

## ESSEX PRIMARY HEADTEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

### MEETING OF THE EPHA SMALL SCHOOLS SUPPORT GROUP

HELD ON WEDNESDAY 10 MAY 2023 3.30 – 5.10 pm

Venue online

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

#### 1. IN ATTENDANCE

Phil Andrews	Rettendon Primary
Jamie Bearman	St Peter's CE Primary, West Hanningfield
Tracey Bratley	Chrishall, Farnham & Rickling Federated CE Primaries
Charlotte Brown	Messing Primary
Judith Dale	Baynards Primary
Hayley Dyer	Crays Hill Primary
Emma Flin	Great Yeldham CE Primary
Matthew Hawley	Debden CE Primary
Becky Keitch	St George's CE Primary, Great Bromley
Llewellen Lawson	Dr Walker's CE Primary, Fyfield
Andrew MacDonald	Ardleigh St Mary's CE Primary/Langham Primary
Sarah Meares	Terling CE Primary
Becky More	Rivenhall Primary
Stephanie Newland	St Margaret's CE Primary, Toppesfield
Jinnie Nichols	Chorus Schools Federation – Chair
Donna Parker	Fingringhoe CE Primary
Marne Reynecke	Ashdon Primary
Jane Scawthorn	St John the Baptist CE Primary, Pebmarsh
Lisa Stainsbury	East Hanningfield CE Primary
Sarah Stevenson	Langenhoe Primary
Kirsty Stuart	Ridgewell CE Primary
Melissa Taylor	Margaretting CE Primary
Samantha Willis	Canewdon and Rawreth CE Primary and Nursery
Clare Kershaw	Director of Education
Alison Fiala	Head of EY and Education, Mid/Small Schools lead
Kerrie McGivern	Director of School Improvement, SAT
Julie Puxley	Headteacher, Katherine Semar Schools/Saffron Academy Trust
	Deputy CEO
Emma Vincent	Headteacher, RA Butler/Saffron Academy Trust Deputy CEO
Pam Langmead	EPHA Professional Officer

#### 2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Johanna Bailey	Ford End Primary
Emily Bartram	Radwinter CE Primary
Ana da Peidade	Belchamp St Paul's CE Primary
Jenny Kemp	Latchingdon CE Primary
Samina Metsom	Finchingfield Primary

Kate Mortimer	High Beech Primary
Jennifer Penney	Shalford Primary
Harriet Phelps-Knights	EPHA Chair
Danielle Welsman	Stisted Primary
Lyndsey Wood	St Cedd's CE Primary, Bradwell

Jinnie Nichols, Chair of the SSSG, welcomed everyone to the meeting and, in particular, Clare Kershaw and Alison Fiala from the Local Authority, and Julie Puxley, Emma Vincent and Kerrie McGivern from the Saffron Academy Trust.

### 3. **MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2023 were approved as an accurate record. The follow matters arising were noted:

#### a) **Suspension and permanent exclusion training for governors (Minute 3b refers)**

The Professional Officer confirmed that she had run training for governors focused on their role in the exclusions process, and had one more session planned for 11<sup>th</sup> May. The take up had been excellent, with over 150 governors signed up for the final session. Jinnie reminded headteachers that small schools, in particular, should consider collaborative arrangements with other governing bodies to help support the process, in the event of an exclusion.

Pam explained that she will run governor training (online) focused on Managing Complaints, on two dates: Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> June at 6.00 pm, and Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> July at 4.00 pm. She will email details to headteachers soon, and ask governors to sign up for a session.

#### b) **Small Schools Group conference (Minute 3a refers)**

The Professional Officer reminded headteachers that this has been booked at the Lion Inn on Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> October 2023. The afternoon will focus on wellbeing, and the speakers for the day are being partly subsidised by the Essex Taskforce.

#### c) **Small Schools Roundtable (Minute 5 refers)**

The Professional Officer noted that she has not had any further information from Sean Tobin following the meeting of the National Small Schools Round Table that was scheduled for Monday 20<sup>th</sup> March. She will contact him and ask him to feedback at the next meeting of the group on 13<sup>th</sup> July.

Professional  
Officer

All other matters arising were addressed during the meeting.

### 4. **FEEDBACK FROM THE NASS ONLINE MEETING**

The EPHA Professional Officer shared a report of a meeting of the National Association of Small Schools that she had attended on 28<sup>th</sup> March. There were 11 people on the call, including NASS committee members, about 3 small school headteachers (one of whom is an Ofsted inspector), and a research student.

