part-time basis. CK said that her belief was that schools will not be expected to deliver a full curriculum for any year group at this stage.

Risk assessments

HPK questioned the legal position of headteachers if schools simply refuse to reopen in line with any future DfE guidelines. CK noted that decisions on how and when to reopen will have to be based on risk assessments, and she assumed that if a school failed to comply with a government directive the LA might be asked to challenge those assessments. She reminded the Executive that schools are regarded as a key part of the response to the national emergency. The Unions have set a number of tests that they state the government must meet in order to reopen schools, and headteachers will need to be very clear about how they can open safely, not least so that they can reassure staff and parents.

RP noted that school leaders would normally undertake training around the mitigation of risks to enable them to complete risk assessments with any degree of credibility or accuracy. He questioned how a headteacher can be expected write an assessment about how the school can avoid risk about an unknown disease, with unknown outcomes; he certainly does not have the confidence that his risk assessment could be iron clad.

CK noted that we will need to wait for a response from Public Health England, and that the emphasis will be on effective social distancing, hand hygiene and PPE. RP argued that currently schools are open and are risking a very small number of children and staff,

but he still cannot see how schools can expand those numbers safely. The general opinion of headteachers is that social distancing doesn't and cannot work within schools.

CK noted that she is currently not picking up the proposal that there will be full opening of schools until September, but that the government is certainly looking to ease restrictions for households and the workforce. The R ratio has fallen below a level which indicates that the government can start to relax the lockdown, but the rate of transmission of Covid-19 and the number of deaths are still high.

CK accepted that it may be reasonable to ask or enable some staff members to stay at home, particularly if they or family members are particularly vulnerable. She did note that the numbers of critical worker' children and vulnerable pupils who attend school is likely to increase as more adults need to return to work – currently a very small percentage of eligible children are attending school, which has been of concern to the government.

It was noted that the letters for parents written by CK have been very well received and help schools to explain and depersonalise the current school offer; headteachers want the LA to continue to produce these when required. CK agreed to continue to support schools in this way.

Summer holiday period

GA asked whether the DfE will expect schools to open during the summer holiday period and, in which case, should staff (including headteachers) be given a proper break during the second half of the summer term. CK noted that the DfE has indicated that schools will not be open, but has not made a definite decision. Her view is that if the DfE is working towards reopening schools in September senior leaders and staff will need a break and also time to plan for the return in the new academic year. The Local Authority is considering whether summer schools would help support children and young people to catch up on their missed education during the holiday period.

Early Years and Reception intake

The Executive asked whether the Early Years team is in contact with pre-school settings. It was noted that it is a very difficult and challenging time for EY settings and some private businesses may not survive financially. A new EY team structure has been in place since the beginning of May and staff have been contacting settings to undertake welfare checks. They have RAG rated each setting and provision, to identify and support vulnerable children. It was noted that some settings that had closed had not been aware that they should keep in contact to monitor vulnerable families.

The group discussed a possible suggestion that the new Reception intake might be delayed at the beginning of September. Whilst this could help their entry to school and the management of schools reopening in full, it was noted that this could have serious financial implications for schools if Reception classes were not in situ for the autumn term census.

There was also concern that the DfE has indicated that if a school has an existing healthy carry forward (whatever that means) they will not be entitled to apply for funding to reimburse Covid-19 expenditure, despite earlier promises to that effect.

Ofsted

It was noted that Michelle Winter, Senior MHI for the Eastern region has been holding regular discussions the DfE around when inspections might restart and what the focus could be initially. It was suggested that Ofsted is unlikely to return to normal for some time, and there will need to be consideration of national assessments and how pupil outcomes are determined. One headteacher noted that it would be helpful if the DfE could

make a definitive announcement about inspection and the expectation around SATs next year, to take pressure off schools.

LF noted that the LA has welcomed the deployment of four senior Ofsted inspectors to support them and schools in relation to gathering views around reopening and other concerns. Their approach is realistic and sympathetic to schools. CK stressed that Ofsted inspectors are very aware of the stresses and strains that schools are experiencing and recognise that the impact of the pandemic is a long term issue which will not be resolved quickly.

CK explained that the LA is currently working on a suite of documents that aim to support schools respond to DfE demands around reopening, whatever they might be. In particular, a risk assessment checklist will be crucial. She noted that she has been liaising with other neighbouring authorities, with the aim of providing a consistent approach. The guidance and templates that the LA has provided have been produced with the intention of giving schools supportive and consistent information and template that they can use as they wish, and the Reopening Framework will develop and adapt. If necessary, CK will increase communication to schools.

One headteacher commented that, unfortunately, some of the communications from the NAHT have seemed to be divisive, which many did not regard as particularly helpful.

CK noted that she welcomes all feedback, but acknowledged that we are in a strange place at the moment, but will all have a duty to respond pragmatically and sensibly to support the emergency response to Covid-19. She thanked headteachers once again, and urged everyone to get some rest at the weekend.

3. **SUMMER TERM HEADTEACHER MEETINGS**

It was agreed that the termly headteacher meetings due to be held in June would not take place as scheduled because of the ongoing restrictions to gatherings. Instead, it was agreed that an additional EPHA Executive meeting should be held, to continue the feedback and dialogue with headteachers. It was agreed that it would be helpful to invite Michelle Winter (Ofsted) and also a representative from the DfE.

The Professional Officer **AGREED** to decide a date and set up an online meeting, and she will also communicate the decision to cancel the headteacher meetings to schools.

**Professional
Officer**

4. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Lisa Fergus noted that Mike Wade, headteacher of Quilters Infants and Junior Schools, who won the Essex Primary Headteacher of the Year Award, has been shortlisted for the national awards.

5. **DATES AND TIMES OF MEETINGS FOR THE 2020/21 SCHOOL YEAR**

Executive meetings (Chelmsford City Football Club)

Wednesday 7 October 2020 (to include the EPHA AGM first thing)

Thursday 21 January 2021

Thursday 29 April 2021

Area Heads Meetings

Summer term 2020 – cancelled

N-EAST ——— Wednesday 10 June ——— Colchester Community Stadium

SOUTH ——— Thursday 11 June ——— Holiday Inn, Basildon

~~WEST Wednesday 17 June Weston Homes Business Centre, Takeley~~
~~MID Thursday 18 June Chelmsford City Football Club~~

Autumn term 2020

N-EAST Wednesday 11 November Colchester Football Stadium
SOUTH Thursday 12 November Holiday Inn, Basildon
WEST Wednesday 18 November Weston Homes Business Centre, Takeley
MID Thursday 19 November Chelmsford City Football Club

Spring term 2021

N-EAST Wednesday 3 March Colchester Football Stadium
SOUTH Thursday 4 March Holiday Inn, Basildon
WEST Wednesday 10 March Weston Homes Business Centre, Takeley
MID Thursday 11 March Chelmsford City Football Club

Summer term 2021

N-EAST Wednesday 16 June Colchester Football Stadium
SOUTH Thursday 17 June Holiday Inn, Basildon
WEST Wednesday 23 June Weston Homes Business Centre, Takeley
MID Thursday 24 June Chelmsford City Football Club

The meeting ended at 3.30 pm
Pam Langmead, EPHA Professional Officer