

ESSEX PRIMARY HEADTEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

MEETING OF THE EPHA SMALL SCHOOLS SUPPORT GROUP

HELD ON TUESDAY 8 JULY 2025 3.30 –5.00 pm

Venue online

Clerk Pam Langmead [TEL: 01621-786359/07791 143277]

1. IN ATTENDANCE

Charlotte Brown	Messing Primary
Claire Jackman	Great Easton Primary
Jinnie Nichols	Chorus Schools Federation – Chair
Amy Reis	Great Sampford Primary
Kirsty Stuart	Ridgewell CE and Belchamp St Paul's Primaries
Melissa Taylor	Margaretting/Roxwell/Ford End Primaries
Pam Langmead	EPHA Professional Officer
Richard Manville	FundEd
Catherine Hutley	Mid Assistant Director for Education/Inclusion Framework lead

Jinnie Nichols, Chair of the SSSG, welcomed headteachers to the meeting, noting that the end of the summer term is always exceptionally busy for schools, with all sorts of unexpected issues to take care of.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from:

Stephanie Newland St Margaret's CE Primary, Toppesfield

3. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

The minutes of the meeting held on 18th March 2025 were approved as an accurate record. The following matters considered at the meeting were noted:

a) FundEd funding project (Minute 3 refers)

Jinnie noted that she has started to develop a funding wall, working with Richard Manville, but had some concerns about the inclusion of information on the school website. Charlotte echoed this, and it was agreed that this would be discussed with Richard later in the meeting.

b) Ofsted consultation (Minute 4b refers)

It was noted that the new Ofsted framework has not yet been published. Helen Youngman is presenting at the Small Schools conference, focusing on the new framework and the implications for small schools.

4. GOVERNOR NETWORK GROUP

The Professional Officer reported that the Small Schools Governor network had held two themed discussion group meetings since the small school headteachers last met. She referred to the following reports:

Meeting summary for Small Schools Governor Network – Thursday 24th April 2025

The discussion focused on two areas:

- a presentation from Richard Manville, Managing Director of FundEd, and
- Managing governing body roles and responsibilities.

Seven governors joined Pam at the meeting.

Schools' Income Generation and Fundraising Challenges

Richard Manville, the managing director of Community Inspired, discussed the challenges faced by schools in income generation and fundraising, particularly for extracurricular activities. He highlighted the time constraints faced by schools and the difficulty in setting up a PTA due to legal requirements. Richard suggested that his team could help with the heavy lifting in fundraising, but would need input from the schools. He also mentioned the positive feedback from previous meetings and the interest shown by some schools in setting up a community fund.

School Fundraising Service Overview

Richard discussed the school fundraising service they've been providing since 2012, which includes a magazine, comprehensive support guides, and a grants database. He also mentioned their online fundraising platform and the "Donate to Educate" community fund, which allows schools to raise funds from local businesses. Richard emphasised the importance of building relationships with businesses and the potential for recurring income streams. He also mentioned the challenges schools face in finding the time and resources to start fundraising and offered their service as a solution.

Governor Roles and Responsibilities Discussion

In the meeting, Pam led a discussion on Governor roles and responsibilities, focusing on how to manage and encourage those on the governing body. One governors shared a document with detailed roles and responsibilities for different types of roles, which was found to be useful for new governors. Another suggested using a skills audit to determine the roles and responsibilities of governors, and to align them with the school's needs. The importance of training and support for governors was also discussed, with Pam suggesting the use of online resources like the Key for School Governors. The conversation ended with a reminder of upcoming training sessions and the importance of sharing meeting recordings with governors.

Meeting summary for Small Schools Governor Network – Wednesday 25th June 2025

The discussion focused on two areas:

- Considering themes for the next school year
- Celebrating successes over the year in our small schools

Nine governors joined Pam at the meeting.

The governors who attended said that they have found being part of the network valuable. It gives small school governors the opportunity to share experiences, resources and expertise, and they feel less isolated as a result of the regular meetings. Pam suggested that they could further use the email group to ask questions in between meetings (as well as using her as a source of advice).

