

**MINUTES OF THE LA AND EPHA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING  
WEDNESDAY 24 MAY 2023 starting at 11.30 am**

The meeting was held at The Lion Inn, Boreham.

<b>In attendance</b>	<b>Representing</b>	<b>email address</b>
Clare Kershaw	Director of Education	Clare.kershaw@essex.gov.uk
Shamsun Noor	Head of Statutory and Regulated Customer Services	shamsun.noor@essex.gov.uk
Ralph Holloway	Head of SEND Strategy and Innovation	Ralph.Holloway@essex.gov.uk
Lisa Fergus	Assistant Director, South	Lisa.fergus@essex.gov.uk
Jo Barclay	Head of Education Safeguarding and Wellbeing	Jo.barclay@essex.gov.uk
Stephen Chynoweth	Education and EY Lead North East	Stephen.Chynoweth@essex.gov.uk
Dawn Baker	EPHA Chelmsford West	ceo@heracademy.co.uk
Sue Bardetti	EPHA Tendring South	admin@hollandhaven.essex.sch.uk
Isobel Barron	EPHA West Chair	head@roseacres.essex.sch.uk
Liz Bartholomew	EPHA Harwich and Dovercourt	head@mayflowerprimary.com
Dale Bateman	EPHA Epping Forest Rural	Head@coopersaletheydongarnon.essex.sch.uk
Liz Benjeddi	EPHA Billericay	head@southgreen-jun.essex.sch.uk
Heidi Blakeley	EPHA Wickford	Head@abacus.essex.sch.uk
Amanda Buckland Garnett	EPHA South Woodham Ferrers	abg@collingwood.essex.sch.uk
Luke Bulpett	EPHA South treasurer	Head@brightside-pri.essex.sch.uk
Dida Burrell	EPHA Braintree	Head@whitecourt.essex.sch.uk
Anna Conley	EPHA Witham	head@howbridge-inf.essex.sch.uk
Dawn Dack	EPHA Mid Chair/ Maldon	drdack@wentworth.essex.sch.uk
Paula Derwin	EPHA Colchester East	headteacher@hazelmere-jun.essex.sch.uk
Mary Jo Hall	EPHA Uttlesford North	head@stmsw.co.uk
Richard Green	EPHA South Vice-Chair	Head@groewood.essex.sch.uk
Nick Hutchings NH	EPHA Vice-Chair/NE Chair	head@hamiltonprimary.com
Clare James	EPHA Dengie	cjames@maylandsea.essex.sch.uk
Becky Keitch	EPHA Tendring North	Head@st-georges-pri.essex.sch.uk
Pam Langmead	EPHA Professional Officer	pam@langmead.me.uk
Diana Mason	EPHA Castlepoint and Benfleet	head@montgomerieprimary.essex.sch.uk
Richard McIntosh	EPHA Chelmsford South	head@baddowhall-jun.essex.sch.uk
Jinnie Nicholls	EPHA Halstead	head@sgasa.uk
Matt O'Grady	EPHA Brentwood	Matt@westhorndon.essex.sch.uk
Harriet Phelps-Knights	EPHA Chair	<a href="mailto:head@janetduke.essex.sch.uk">head@janetduke.essex.sch.uk</a>
Richard Potter	EPHA North East Vice-Chair	head@homefarm.essex.sch.uk
Amanda Reid	EPHA Mid Vice-Chair/Chelmsford North	admin@perryfields-inf.essex.sch.uk
Gary Soars	EPHA Rayleigh	gsoars@edwardfrancis.essex.sch.uk
Sarah Stevenson	EPHA Tiptree and Stanway	Head@langenhoe.essex.sch.uk
Nicky Stone-Riley	EPHA South Chair	headteacher@cherrytree-pri.essex.sch.uk
Karen Tucker	EPHA Canvey Island	head@canvey-jun.essex.sch.uk
Joanne Willcox	EPHA Epping Forest South	<a href="mailto:headteacher@hillhouse.essex.sch.uk">headteacher@hillhouse.essex.sch.uk</a>
Sue Clarke	Substituting for Hayley O'Dea	Head@barlingmagna.essex.sch.uk
Mary Evans	Substituting for Jonathan Tye	mary.evans@hiltacademies.org

