

ESSEX PRIMARY HEADTEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 19 MAY 2020 from 10.00 am –11.30 am

The meeting was held virtually, as a conference call, as a result of the lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic.

* indicates attendance

Distribution	*Lois Ashforth	Dengie
	*George Athanasiou	West Vice-Chair
	*Dawn Baker	Chelmsford West
	*Sue Bardetti	Tendring South
	*Nicky Barrand	South Chair/Basildon East & Pitsea
	*Isobel Barron	West Chair
	*Liz Bartholomew	Harwich and Dovercourt
	*Liz Benjeddi	Billericay
	*Heidi Blakeley	Wickford
	*Amanda Buckland-Garnett	South Woodham Ferrers
	*John Clements	Uttlesford South
	*Anna Conley	Witham
	*Dawn Dack	Mid Chair/Maldon
	*Ceri Daniels	Colchester South
	Emma Dawson	Castle Point and Benfleet
	*Richard Green	South Vice-Chair
	*Mary Jo Hall	West Treasurer/Uttlesford North
	*Nick Hutchings	EPHA Vice-Chair/North East Chair/ Colchester West
	*Pam Langmead	EPHA Professional Officer/County Treasurer
	Julie Lorkins	Epping Forest Rural
	Ian MacDonald	Tendring Mid
	Kate Mills	Braintree
	*Nicola Morgan-Soane	Mid Vice-Chair/ Chelmsford South
	Hayley O'Dea	Rochford
	*Donna Parker	Tendring North
	*Paula Pemberton	Colchester East
	*Richard Potter	North East Vice-Chair
	*Harriet Phelps-Knights	EPHA Chair
	Amanda Reid	Chelmsford North
	Angela Russell	Basildon West
	Gary Soars	Rayleigh
	Karen Tucker	Canvey Island
	*Jonathan Tye	Harlow
	Vacancy	Epping Forest South
	Vacancy	Halstead
	Vacancy	Brentwood

Also in attendance

*Matt O'Grady	West Horndon Primary (Brentwood)
*Jenni Evans	Warley Primary (Brentwood)

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Action

Harriet Phelps-Knights (EPHA Chair) and Pam Langmead (Professional Officer and Treasurer) welcomed everyone to the meeting. It was noted that this additional meeting had been convened to give Executive members a chance to discuss any issues including their concerns and opinions about the DfE's directive that primary schools should reopen to Reception, Year 1 and Year 6, from 1st June onwards.

Apologies were received from:

- Julie Lorkins Epping Forest Rural
- Kate Mills Braintree
- Amanda Reid Chelmsford North
- Angela Russell Basildon West
- Karen Tucker Canvey Island

Pam Langmead noted a number of issues that she wished to raise before the general discussion.

2. JOINT EASTERN REGION STATEMENT

Pam referred to an email and draft statement sent out by Tim Coulson via the MAT2MAT group, proposing that a joint statement should be agreed by the whole of the Eastern region education system, including Local Authorities, Unions, MATs and schools. Pam had already given her view that some of the "promised" agreements within the statement were unlikely to be welcomed or achievable, such as the offer to share and agree the school's risk assessment with Union or health and safety representatives.

One headteacher said that he was fed up with the DfE referring only to MAT CEOs as the decision makers in schools. One CEO in the group said that he felt that Tim Coulson does not have his finger on the pulse of what is going on in schools in general; there was a wider feeling that the statement was patronising and insulting. The Professional Officer suggested that a joint statement from the Eastern Region directors might be welcomed, but that it was unwise and unrealistic to agree and sign up to a statement that wouldn't be agreed by every individual school. It was **AGREED** that Pam would respond to the MAT2MAT group that EPHA did not wish to subscribe to such a statement.