The group discussed the themes for the school year ahead and put forward the following suggestions:

- SEND – the challenge of managing complex children, with limited resources and capacity. This has a huge impact in a small school.
- The impact of falling rolls and consideration of the sustainability of small schools. Structures and organisation, including MATs and federations. Ideas and initiatives to attract new pupils.
- Managing school meals and wraparound childcare in small schools.
- Succession planning on the governing body, particularly the Chair.
- The new Ofsted framework.
Governor monitoring, governor visit templates.
- Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation

It was agreed that these subjects will be allocated as themes across the school year. The following dates/times and themes have been circulated to the Governor Network:

- **Tuesday 30th September 2025, 4.00 – 5.00 pm** – the sustainability of small schools, structures and organisation, and how can we attract new pupils
- **Wednesday 19th November 2025, 8.00 – 9.00 am** – managing school meals and wraparound childcare in small schools
- **Monday 12th January 2026, 5.30 – 6.30 pm** – the new Ofsted framework and what that means for small school governors
- **Tuesday 24th March 2025, 8.00 – 9.00 am** – succession planning on the Governing Body
- **Tuesday 12th May 2026, 4.00 – 5.00 pm** – the wider system (devolution and Local Government Reorganisation) and what it might mean for Essex schools
- **Wednesday 15th July 2026, 8.00 – 9.00 am** – governor monitoring and visits/celebrating success

The second half of the meeting focused on successes in the governors' small schools and on their governing bodies. It was so positive to hear the great work that governors are involved with and/or recognising. The success stories included:

- The local headteacher partnership who is welcoming and inclusive to their small school colleague, enabling her to be fully involved in the group, despite the time-challenges of being a small school head.
- One small school that has improved its attendance figures significantly (from LA RAG-rated red, to green), not by using penalty notices, but by communicating and hassling families to ensure their children attend school.
- Governors in one VA school have helped to raise funds for capital projects by running a series of supper clubs. The three over the year have attracted support from parents and

also the wider community and have raised the profile of the governing body, as well as raising much needed funds for projects.

- Another governor explained that her school gained a new headteacher at the beginning of the school year and have benefited from great leadership which is enabling the school to thrive.
- One governor said that it has been a challenging year for her school for various reasons, but the staff have been very supportive of each other, which has been very positive.
- Another governor said that it had also been a challenging year. Early on they had to close the school for a period of time but the Headteacher and all staff really rose to the challenge, and coped admirably, making sure that the teaching and learning still continued. The school also had a very successful SIAMs inspection which recognised the excellent work that is being done.
- One governor explained that she is on the governing body at Cray's Hill, which is unique in that 98% of their pupils are from the Traveller community. They support the pupils and their families in very unique ways, and have been instrumental in offering support to other schools to share their experience and expertise.
- Finally, a governor explained that he had handed the role of Chair after many years to another governor, and said that governor relationships with the headteacher and staff are very positive.

This has been such a positive year for this Network. The governors have confirmed that they appreciate the support and advice from their colleagues, and also from EPHA. Pam noted that she is very pleased to be continuing the network in 2025/26 and is confident that many more ideas and resources will be shared and that governors will benefit from the group.

The next Governor Network meeting will be held on Tuesday 30th September, and the focus will be on the sustainability of small schools. Pam reminded headteachers to promote the network to their governors, who should contact her directly if they want to join the group.

5. FundEd FUNDING PROJECT

Richard Manville was welcomed to the meeting. Jinnie explained that Richard had been asked to attend the meeting to follow up on any progress made by small school headteachers, a number of whom had volunteered to pilot a community fund in their schools.

Richard accepted the challenge for small school headteachers, both in terms of capacity, time and resources, but did stress the power of the funding wall. He reminded headteachers that FundEd works with PTAs as well as school leaders and business managers, so the responsibility for fundraising need not lie solely with the headteacher.

