

**MINUTES OF THE LA AND EPHA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING
THURSDAY 29 JANUARY 2021 starting at 11.15 am**

The meeting was held virtually (using Zoom) as a result of the lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic. It followed on from the EPHA Executive meeting held during the morning.

In attendance	Representing	email address
Clare Kershaw CK	Director of Education	clare.kershaw@essex.gov.uk
Lisa Fergus	Assistant Director – South	lisa.fergus@essex.gov.uk
Alison Fiala AF	Education and EY Lead Mid	Alison.fiala@essex.gov.uk
Roy Blatchford RB	Essex Education Taskforce, Chair	royb88@gmail.com
Lois Ashforth	EPHA Dengie	head@coldnorton.essex.sch.uk
George Athanasiou	EPHA West Vice-Chair	head@greatsampford.essex.sch.uk
Dawn Baker	EPHA Chelmsford West	ceo@heraacademy.co.uk
Sue Bardetti	EPHA Tendring South	admin@hollandhaven.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
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
John Clements	EPHA Uttlesford South	jhcleam@hotmail.com
Anna Conley	EPHA Witham	head@howbridge-inf.essex.sch.uk
Dawn Dack	EPHA Mid Chair/ Maldon	drdack@wentworth.essex.sch.uk
Ceri Daniels	EPHA Colchester South	Head@eightashgreen.essex.sch.uk
Emma Dawson	EPHA Castlepoint and Rochford	Head@thundersley.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 NH	EPHA Vice-Chair/NE Chair	head@hamiltonprimary.com
Pam Langmead PL	EPHA Professional Officer	pam@langmead.me.uk
Ian MacDonald	EPHA Tendring Mid	headteacher@elmstead.essex.sch.uk
Richard McIntosh	EPHA Chelmsford South	head@baddowhall-jun.essex.sch.uk
Kate Mills	EPHA Braintree	head@johnrayinfants.essex.sch.uk
Jinnie Nicholls	EPHA Halstead	head@sgasa.uk
Hayley O’Dea	EPHA Rochford	head@greatwaking.essex.sch.uk
Matt O’Grady	EPHA Brentwood	Matt@westhorndon.essex.sch.uk
Donna Parker	EPHA Tendring North	head@st-marys-ardleigh.essex.sch.uk
Harriet Phelps-Knights HPK	EPHA Chair	Head@janetduke.essex.sch.uk
Richard Potter RP	EPHA North East Vice-Chair	admin@perryfields-inf.essex.sch.uk
Angela Russell	EPHA Basildon West	angelarussell@st-anneline-inf.essex.sch.uk
Gary Soars	EPHA Rayleigh	gsoars@edwardfrancis.essex.sch.uk
Karen Tucker	EPHA Canvey Island	head@canvey-jun.essex.sch.uk
Joanne Willcox	EPHA Epping Forest South	headteacher@hillhouse.essex.sch.uk

1. WELCOME AND ATTENDANCE

Apologies were received from:

- Mary Jo Hall Uttlesford North
- Amanda Reid Chelmsford North
- Jonathan Tye EPHA Harlow

Harriet Phelps-Knights welcomed the Local Authority officers who had joined the meeting.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE EPHA EXECUTIVE MEETING EARLIER

HPK noted that a number of issues had been raised at the EPHA Executive meeting, and asked CK to respond to the following:

i) DfE guidance for schools

The EPHA Chair explained that headteachers are keen to understand what changes the DfE plan to make to the operational guidance as the relaxation of Covid restrictions continues. Schools are still operating under the strictest of guidelines and this is increasingly problematic, particular as the general public begin follow more relaxed rules. CK noted that she has raised this repeatedly with the DfE (and will continue to do so), but stressed that the national guidance is still reliant on the data. Infection rates in Essex schools remain low; there has been a small increase of cases since schools reopened fully, but only around 20 notifications of positive cases in Essex schools each week, and the contact tracing team report that the situation is stable. She confirmed that the LA will continue to support schools while they are required to reinforce the current DfE guidance.

In addition, schools are receiving an increased number of term-time holiday requests, including from parents who are key workers who feel that they should be regarded as an exceptional case.