Professional
Officer

3. GMB LETTER TO STAFF

The GMB Union has just sent (18.05.20) a letter to headteachers on behalf of their staff in schools, with a long list of complex demands that they insist schools leaders should meet and evidence before expecting staff to return to schools. Pam noted that she has forwarded this letter to Clare Kershaw, who will take this up with Mark Holland (GMB) and she has said that she feels that this goes against what Unions have jointly been discussion.

Alan Garnett, the NAHT Branch Officer, has sent the following advice to heads:

You could write to all staff, saying

- 1. You have received letters from...*
 - 2. You have also received the joint union coronavirus workplace checklist doc*
 - 3. You will not be responding to the letters directly but*
 - a. welcome the news that unions are asking their members to engage in the planning process*
 - b. will be mindful of these docs alongside government guidance as you go through the RA process, guided by the thorough 25 page LA RA*
 - c. be seeking views/continue to consult with staff and parents...*
- In the meantime PW (Paul Whiteman, NAHT) said last night the NAHT are looking at the joint union checklist.*

In another message (shared on the group chat) it was noted that Alan Garnett had also informed heads:

I have spoken to the NEU.

They want to work with the NAHT, with an approach that does not seek unnecessary conflict with school leaders.

They would prefer school leaders to talk through plans/RAs with their school reps but recognise that not all schools have reps.

Their checklist (GMB, UNISON & UNITE) is key. Focus on that.

4. REVIEW OF EHCPS

Pam explained that the DfE had issued temporary legislation in relation to the delivery of EHC Plans, which ran for the month of May. The LA has been told to direct all schools to review EHCPS, to consider what they can offer to meet the expectations of an EHCPS, including explaining how they will offer support and provision if a child is not in school.

One headteacher asked whether the Inclusion Partners are still working, as she has tried to contact her link IP. It was explained that should still be available. Heads advised colleagues to get in touch with the EP or school SEP, as every schools should be receiving support from their Inclusion Partner.

Nick Hutchings noted that he had received good support from the EP and Ros Somerville, as well as the SEP. He noted that currently a lot of parents of children with EHCPS are keeping their children at home, but the numbers will increase as schools reopen.

Matt O'Grady asked if there was any more (useful) information about transporting children by taxi and other means. The DfE guidance is unhelpful, and he needs more guidance from the Local Authority. Pam noted that this has been discussed during the conference calls, but there aren't any more answers yet.

Pam and Harriet will take these issue back to Clare at the meeting later today.

**Chair/
Professional
Officer**

4. REOPENING SCHOOLS – PRIMARY-PHASE CHALLENGES

a) Risk assessment and liability

Richard Potter repeated his concern, stated at the Executive meeting on 7th May 2020, that headteachers are being asked to complete risk assessments based on insufficient evidence and training. He argued that there is a limit to what can be safely and sensibly included within the current risk assessment. Richard has undertaken some online training about virus transmission and control, which he says is useful (though certainly doesn't resolve the challenge of opening a school). He forwarded the link to the group:

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/training/online-training>

Richard noted that you need a My Who account to access the training, but it is free.

Pam agreed that there are still concerns from many headteachers about liability and insurance, and that this has not been sufficiently addressed by the Local Authority or DfE. She has asked the LA to ensure that the Health and Safety team develops a policy for reopening.

b) Varied responses to suspected or confirmed Covid-19 cases

Sue Bardetti noted that there are a number of Covid-19 in the Tendring District and schools vary in their response, either closing the whole school or just areas within the school. Although the DfE guidance gives some indication of how this should be addressed it was agreed that it would be helpful for there to be clear guidance from the LA.

Pam and Harriet will take this issue back to Clare at the meeting later today.

c) Secondary schools – support of primary

There was a long discussion about the response of secondary schools, and their support (or lack of) for primary schools. One headteacher noted his irritation at observing his neighbour, a secondary school teacher, in his garden sunbathing all day. It was felt that secondaries could offer much more practical support and help to primary schools, over and above simply offering their sympathy and acknowledgement that primary-phase heads are under a lot of pressure.