## 1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from:

- Alison Fiala                      Head of EY and Education (Mid)
- Matt Curzon                      Uttlesford South
- Ceri Daniels                      Colchester South (Tiptree & Stanway)
- Chris Jarman                      West Vice-Chair
- James Newell                      Tendring North
- Hayley O'Dea                      Rochford

Clare Kershaw, Director for Education, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

## 2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE EPHA EXECUTIVE MEETING EARLIER

### a) Survey of balances in maintained schools and academies

The Schools Forum has asked for a review of schools balances over 30% to help understand the reasons that they are retaining such a large carry forward. Clare **AGREED** to find out how this survey was taking place and what the process would look like for schools.

CK

### b) Year of Number

Clare agreed that this should be included in the June area meetings to ensure that heads are aware of the projects that have been decided so far, and to gather suggestions that will help support schools to make the Year of Number a success.

### c) Attendance and the use of penalty notices

Headteachers explained that there are an increasing number of EAL children who are travelling abroad, returning to their home country for extended periods. It was felt that a letter written by the Attendance Compliance team, specific to this situation, would be very helpful; Clare **AGREED** to take this forward.

CK

The group discussed the use of penalty notices, and balancing the impact of these with the amount of administration they generate and the relationships with parents. It was felt that the penalty notice fine is insufficient and not a deterrent for many parents; the financial pressure that families are facing means that it is much cheaper to take a holiday in term time, and this particularly impacts those children eligible for pupil premium.

Clare noted that the LA is working on a more strategic approach to attendance, and recently spent a day with their DfE attendance adviser. Nationally there is a post-Covid dynamic which is having a real impact on many aspects of school life, including attendance, SEND, an increasing number of exclusions, and complaints. Clare reminded headteachers of the *Isle of Wight v Platt* judgment in 2017. This resulted in an amendment to the school attendance requirement contained in section 444, which now provides: **“If a child of compulsory school age who is a registered pupil at a school fails to attend regularly at the school, his parent is guilty of an offence.”**

Clare recognised the continuous disruption to teaching and learning when pupils take term time holidays: this doesn't only impact their own learning, but that of the other children in a class.

One headteacher stressed the administrative burden of applying for a penalty notice and Clare accepted that the LA should be able to reduce the bureaucracy in relation to term-time holidays.

One headteacher accepted the need to address and recognise different cultural issues, but asked for clarification of when it is possible to remove a child from the school roll who has been away from school for months.

Clare **AGREED** that attendance should be a key focus in the next academic year.

### 3. SEND STRATEGY UPDATE

Ralph Holloway noted that the first few moderation meetings have gone well, and stressed that the quality of paperwork for annual reviews from mainstream schools is generally of exceptionally high quality.

The re-banding of EHCPs across the county has resulted in a significant increase in the number of children and young people being assessed in a higher band, and the financial implications are unsustainable at present. Ralph is asking the team to consider whether more money can be put into the system and this being reviewed.

It is accepted that there are significantly higher needs in mainstream schools, and the moderation process of the higher bands has not yet taken place. One headteacher suggested that this should take priority during the process, but Ralph noted that this has been dictated by Schools Forum.

Feedback from schools has suggested that the application of the criteria in the matrix should allow for flexibility on a case by case basis.

One headteacher thanked Ralph for explaining the system, acknowledging that he has a very unenviable task at the moment, reshaping the top-up funding. He reiterated, however, that financing and supporting children with extremely complex SEND needs is the number one stressor for most headteachers and staff; many school leaders are at breaking point. Ralph accepted this and noted that if there are genuinely 216 Band G children in mainstream schools, as the review suggests, then there simply isn't sufficient money from Government to fund the need. Clare accepted that if the moderation process gives clear evidence that the complexity of needs has increased in mainstream schools, then that will be an important discussion to have with the DfE.

Another headteacher noted that we are starting to normalise extreme behaviour in mainstream schools that a few years ago would have been considered abnormal; another stated that SEN impacts every challenge faced by schools, including recruitment and retention, finances, attendance, inspection outcomes, and staff workload and wellbeing.