NASS has benefited from the development of online meetings as a result of Covid, and can now hold regular meetings online; previously they met in London and struggled to find

attendees.

Julie Kelly, the Headteacher Liaison Officer for NASS, chaired the meeting. She explained that the committee is focused on developing and improving their website, including posting up to date resources and information.

The meeting focused on a range of issues including Ofsted inspections of small schools, the aftermath of the recent tragic death of Ruth Perry, local authority support of small schools, and the promotion of a small schools week.

Jinnie noted that, in her experience, the support from Essex Local Authority seems to be more effective and positive than that reported by a couple of headteachers from other authorities. She has certainly appreciated the support and input from School Effectiveness Partners and LA officers in the last few years, including during the pandemic. She noted that it was also good to see that NASS was focusing on good and best practice in schools and not just celebrating “the nice to do” events.

<https://www.smallschools.org.uk/>

## 5. **LOCAL AUTHORITY STRATEGY AND SUPPORT FOR SMALL SCHOOLS**

Clare Kershaw, Director of Education, was welcomed to the meeting. The group was reminded that, at the last meeting in March, the Professional Officer suggested that Clare should be invited to the next meeting to talk about the Local Authority’s strategy to support small schools, particularly now that the DfE focus is no longer on system-wide academisation. An increasing number of headteachers in small schools are struggling and a worrying number are resigning from headship, some well before their retirement age.

Clare noted that Alison Fiala has been driving much of the Small Schools work on the ground, and she had asked her to accompany her to the meeting as she has so much local knowledge and detail. The LA small schools’ strategy has been around for a while, and then morphed into the sustainable schools’ strategy. This acknowledges that all schools, whatever their size, need to be sustainable, though the financial pressures are particularly acute for small schools.

Clare explained that she spends a lot of her time working with Joe Chell and his team on place planning, and she has come to realise that small schools have a unique value, and are really the beating heart of a community. Some parents actively seek a small school environment. The Local Authority tries to be as proactive as possible when considering the challenges for small schools, including planning, pupil numbers, class sizes and the recruitment and retention of staff.

Clare said that probably the hardest experience she has had in her career as Director of Education was overseeing the possible closure of a small school. The LA needed to consider whether the school was viable, but she realised that they also needed to look at the individual and unique circumstances in that community; for her, there was a shift from considering whether a school was “viable” to how it could be “sustainable”. She stressed that there are no plans to close small rural schools and when the LA looks at its forecasting methodology it considers the valuable and unique part that a small school plays in its

community.

She noted that the DfE White Paper, published a year ago, is in an interesting space. It continues to be the policy direction for the DfE, and some of the plans, such as developing Trust standards and the academy regulatory and commissioning review, are continuing. However, there will now be very minimal legislative reform in this parliament, and the language of a fully Trust-led system has gone. However, the focus on strong, sustainable, and viable MATs continues to be the aim of Government. There isn't now the pressure on maintained schools or Standalone Academy Trusts to join a MAT, unless they are vulnerable or causing concern; i.e. if a school is judged inadequate, or has two consecutive RI judgements from Ofsted, the DfE will continue to be interventionist. That aspect of the White Paper continues to be DfE policy.

Clare noted that this gives headteachers the time and space to consider the context and challenges for their own school, including rurality issues, pupil numbers and forecasts, staff recruitment and retention, and to think about the future for their own school without the political pressure of academisation. The Sustainable Schools Dashboard, developed by the LA, now focuses on a three-year budget projection, to help schools consider their financial sustainability and outcomes for pupils. The Schools Forum has reviewed and changed the criteria for the Falling Rolls Fund so that more primary schools (including small schools) are eligible and can apply, although this funding is specifically for those schools that have a temporary dip in their roll and can demonstrate anticipated growth and recovery in the medium term.

The Local Authority can approve loans for schools that are struggling to set a balanced budget; working with the schools' finance team, these are signed off by the Director of Education, and the school must have a budget recovery plan in place. To date the LA has used this facility very sparingly, but in order to support schools over the next few years the LA will more proactive in this area. She noted that if a school seeks to join a MAT the loan does not go with them.

The LA is also focused on how schools are accessing the support of partnerships through the Partnership Strategy. Linda Robinson is a member of the Essex Taskforce, and she is supporting both wellbeing, and offering support for the Year of Reading and the Year of Number. Clare noted it would be helpful to understand how the LA could tweak the strategies for small schools so that they don't miss out on these opportunities. Clare stressed that the LA is keen to engage with small school heads, with no agenda, to help facilitate the discussions around their direction of travel.