Pam noted that she had raised the issue of on-site transition support from secondaries at the conference call, but that this had been dismissed by ASHE colleagues, and was clearly not being discussed as a possible offer by most secondary schools. The Executive members felt that secondaries could be offering support in relation to space (on their sites) and staffing capacity. It was difficult to see why secondaries couldn't offer on-site transition visits to primaries. They have raised the challenge of bringing together children from a number of schools and the problem of possible transmission, but the Executive did feel that this could be managed. Similarly transport could be an issue, but again this could be worked through. It was argued that they are going to have to manage this in September for most or all of their pupils, so why not trial arrangements this term (just as primary schools are having to).

Some secondaries have been practical, and have even offered on-site transition

arrangements, but ironically have back tracked from this offer because DfE guidance has stated that they shouldn't do this. Nicky Barrand noted:

"One of our local secondary's made a fantastic offer of having Y6 pupils from mid-June until the end of the term; they had plans for groups and it looked great, but evidently now that the DfE have advised against it, they are not going ahead. So some secondary heads have really thought about it."

There was a real lack of comprehension from Executive members as to why this was seen as a risk or non-option for secondaries, when primary schools are being asked to take back their pupils.

Lois Ashforth expressed her irritation (shared by everyone) that the government uses the Danish reopening of schools as their model to follow, when in reality all/most of the Danish primary schools are engaging with secondaries and using their sites as well as their own. Matt agreed noting that, in Denmark, the Covid-19 death rate is lower and the whole education culture is entirely different – he stated that it was a ridiculous comparison. Amanda Buckland-Garnett added that Danish schools are also 5 weeks ahead of us, get transported to school (no adults massing outside) and are not going in every day (despite what our DfE is recommending).

d) Keeping key worker children separate?

The group discussed whether schools are keeping the children of key workers and vulnerable children separate from the other groups. There was a range of responses; most schools are keeping these children separate, but some are giving parents the choice, or are integrating the key worker children into their year groups. It was agreed that the DfE guidance is inconsistent and vague around this.

e) How to teach and manage children in school, when social distancing

This issue was discussed. Concern was raised about the guidance about limiting equipment (impossible for the youngest children, if not all) – schools do not have extraneous equipment lying around, it is all there for an educational reason!

Pam wondered whether it would be helpful to ask the Consultant from Addenbrooke's for more advice on teaching methods, to limit possible transmission of the virus. It was agreed that this would be helpful, but led to a wider discussion about the use of PPE and appropriate teaching methods, particularly when children may return to school with anxiety and need more support and reassurance than ever.

f) Police contact

Mid schools have been contacted by the Chelmsford and Maldon Community Policing team (Sonja Viner) asking the following question:

I am emailing to enquire if you have any plans in place for reopening the school. We are concerned about the potential of children coming back to School from lockdown and reporting lots of crimes and would like to establish a procedure of reporting any issues with our Public Protection Unit if required.

Pam **AGREED** to take this back to Clare, to check if she was aware of this contact (and whether it is reasonable?)

**Professional
Officer**

**Professional
Officer**

g) Survey on returning to school

It was felt that the survey questions would not cause too much problem. This led to a discussion about the various ways that schools are planning to reopen. A quick show of hands suggested that only one school was opening full time to all year groups.

It was noted that the DfE/government could decide as late as 28th May that schools will not reopen on 1st June, though the general feeling from the Executive was that this was unlikely. However, it was suggested that heads warn parents that this could be the case, as they will have no (term-time) opportunity to tell families of any changes to national arrangements, if they plan to open on the 1st June.

h) Headteacher wellbeing

The group felt very strongly that schools must not be asked or obliged to open over the summer holiday period. The majority of headteachers are exhausted and, at the end of this week in particular, demoralised and angry about the expectations that are being imposed on them by government. Harriet and Pam agreed to raise the issue of headteacher wellbeing during the meeting with Clare, and to stress that heads will not accept any directive to open their schools in the summer holidays.