Ralph noted that the LA has been unsuccessful in its bid for two new special schools, and part of the strategy to increase capacity is to look at the expansion of existing special schools, and to develop provision in mainstream schools. The Executive asked if any new school that was built included provision for specialist needs; Clare noted that any new school will include an enhanced provision or at least more SEND space within the new build.

Ralph reminded the Executive that the decision had been made to back date the funding for completed needs assessments that ran over 20 weeks; the cut-off point had been needs assessments that started after July 2022, but it has been acknowledged that this disadvantages the schools that have been awaiting the longest, so the intention is to backdate the funding for all assessments. He warned that this could take some time to introduce.

The LA recognises that there are children in mainstream schools with severe learning difficulties, and a mechanism is being developed to identify those children and provide funding accordingly. The EPHA Chair asked if this included children with a medical IPRA; Ralph agreed to consider this issue.

In the second half of term the LA will publish the SEND Sufficiency Plan and will welcome expressions of interest from mainstream schools that might be in a position to establish enhanced provisions, both to support the need in their own school and/or to increase support for other schools.

It was **AGREED** to bring a full SEND Improvement / Transformation update to EPHA during the Autumn term.

#### 4. SAFEGUARDING UPDATE

Jo Barclay, Head of Education Safeguarding and Wellbeing, gave the following updates:

- a) The LA is running training focused on dealing with allegations against staff and managing low-level concerns. Two courses are being scheduled on 27<sup>th</sup> June, from 1.00 – 4.00 pm, at the ACL in Brentwood; and 4<sup>th</sup> July, from 9.30 am – 12.30 pm at Colchester Football Stadium. The training is free and aimed at headteachers and DSLs. The Professional Officer **AGREED** to promote the training to schools.
- b) The planned training on LGBT is being delayed until October as schools are waiting for DfE guidance on managing gender identity.
- c) The mandatory ESCB safeguarding audit was produced in October and schools were asked to return the audit by the end of the spring term. This was extended to the 22<sup>nd</sup> May, and around 88% of schools have returned the audit; those who haven't are being chased. If schools want to check if they have submitted the audit they should email the Education Safeguarding inbox at [educationsafeguarding@essex.gov.uk](mailto:educationsafeguarding@essex.gov.uk).

Professional  
Officer

Jo acknowledged the length of the current audit but explained that it needs to reflect the requirement of Keeping Children Safe in Education; recent additional sections have included a focus on harmful sexual behaviour and hate crime, which are emphasised in the safeguarding guidance. One headteacher asked if a MAT or federation could submit just one audit for their schools; Jo accepted that much of the information about multiple schools in a trust will be identical but stressed the importance of having a separate audit for each school, reflecting their specific practice and arrangements.

The audit is helpful for schools to enable them to evidence their safeguarding practice and this is recognised by Ofsted. The outcomes will also help inform the Local Authority so that the teams know what support is needed by schools.

- d) The LA has purchased 1000 licences for Essex schools to undertake the Brook Traffic Light training, and there are still around 200 licences available. The booking system has recently been altered to accept more bookings, so schools are encouraged to access this training.
- e) There is some ongoing confusion about professional visitors to schools and the need for them to evidence their DBS status. Jo confirmed that agencies have agreed to provide a letter from the line manager confirming the staff member's DBS check.
- f) Jo reminded the Executive that the Education Safeguarding Team consists of:
  - Jo Barclay, Head of Education Safeguarding and Wellbeing
  - Matthew Lewis, Education Safeguarding Adviser
  - Derai Lewis-Jones (newly appointed) – Mid and North East
  - Alex Darvill, Education Safeguarding Adviser – South and West
  - Gemma Harris, Education Safeguarding Officer (MARAC)
  - Katie Crouch, Business Support Assistant

## 5. SCHOOL COMMUNICATIONS

Shamsun Noor acknowledged the volume of communications and requests sent to school, and explained that the LA recognises their limited capacity to engage with surveys, pilots and projects. Over the summer he and Clare will consider and map the projects that they know will be introduced to schools. They will also remind ECC teams that any updates should come via the School Comms weekly email. Occasionally it will be appropriate to send information out via the EPHA communication channels (and, in particular, safeguarding updates) but usually the School Comms route should be used. Shamsun asked people to forward requests not coming from School Communications if they receive directly, so he can assess the scale of the issue.