Clare noted that we are in an uncertain political landscape and urged headteachers not to worry too much about the current political and policy climate; if there is a Labour Government following the next General Election it is not entirely clear what the impact will be, but there may be a bigger investment in the public sector, including schools. Importantly, what Clare is interested in is what the education system will look like in 3- 5 years, how can we ensure that it is both doing well for children and young people and families, and is sustainable, and how the support can be bespoke for small schools.

Jinnie Nichols mentioned a number of pressures that are there for all schools, but particularly for small schools, including finances, and how to support and manage special educational needs. She noted there are also practical issues for headteachers who manage more than one school.

The Professional Officer suggested that the LA could deliver more online training and offer recordings, which would be a practical help for small school headteachers who have multiple commitments during the school day.

Llewellyn Lawson noted that his PAN has increased, but in his school there is now a higher percentage of pupils with SEND and EHCPs. His school (in common with many schools) struggles with recruitment because of a lack of transport links, and staff are finding managing children with complex needs more and more challenging and stressful. He asked how his and other small schools could manage the wellbeing of staff as well as their budget.

Clare acknowledged these additional challenges for small school and suggested that the LA could undertake a review of the percentage of children with SEN in a school population, in order to check whether the notional SEN funding was sufficient or needed to be recalibrated. Jinnie also noted that, whilst SEN top-up funding may be provided for a school that seems to come out of the blue and therefore it is difficult for schools to plan their budget in advance. The challenge for small schools of admitting children who are displaced or who have EHCPs (and whose parents express a preference for a particular school) can add huge pressures, due to a lack of resources both in and available to the school. This also offers significant additional pressure on the school's SENCo, who may, in several cases be the headteacher, and is rarely a full time role. The LA was asked to consider impact of the additional tasks that they request schools to complete, such as the current need to re-moderate EHCPs. Clare noted that the LA has heard this message and is considering how it can manage and gate-keep requests to schools; she stressed it is not always possible to manage every communication to schools but accepted that the LA needs to consider the impact on schools, and small schools in particular.

Sarah Stevenson argued that, as a non-church, small maintained school, the options for academisation or federation are often difficult to find. The school may be rural and be under financial pressure, so the option of Executive headship may be unrealistic. Alison Fiala noted that there are a number of federations across Essex, and that there are grants available to support a school that is considering this option. She explained that schools are considering a range of federations, including between secondary and primary, and church and non-church schools. Alison stressed the importance of encouraging schools to make use of the Sustainable Schools Toolkit, which gives senior leaders and governors valuable insight and information about their school. It was **AGREED** that Alison would attend the next meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> July to demonstrate the toolkit.

**Alison Fiala**  
**SSSG 13 July**

Jinnie Nichols asked about a financial barrier to federation, that currently a group of federated schools are unable to run a joint budget due to the restrictions on the reporting system. Clare agreed that this should be reconsidered and also stressed the importance of minimising administration and bureaucracy in a small school; it shouldn't be the case that the

only way to reduce costs is by reducing staff numbers.

Clare was thanked for attending the meeting and for her support. She stressed the importance of having a focused lens on small schools to ensure that they are sustainable and can continue their unique and valuable position in the education landscape. She agreed to return to a future Small Schools Group meeting to continue the dialogue.

**6. SAFFRON ACADEMY TRUST RE CURRICULUM PROGRAMME**

Julie Puxley, Emma Vincent, and Kerrie McGivern were welcomed to the meeting. Julie explained that she is headteacher at Katherine Semar Schools, and a Deputy CEO of the Saffron Academy Trust. Emma is head at RA Butler Primary, and also a Deputy CEO of the Saffron Academy Trust. Kerrie is the Director of School Improvement for SAT.

Julie played a video outlining the reason that SAT has developed an RE Scheme that they are now offering to Essex schools. She noted that when the new RE Syllabus was developed by SACRE, to be introduced in September 2023, she welcomed the new content and approach, but felt that it was not ready to be delivered in the classroom. The Trust discussed whether they could develop a deliverable scheme that could be used in every Key Stage. The Trust’s vision is to ensure that every child goes to a great school, and they involved teachers from each key stage to create the new scheme.