5. SUMMARY OF ISSUES TO RAISE AT THE AFTERNOON MEETING WITH CLARE KERSHAW

The following issues would be raised at the afternoon meeting with Clare Kershaw, the EPHA Chair and the Professional Officer:

- GMB union letter to schools;
- Transport – particularly of vulnerable children
- Inclusion Partners – engagement with schools
- Liability and insurance, coupled with policy updates:
 - Child Protection;
 - Behaviour Management
 - Health and Safety
 - Attendance
- Clear guidance about closing schools when there is a reported case of Covid-19
- Secondary schools – support for capacity, space and transition.
- Updated key worker list?
- Workload and well-being – summer holiday.

6. NOTES FROM THE EPHA CHAIR AND PROFESSIONAL OFFICER'S MEETING WITH CLARE KERSHAW

3.00 pm – 4.15 pm

The meeting was held virtually, as a conference call, as a result of the lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic.

i) DfE survey calls to schools

Pam noted that she had just been talking to a headteacher in West Essex, who explained that she had been contacted by someone from the DfE who was surveying individual school leaders. She was certain that this was not the call from the HMI link, as the headteacher had already had this call. During the call the head was asked a number of questions including:

- Did the school have bereavement counselling support in place;
- Were they planning/able to host SCITT training in September;
- The availability of laptops and the access to home learning;
- How the schools was keeping in touch with home learners and the vulnerable;
- How did she feel about the priority groups returning;
- On a scale of 1 – 10 how was she feeling (about 4) – was the weekend reassuring (no).

Clare was not aware that these calls were taking place and was surprised that they were contacting maintained schools (she was aware that the DfE is consulting with MAT CEOs). She agreed to follow this up with the DfE.

ii) Governors approval of reopening arrangements

Pam noted that a headteacher had contacted her to ask if governors have the final say about reopening. Her advice had been that the headteacher should be consulting with governors, but that this is an operational decision. Clare stressed that one governor's view should not prevail, and that this should be discussed with the whole Governing Body. She agreed to follow this up.

iii) Notifying the LA if the school is unable to reopen for operational reasons

Harriet asked if a school that was unable to open for operational reasons – for example, no water on site - needed to notify the LA. Clare agreed that if a school cannot open safely or securely, then they can close as normal. She suggested that a school should use the comment box in the survey (out tomorrow) to explain the reason they cannot open or expand their provision.

iv) GMB Union letter

Clare had emailed Mark Holland (GMB representative) and had also contacted Nicki Harris (HR) to discuss this. She will be formulating a direct reply that heads can use to respond to the letter. However, Clare expressed her disappointment that this letter had been sent to heads at the same time as the NEU/GMB checklist, which offers a reasonable compromise between asking key questions and assuring their members that schools are taking appropriate measures to ensure their safety. Clare stressed that she felt that the key document will be the school's risk assessment, which should inform the checklist.

v) Eastern region statement

Harriet and Pam informed Clare of the discussion about the suggested regional

statement, and explained that the EPHA Executive was not minded to spend time developing a joint statement. However, they made it clear that collaborative agreements between regional Education Directors were helpful, to demonstrate their support for schools.

vi) Transport for vulnerable pupils

It was argued that there needs to be more robust guidance around the transport of vulnerable pupils; the DfE guidance is unhelpful and woolly. Clare agreed to follow this up.

vii) Support from Inclusion Partners

It was noted that the support has been inconsistent, particularly in some areas. Clare expressed her concern about this, especially as schools are being asked to review EHCPs. She agreed to follow this up, but noted that SEN teams should be available to support schools.

viii) Liability and Insurance

Harriet and Pam stressed that school leaders continue to be worried about their responsibilities and liabilities in relation to Covid-19 cases, and any accidents that might occur as a result of the changing use of their schools. Clare agreed that individual schools should speak to their own insurance providers, but will also speak to the insurance team. Her view is that the risk assessment will drive and protect the actions of a school. This should be used to identify risk; explain action taken; and how any high risk is being modified to low risk.

ix) School policies

Clare was asked if the LA could develop the following policies, or at least provide appendices to reflect the Covid-19 pandemic:

- Behaviour Management – she confirmed this was underway (using the HMI support)
- Health and Safety – underway
- Attendance
- Child Protection

Clare noted that the LA is also reviewing the Home/School Agreement produced at the beginning of the school closure period.