Jinnie explained that her three schools had started to work with Richard, but they had a current issue with their websites, following Juniper's decision to buy Primary Site, resulting in additional charges to schools. Richard noted that managing the school website can often be a problem, particularly when time is limited. However, he reminded the headteachers that

funding pages and information do not necessarily need to be published on the school's own website; a page can be created for an entire funding wall, or single event and information pages, and a link can then be shared with parents, for example through an email or newsletter.

Jinnie did note that, despite the challenges being faced around the website, her schools have started to introduce a number of fundraising ideas.

Richard stressed the power of setting up and developing a Community Fund. Schools ask local businesses and suppliers to set up a regular monthly donation to the school (e.g. £10) and, in return, offer publicity and positive links with the school. He suggested that a school could ask a confident teacher (or PTA member, or governor) to be the mouthpiece for the school, and reminded heads that FundEd will help with template letters and how best to make contact with local businesses. The particular value of this income stream is that, once set up, it gives a regular income, rather than focusing fundraising on individual projects. Richard recommends trying to contact former pupils, who may be willing to donate regular funds to the school, although it was accepted that they might not always be easy to track.

There was a discussion about lotteries, or 100 Clubs. Richard confirmed that a school, or PTA, would need to register this with the Local Authority, but they are very simple to set up and give a reliable income. There is a guide on their website

<https://pta.co.uk/fundraising/ideas/step-by-step-guide-100-club/>

Richard reminded headteachers of their website for PTAs, which gives regular ideas and information about local grants. <https://pta.co.uk/fundraising/ideas>

The group discussed bidding for grants, which FundEd can help with. Richard gave a useful tip, to contact the organisation that is offering the grant, before starting on an application process to check if it is actually worth apply. The applicant can then confirm that they are eligible for the grant before committing to the process.

Richard mentioned once again the value of having a fundraising champion, perhaps working in more than one school, who could be paid for a few hours a week to focus on raising funds for the school(s). The Professional Officer suggested that fundraising could be discussed at a Governing Body meeting, to involve governors and potentially interest someone in lending support.

Richard confirmed that he is very willing to support headteachers in their fundraising efforts. He was thanked for attending the meeting and for his help and advice. *He left the meeting at 4.25 pm.*

6. HOW SMALL SCHOOLS CAN ACCESS THE INCLUSION FRAMEWORK

Catherine Hutley was welcomed to the meeting. She is the Mid Assistant Director, and leads on the Inclusion Framework. Jinnie reminded the group that, at the last meeting, there was a discussion about inclusion reviews and the inclusion framework fund, and there was some

concern that small schools are missing out on this funding. This is partly due to a lack of time and capacity to bid for the funding, and there were concerns that the process is time consuming and involves a great deal of paperwork.

Catherine acknowledged that there is some variation of experience across the four quadrants, but Inclusion Partners are becoming more familiar with the Inclusion Framework and are increasingly confident in helping schools make successful bids. She noted that there is still plenty of money in the inclusion framework pot, though a lot of bids are coming in at this point in the term. She noted that at some point the funding will run out, and a further bid will need to be made to Schools Forum to add to the fund.

She stressed that the principles of the Inclusion Framework are paramount when considering a bid for funding. The school should work with their Inclusion Partner to develop a bid. Once submitted it goes to a decision-making panel, but Catherine stressed that, if the bid is well considered, it would usually be agreed by the panel.

When making a bid the school needs to profile the cohort of pupils who will benefit from a particular project, identifying the avoidance of certain negative outcomes, and the positive impact, for example on SEMH, attendance, behaviour etc. The pupils who are going to benefit don't have to be on a pathway to an EHCP, in fact a key part of the Inclusion Framework is to avoid the need for assessment and EHCPs.

Catherine stressed that copious paperwork or detailed presentations are not an essential part of the application process; when attending the panel meeting the school can talk about the intended project and bring it to life.

She suggested that applications are not confined to just one school; for example, a group of schools might make a joint bid to address a need, for example for training. She noted that one of the issues often expressed by small schools is the challenge faced by a Year 6 pupil who has been within an inclusive and nurturing environment, who is then moving to a much larger secondary school. It could be beneficial for a group of small schools to apply for funds to set up a project to support transition.