The Executive stressed the value of the weekly email and thanked Local Authority colleagues for collating and providing this information.

## 6. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT OFFER

The Executive was reminded that ECC's School Effectiveness team will be making changes to the way its school improvement service to schools will be offered from September 2023.

Maintained schools will continue to receive a core offer of support provided to them through their School Effectiveness Partner. This core offer will continue to be linked to the level of support they receive. Additional support will also come through a core partnership model that is currently in development. There will also be the option to select additional support from a traded services menu; this will reflect prices that remain highly competitive. A day's support includes preparation and support and the brochure outlines what will be delivered within each activity.

Academies will retain a named SEP for immediate contact purposes. School Improvement services will be available through the traded services menu. The core partnership model will provide some support that will be available to all Essex schools.

The School Effectiveness Team are committed to developing this further through engagement with headteachers on what they would like to see developed.

All schools will be able to contact their named SEP to discuss any type of bespoke traded support that may be needed. It was stressed that schools will know the name of their School Effectiveness Partner before September, and in most cases this will continue to be their existing SEP.

The prioritisation criteria for the maintained school core offer will include the nearness of the next Ofsted inspection, but this not the only or over-riding criteria; other intelligence about a school's core need will be determined by the school's sustainable toolkit information.

Maintained schools will have the following core number of days depending on their priority needs:

- High priority – up to 6 days
- Medium priority – up to 4 days
- Low priority – up to 2 days.

All schools can purchase additional days of support and targeted activity. Stephen Chynoweth demonstrated an example of the brochure that is being developed, which includes a "meet the team" section, which includes information about each SEPs specialisms. However, it was stressed that their expertise is quality assured and every SEP will be able to deliver the menu of traded activity.

More information will be shared with headteachers at the area meetings in June.

## 7. SUMMER TERM PRIMARY HEADTEACHER MEETINGS

It was agreed that the focus for the LA meetings should include the termly Director's briefing, including a DfE update, discussion about future comms, strategic priorities for 2023/24, and an overview of SEND activity.

The EPHA part of the meeting will include an introduction to the Year of Number.

## 8. CLOSE

Clare closed the meeting by acknowledging, once again, the stresses and pressures that are on schools are the moment, and thanked headteachers for their amazing work. She stressed the value and importance of the partnership between the LA and EPHA.

## 9. DATES AND TIMES OF MEETINGS FOR THE 2022/23/24 SCHOOL YEAR

### Executive meetings (The Lion Inn, Boreham)

Thursday 5 October 2023

Thursday 18 January 2024

Thursday 9 May 2024

### Area Heads Meetings

#### Summer term 2023

WEST	Wednesday 14 June	Manor of Groves, Sawbridgeworth
SOUTH	Thursday 15 June	Greenwoods Hotel, Stock
N-EAST	Wednesday 21 June	Colchester Community Stadium
MID	Thursday 22 June	The Lion Inn, Boreham

#### Autumn term 2023

WEST	Wednesday 8 November	Manor of Groves, Sawbridgeworth
MID	Thursday 9 November	The Lion Inn, Boreham
N-EAST	Wednesday 15 November	Colchester Community Stadium
SOUTH	Thursday 16 November	Greenwoods Hotel, Stock

#### Spring term 2024

WEST	Wednesday 28 February	Manor of Groves, Sawbridgeworth
SOUTH	Thursday 29 February	Greenwoods Hotel, Stock
N-EAST	Wednesday 6 March	Colchester Community Stadium
MID	Thursday 7 March	The Lion Inn, Boreham

#### Summer term 2024

WEST	Wednesday 12 June	Manor of Groves, Sawbridgeworth
SOUTH	Thursday 13 June	Greenwoods Hotel, Stock
N-EAST	Wednesday 19 June	Colchester Community Stadium
MID	Thursday 20 June	The Lion Inn, Boreham

The meeting ended at 2.30 pm  
Pam Langmead, EPHA Professional Officer