It was agreed that, in relation to attendance, parents should not be able to opt in/opt out of any school offer for their child. However, it was recognised that some parents will wait to make the decision as to whether they want to send their child back to school (considering how safe it appears to be over time) and schools will need to be able to – or consider whether they can - expand their offer as demand and numbers grow.

x) Meeting with Essex MPs

Clare was asked about her meeting with Essex MPs last Friday. She noted that their approach was more understanding than might have been feared, though Vicky Ford Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families at the Department for Education, did stick to the party line about reopening. The LA continues to lobby on

behalf of headteachers, particularly around wellbeing.

xi) Key worker list

Clare felt that this was likely to stay as it was, and that it is already quite wide. She understood the concern that parents who worked in some industries who had been instructed to go back to work, such as construction or manufacturing, might now argue that they are “critical workers” but believed that schools should stick to the original list. She reminded us that the original list was to ensure a national response to the pandemic health emergency, and these jobs are not part of that.

xii) Secondary schools

Harriet explained that the Executive had a long discussion about secondary schools and the very different role they are being expected to play in the pandemic. We discussed the issues around transition, about the potential space on secondary school sites and possible staffing capacity, and noted our disappointment that some secondary schools had initially put forward a supportive offer including onsite transition, which has since been withdrawn following the DfE guidance that suggested that Year 6 would not be taught at secondaries. That guidance can be found in

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/preparing-for-the-wider-opening-of-schools-from-1-june/planning-guide-for-primary-schools#planning-what-to-teach-and-how>

Within section 11 – planning what to teach and how:

In year 6 it is unlikely that many of the end of term traditions will be able to take place, for example, whole year or class assemblies with parents, school journeys and trips. Schools should provide opportunities for children to discuss this as it may be a source of anxiety or sadness. Though visits to secondary schools for induction will not take place this year, some secondary schools may have capacity to undertake remote induction briefings or other types of sessions for pupils, for example to meet form tutors, heads of year, or other key staff, or have a tour of the school virtually. You should discuss the options with your secondary schools.

Clare noted that the DfE is publishing guidance for secondary schools imminently, and she has asked for, and hopes that this will include guidance about Year 6 transition.

She noted that Nicola Pruden and Robin Harbord are working on a set of principles for secondary schools, in collaboration with ASHE. She agreed to continue the discussion about Year 6 transition and support for primaries.

xiii) Headteacher wellbeing

Lastly, Harriet mentioned the concerns that are shared by the whole EPHA Executive about their own and other headteachers’ wellbeing. Primary-phase headteachers are under unprecedented stress and pressure, not helped by statements from government ministers implying that they are not taking their responsibilities seriously. Clare confirmed that she raises her concerns about headteacher wellbeing with the DfE on a regular basis, and is determined that they should not expect schools to open during the summer holiday period. This feeling is shared by Helen Lincoln. It is possible that there will be an expectation that LAs organise some type of summer school provision, but the LA feeling is that this must be offered on a voluntary basis and not with the expectation

that it is run by schools. She noted that regional local authorities are working closely together and are increasingly making joint decisions, endorsed by all; the decision to advocate that schools should close at half term was one such decision.

She noted that Sally Rendell continues to work with Jo Barclay on the wellbeing project, and this work will continue and will expand to include headteachers when circumstances allow. Clare promised to continue the focus on headteacher wellbeing, as she shares our concerns about the pressures and stresses that primary heads are having to manage and cope with.

Pam Langmead
EPHA Professional Officer