It was suggested that a letter from the LA to parents to stress the requirement of schools to follow guidance, including that on attendance, would be helpful. CK **AGREED** to produce a letter to go out in the School Comms the following week.

**Clare
Kershaw**

ii) EYFS Baseline training

Alison Fiala noted that the Local Authority has organised free training for primary schools around the introduction of the new Early Years Foundation Stage framework in September and the Reception Baseline Assessment, which becomes statutory for all schools. She shared the dates during the meeting, but confirmed that she will send the information to the Professional Officer.

**Alison
Fiala**

iii) Traveller Liaison

CK **AGREED** to find out if there was a Traveller Liaison Officer available to work with primary schools.

**Clare
Kershaw**

iv) Changes to school nurse contact

A headteacher in Mid noted that she has just received an email setting out immediate changes to the communication with the School Nurse in the their quadrant. The email noted: *I have been advised today from the Kate Walder, Deputy Quadrant Manager in Mid Essex, that we are asking for schools not to contact their school nurse directly by phone or email but to go via the single point of contact (SPOC) and the duty school nurse can then triage the urgency of calls and referrals. Similarly schools are asked to ring SPOC with referrals whilst a robust referral process is put in to place.*

The headteacher argued that the new system for contacting school nurses is very likely to cause safeguarding issues at her school if there is not an immediate response from SPOC.

The school has an excellent professional relationship with their School Nurses going back many years as they have several vulnerable families and have had to "react" very quickly in unison to safeguarding, medical and bereavement issues in their community. She argued that if they have to go through a triage system each time they contact the team, it is going to be very inefficient and unhelpful for both the school and the team. Her greatest concern is that the email concluded that this system would be in place until an alternative referral system was introduced, which may reduce effective contact even further.

CK asked the headteacher to forward her the relevant correspondence and **AGREED** to follow up this system change.

Clare
Kershaw

v) SEND support

There was a discussion about SEND support, with a number of headteachers arguing that the support for children with SEND is inconsistent across the county. Many are frustrated that most assessments are taking place virtually, with some EPs not agreeing to come in to school and/or to see individual children. One headteacher noted that her EP has been told by their union not to go into school, and others are refusing to make any bookings with schools including in September as they note they are being restructured or moving around the county. She stressed that the service feels very fractured and inconsistent.

CK noted that the workforce is still operating in a hybrid way; if an assessment can be done virtually (in agreement with the school) that should be the preferred option, but if a physical assessment/visit is needed then that should take place. She agreed that children are in school, and therefore in-school support is often the most effective. The DfE has recently produced guidance stating that healthcare and other professionals can now return to in-school visits. The Local Authority staff are undertaking regular Lateral Flow Tests.

CK asked headteachers to let her know when they have individual concerns, so that she can address these issues.

vi) Support with transition from Year 6-7

There has been a very mixed experience of transition across the county, with a wide range of requests for information, different time frames and a lack of communication between secondary schools and primary feeders. CK stressed that if the request from a secondary school is entirely unreasonable or unmanageable, the Heads of Education in each quadrant can help broker the conversation to reach a workable solution.

It was noted that this is something that the LA, EPHA and ASHE are discussing, though it has been acknowledged that it may be too late to address the issue this year.

vii) Summer school information

It was noted that most primary schools have not yet been told of arrangements made by secondary schools in respect of summer schools, although in many cases the pupils who will attend are their current Year 6. It was agreed that this will be fed back to ASHE, and primary schools are encouraged to discuss the plan with their local secondaries.

3. ESSEX EDUCATION TASKFORCE

Roy Blatchford, the recently appointed independent Chair of the Essex Education Taskforce, was welcomed to the meeting. CK reminded the Executive that Essex County Council has committed £1 million from Council reserves to support the work of the taskforce, in addition to £500,000 earmarked to support emotional wellbeing and mental health, in order to do something proactive around children's recovery. There is a further pot of funding to extend the holiday activity fund, which has previously been limited to disadvantaged children and young people.