Catherine noted that the funding can't be used for transport or staffing costs, and it is important that projects are demonstrably sustainable after the one-off injection of funding. She gave some examples of projects, such as developing outdoor learning (e.g. sensory trails, forest schools), repurposing spaces in buildings; she noted that a lot of bids are around staff training and development, for example supporting the Stay Project. The possibilities are wide and the LA wants schools to be really creative.

In response to a question, Catherine gave more guidance about the role of the IP in the process. They are unable to write the bid for a school, but will support the process, including at the panel meeting.

Catherine was asked if she could share information about the inclusion framework bids that have been accepted, focusing on how many were from small schools and what percentage are successful in their bid for funding.

Catherine was thanked for attending the meeting; *she left at 4.40 pm.*

The group discussed the possibility of a joint funding bid from small schools, and it was **AGREED** that this should be considered at a future meeting. There was some concern that the expertise and support from Inclusion Partners did vary across the county, and also that that experience of many schools was that the application process was unnecessarily time-consuming and complicated.

7. SCHOOL MEALS AND WRAPAROUND CHILDCARE

It was noted that this had been raised as an issue by a small school headteacher, who had reached out to colleagues to ask for advice and experiences around managing school meals and wraparound childcare in a small school.

Melissa noted that her schools are unable to run viable childcare due to low need and take up from parents, and there are no local childminders, which makes it impossible for them to even signpost to local childcare. The group discussed recent approaches from a company that had been commissioned by the Local Authority to contact schools that were in a priority area (i.e. with limited or no childcare offer), but who had not applied for wraparound funding. The approach from representatives had been experienced by some schools as inappropriate and even aggressive; this issue has been raised with the Local Authority who confirmed that they would ensure that the contact was supportive and did not put pressure on schools.

The group agreed that, while wraparound childcare is a key Government manifesto promise to parents, it is not a statutory requirement and schools must ensure that any offer is both financially viable and sustainable.

The headteachers in the group discussed how they offer school meals. Jinnie explained that she reinstated a kitchen at Wethersfield Primary, which previously had been operated from a servery. They are now very creative in their offer, including selling meals to the local pre-school, running a seniors' lunch and so on. She advised being very flexible with menus.

Amy explained that her school includes a "blue band" offer to pupils, a cold lunch alternative (e.g. a wrap or baguette) that pupils can choose to eat outdoors. They surveyed the pupils asking for 12 filling suggestions, and have chosen the top five, which are served each week.

Charlotte noted that two thirds of her pupils have school meals. They have increased the cost of a school meal to £2.50 to make it viable. There was a discussion about the importance of increasing prices gradually but regularly to reflect food and staffing cost increases, rather than trying to fix prices for years and then having to introduce a sharp increase.

A couple of the headteachers reported that they are buying support from the Essex School Meals Advisory Service using their virtual offer, and noted that they are very happy with the service.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no additional business to discuss.

9. DATES AND TIMES OF MEETINGS FOR THE 2025/26 SCHOOL YEAR

The group discussed the frequency of meetings over the year, and agreed that one a term was about right. It was noted that small school headteachers are exceptionally busy at the end of the school year and it was suggested that the summer term meeting should be brought forward from July. It was also suggested that the days and times of meetings should vary, to try to suit as many headteachers as possible.

- Small Schools conference – Wednesday 15th October 2025, The Lion Inn, Boreham
- Small Schools Support Group online meeting – Wednesday 26th November 2025, 3.30 pm
- Small Schools Support Group online meeting – Tuesday 17th March 2026, 9.30 am
- Small Schools Support Group online meeting – Thursday 4th June 2026, 11.00 am

All meetings held online (apart from the conference – in-person at the Lion Inn)

It was noted that the conference will be held a week earlier in the term than previously, so that those headteachers whose schools have a two-week half term will be able to attend.

The meeting ended at 5.00 pm