ECC has established the education taskforce, and a planning meeting was held in April to draft terms of reference for the group. These were shared at the meeting. The taskforce aims:

- (i) to minimise the impact of the pandemic on all children and young people as quickly as possible, but with a three to five-year overview of phases of regeneration;
- (ii) to capture and promote current innovation and best practice across the education system in Essex;
- (iii) to question current national approaches to education and system orthodoxies, shaping and demonstrating new 'ways of doing'.

The Taskforce members are yet to be determined, but include:

- Roy Blatchford, Chair
- Clare Kershaw, Director of Education
- Cabinet member for Education
- A voluntary/youth sector practitioner in the County
- A special school practitioner in the County
- An early years practitioner in the County
- A primary practitioner in the County
- A secondary practitioner in the County
- A further education practitioner in the County

The Task Force may add further members up to a limit of 12, as its work develops.

Clare stressed that each practitioner will be a "voice" or "ambassador" for their sector, rather than a representative, someone who can bring the day to day realities and challenge of their sector, as well as having the ability to challenge orthodoxies. The first meeting will be held on 20th May, and Clare has asked for

the name of the primary member by 14th May.

Following the meeting, the EPHA Executive agreed unanimously to nominate Harriet Phelps-Knights, the Chair of EPHA, as the voice of the primary sector.

RB stated that he was delighted to have been appointed as Chair, reminding the Executive of his work in Essex over several years. He noted that he wants to ensure that the existing good practice in Essex is recognised by the project, and to focus the “gaps and gains” caused by the pandemic. He stressed that the taskforce is not about a flurry of new initiatives, but is about building on the best educational practice already established, including partnership work, TPP, disadvantaged work and so on. The funding first and foremost needs to focus on those children and young people who have suffered the greatest gaps during the pandemic.

It was suggested that it will be essential to align the Essex taskforce strategies and plans with those of the national recovery. CK noted that it will be critical to reach out to Sir Kevan Collins, and one of the purposes of appointing RB is that he has access to the national platform and programmes. One of the key objectives of the taskforce is also to lobby and to ensure that the Essex system is heard nationally, to help shape practice.

It was **AGREED** that EPHA will host a webcast with RB later in the term, to enable him to talk directly to Essex primary headteachers and hear their views. He also wants to meet 2 or 3 headteachers in their school settings, from a range of schools.

**EPHA
webcat**

4. SEND STRATEGY UPDATE

CK noted that the improvement work around SEND continues behind the scenes; she is committed to developing the best SEND system for children and young people, their families and for schools in Essex. The SEND inspection in October 2019 informed the key areas for improvement.

Ralph Holloway has led on the SEND Strategy developments along with the Assistant Directors and SEND leads in each quadrant team. Like schools, the LA has experienced challenges in the system during the pandemic.

CK noted that, working through the Headteacher Inclusion Roundtable, a proposal has been put forward to end the academic year with an online conference, to relaunch the SEND strategy. The conference will be broader than SEND, focusing on SEND, the work of the Headteacher Roundtable, the development of the ordinarily available provision guidance, the Inclusion Framework, the links to Trauma Perceptive Practice and the Disadvantaged Strategy, as well as learning and development as a result of the Covid pandemic. This will link with the priorities for the Essex Taskforce.

Work continues on the SEND Strategy for the county; schools were consulted in summer 2019 on the three pillars for the strategy:

- the School-led SEND system;
- growing specialist SEND provision; and
- redesigning a new approach for the SEND workforce.

The LA is now planning to consult on how to create a co-created SEND strategy in the new academic year that schools can sign up to.

The new SEND teams went live in January 2020, and therefore have not had the chance to embed the aspirations and ambitions that were planned for this way of working; in the autumn term the aim is to settle the new SEND team. CK has received some positive feedback about the value of the strategic planning meetings; the aim is to ensure that every school has an Inclusion Partner, an Educational Psychologist and the Schools Effectiveness Partner, to support all children with SEND needs, not just those with a statutory Education Health and Care Plan. She reassured heads that the LA is looking to make some adjustments to address areas that are not yet working.

CK acknowledged that the teams are overwhelmed with requests for assessments at the moment; she urged headteachers to raise concerns either through the SEND Operations Manager or the quadrant lead, if requests seem to have been lost in the system.

The Written Statement of Action following the 2019 inspection identified three areas of weakness:

- The over-identification of Moderate Learning Difficulties – did that mask other needs in relation to speech and language, or other aspects of social, emotional and mental health;
- Joint commissioning, having a county-wide approach to commissioning with colleagues from health so that the access to provision is consistent;
- The quality and consistency of EHCPs.

The LA has had discussions with schools that have had a high number of children identified with MLD, Inclusion Partners have received relevant training and there has been a subsequent reduction in the identification of MLD.

The Local Authority commissioned ISOS to evaluate the EHCP system; they are nearing the latter stages of the redesign, and the projected plans to change the system will be introduced and implemented in the autumn term.

There has been progress around joint commissioning, the work co-chaired by Chris Martin (ECC Commissioner with oversight of the EWMHs contract) and Richard Watson (Deputy Chief Executive of North East CCG, taking the lead on SEND). They have been doing a number of projects including mapping therapies, SENDIASS, neurodevelopment pathways, the Local Offer, and speech and language communication. The work has been ongoing and will start to impact on provision for schools.

The Governance system has been signed off, moving to a Partnership Board, with an oversight for the whole SEND system, chaired by CK.

The Essex Family Forum, the parent/carer forum, recently completed an impact survey, which they plan to repeat annually. There were over 700 responses to the survey, which provides a sense check about how parents and families are experiencing the system. There are concerns about the provision at SEND Support and parental confidence in the EHCP process, that one-planning is inconsistent and ineffective, communication and navigation of the system needs to improve, and the pupil voice needs to be better heard. ECC has written a formal response to the Essex Family Forum. The LA will need to respond to the comments and monitor the progress of changes made to improve the system.

The LA is also working on a SEND forecasting and sufficiency strategy, similar to place planning, the 10 year plan updated each year. This will help determine where capacity is needed going forward; the county is seeing a massive increase in autism, children presenting with Severe Learning Disabilities, and the plan needs to respond to this. There is also an increase in the number of SEND tribunals which puts a great strain on the system as a whole. Later in the meeting, George Athanasiou (headteacher at Great Sampford Primary) noted that he is currently involved with three tribunals, which takes an enormous amount of time and is an overwhelming experience, taking him away from his main role. He offered his experience as a case study to help inform the research from a headteacher's perspective.

The LA is also working to review the SEND funding system, to ensure that it is transparent and fair. On a positive note, it is likely that the High Needs Block will balance at the end of the year, putting the LA in a much stronger and healthier position to make essential changes.

One headteacher noted an improvement in speech and language provision, and said that SENDIASS has been excellent, but there continue to be difficulties accessing support for children with SEMH. CK reminded the Executive to contact Steve Whitfield, Beth Brown or Lianne Canning who lead on SEMH to seek their support. A key priority for this team is on the rollout of TPP across Essex.

5. TRAUMA PERCEPTIVE PRACTICE AND ESSEX STEPS

CK noted that TPP does not currently have a module around physical restraint training, and the suggested good practice to schools is that (some) members of staff should be trained in physical restraint as required and in alignment with the schools' behaviour policy. TPP addresses the whole school behaviour approach, before restraint is needed. She explained that the LA was trying to align TPP with Essex Steps; this programme was endorsed by Special School colleagues and has been promoted by the LA. Steps has declined that approach and do not see the alignment with the two; the LA is looking at options. CK's current advice is that schools should continue to follow the guidance in the Essex document, Understanding and Supporting Behaviour - Safe Practice for Schools. A number of staff should be trained in physical restraint and a number of providers offer this training, including Essex Steps and Team Teach, although the LA does not endorse a particular programme. The LA is in discussion with ESSET to possibly add a module around physical restraint in the TPP programme.

Nick Hutchings noted that there is an overlap between the programmes, and most of the focus of Essex Steps is on a therapeutic approach to managing behaviour by deescalating situations as far as possible; only the last stage of training deals with restraint and holds. He suggested that the issue is that if SEPs are promoting TPP for all schools, there is a training gap which is not being addressed. CK stressed once again that this issue is being considered and a definitive answer will be forthcoming, once discussions with ESSET have taken place. She reminded the Executive that the introduction of TPP was in response to feedback from schools for many years that the management of challenging behaviour was one of the biggest difficulties in schools, which was not being resolved by the existing programmes.

6. SEP SUPPORT PLANNING FOR SEPTEMBER

CK noted that she is looking forward to the resumption of physical meetings, and that she and the Education Teams are planning their support and focus for September, including the resumption of more “business as usual” type work.

Alison Fiala noted that the Heads of Education have met with the Assistant Directors in each quadrant, and have been writing to Partnership Leads to set out the planned support for the term ahead. This includes, for example, Reception Baseline Assessment training, the development of Disadvantaged Champions, Year 2 and Year 6 moderation support, and Early Years assessment trialling. In addition, the School Effectiveness Partners continue to make contact with and visits to schools.

Lisa Fergus added that they are keen to know what schools want and need for September, whether they need curriculum support, what allocation of days are needed for partnerships. This information would be very helpful to enable the teams to plan their support to schools, so that they can hit the ground running in September.

The EPHA Chair noted some of the discussions earlier in the day, including what support there was from the LA to manage complaints, and what future meetings might look like. She suggested that it might be helpful to diarise a Super Executive meeting to discuss these issue in more detail.

The EPHA Vice-Chair expressed his concern about some of these assumptions, for example that it is “business as usual” in schools. He argued that headteachers are struggling with the triggering nature of the UK starting to unlock, and those outside schools anticipating a return to normal working, including the resumption of Ofsted inspections, without acknowledging the challenges that heads have faced and continue to face. These are both Covid related, as well as new requirements such as, for example, the need to seek Landlord Consent (community and VC schools). He said that one of the biggest requests from headteachers is to be given some space; he is still running on a risk assessment based on 8th March, assessment requirements are being introduced, primary schools are managing transition requests from secondaries, there is a new

**Professional
Officer**

Reception Baseline coming. For him the mere thought of managing the SEP workload is outside his current capacity and he is feeling overwhelmed by the huge number of things that he, as a headteacher, is responsible for. He stressed that there is enormous fatigue in the system and that there seems to be a lack of recognition of what school staff have gone through, in order to enable key workers to continue to work during the pandemic. The other Executive members agreed with Nick's comments and it was noted that many headteachers are close to burnout. It was stressed that schools need early notice of change so that they can plan effectively.

CK said that she hopes that heads do recognise that the Local Authority understands the stresses and pressures. She accepts that the pace needs to be slow and that, when they are needed, the Local Authority officers are there to support schools. She agreed to keep the summer term meetings focused on a small number of issues, including wellbeing and the development of the taskforce, in discussion with the Area Chairs.

CK concluded by reminding headteachers what a phenomenal job they had done during the last year, coping with issues that had never been considered before. She agreed that the national system would not have been able to respond to the Covid pandemic without the education system stepping up to enable the key workers to do their jobs. She reminded everyone to follow the TPP values with each other, adults as well as children.

7. DATES AND TIMES OF MEETINGS FOR THE 2020/21/22 SCHOOL YEARS

Executive meetings

Thursday 30 September 2021

Thursday 20 January 2022

Thursday 19 May 2022

Area Heads Meetings

Summer term 2021 (Online)

N-EAST Wednesday 16 June

SOUTH Thursday 17 June

WEST Wednesday 23 June

MID Thursday 24 June

Autumn term 2021

N-EAST Wednesday 10 November Colchester Community Stadium

MID Thursday 11 November Lion Inn, Boreham

WEST Wednesday 17 November Weston Homes Business Centre,
Takeley

SOUTH Thursday 18 November Holiday Inn, Basildon

Spring term 2022

N-EAST Wednesday 2 March Colchester Community Stadium

SOUTH Thursday 3 March Holiday Inn, Basildon

WEST Wednesday 9 March Weston Homes Business Centre,
Takeley

MID Thursday 10 March Lion Inn, Boreham

Summer term 2022

N-EAST	Wednesday 15 June	Colchester Community Stadium
MID	Thursday 16 June	Lion Inn, Boreham
WEST	Wednesday 22 June	Weston Homes Business Centre, Takeley
SOUTH	Thursday 23 June	Holiday Inn, Basildon

The meeting ended at 1.00 pm
Pam Langmead, EPHA Professional Officer