Kerrie outlined how the scheme was developed, the key curriculum drivers and the hallmarks of the scheme:

Accessible	Consistent	Engaging
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equity of opportunity</li> <li>• Scaffolded up, not differentiated down</li> <li>• Multi-Dimensional, Multi-Media &amp; Multi-Sensory</li> <li>• Clarity of instruction – Teachers &amp; Pupils</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality &amp; Presentation</li> <li>• Unit Structure</li> <li>• Session Structure</li> <li>• Pedagogical approaches – Rosenshine’s Principles / Cooperative Learning / Kagan Structures</li> <li>• Planning and Resources</li> <li>• Aims &amp; Outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pitched-Up Planning</li> <li>• Inspiring and exciting content</li> <li>• Meaningful Outcomes: Session &amp; Unit</li> <li>• Purposeful Activities</li> <li>• Linked Learning</li> <li>• Active Participation</li> <li>• Integrated Challenge</li> </ul>

There is a determined focus on consistency of:

- progressive and purposeful sequencing
- quality and presentation
- planning and resources

Kerrie stressed that the scheme needs to be engaging for pupils and teachers alike, and that lesson plans and resources are easy to pick up and deliver, whether or not the teacher is an RE specialist.

The **cost of the scheme** varies, depending on the size of the school and, following discussions

with the EPHA Professional Officer, it has been agreed that the cost for small schools should be subsidised at a rate of £120. The cost is for a one-off purchase of the scheme (and schools are asked to commit to only using the materials and resources for their own school).

**Costs are inclusive of:**

- Access to Lesson Plans and supporting resources for all units from EYFS to Year 6
- PowerPoint files for each lesson including embedded multi-media links
- Long Term Plan overview including Enrichment and Co-curricular Links
- A range of exemplar outcomes for each year group

Size	Number of Pupils	Subscription	RE Leader Training
Small Schools	>120	£120*	£75.00 per school
Medium Schools	120 – 320	£500	
Large Schools	320 +	£750	

\*Subsidised cost for small schools

- ✓ Mirrors the Essex SACRE Agreed Syllabus 2022
- ✓ Designed and developed by teachers for pupils
- ✓ Incorporates evidenced-based cognitive approaches to teaching and learning
- ✓ Ensures high-quality, purposeful outcomes for each enquiry
- ✓ Endorsed by Essex LA and Essex SACRE

**To complement the scheme, we are offering training to RE Leaders on the following aspects:**

- ✓ RE - A Gateway Subject – Links across a schemata of subjects: History, Geography, Art and more
- ✓ Learning through a Lens – An overview of Theology, Philosophy and Human & Social Science lenses
- ✓ Curriculum Intent – Curriculum Design Drivers & the ACE Hallmarks of the SAT Scheme
- ✓ Curriculum Implementation – Pedagogical Approaches to teaching and learning
- ✓ Curriculum Impact – Achieving high-quality, purposeful and progressive outcomes for all



**Virtual training sessions for Summer 2023 are scheduled for:**

- Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> June – 3:45 – 5:15pm
- Monday 19<sup>th</sup> June – 3:45 – 5:15pm

**How to purchase**

- ✓ Visit the Saffron Academy Trust website: [Click here](#)
- ✓ Complete our Online Order Form: [Click here](#)
- ✓ Scan the QR Code

*To enable schools to purchase and use the SAT RE Curriculum we ask that:*

1. The Saffron Academy Trust RE scheme to be used ONLY by the purchasing school and by staff employed at the named school. They must not be shared with staff in other schools.
1. The school will NOT publish Saffron Academy Trust RE scheme or distribute online or in any digital or paper format.
2. If you are part of a Multi Academy Trust or Alliance, ONLY the purchasing school may use the materials.
3. Access is for staff at the school ONLY.

*The headteacher of the school takes full responsibility that staff at their school comply fully with the terms of this agreement.*



One headteacher asked if the diocese has approved the RE scheme for use in church schools. Emma noted that they haven't consulted with the diocese and each school will need to make a decision, and possibly adapt the materials so that they have a stronger Christian focus.

However, the scheme has been endorsed by the LA and SACRE so it is likely to be suitable for church schools.

It was **AGREED** that the presentation would be shared with the small school headteachers following the meeting, and heads were reminded that there will be a webcast on Monday 15<sup>th</sup> May at 3.45 pm, hosted (and recorded) by EPHA. The Zoom link for that webcast is <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87125230204?pwd=UIE3UTVXR1dTeTRQNFdiK2VBNm1jUT09>  
Meeting ID: 871 2523 0204  
Passcode: 946324

## **7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS AND SUGGESTED ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS**

Jinnie stated that she had not been notified of any other business.

She said that she was encouraged by Clare's open and reflective approach, and she felt that she was genuinely focused on the challenges faced by small schools. The Professional Officer urged headteachers to feedback their experiences, both positive and negative, so that this welcome shift and focus on small schools continues to be followed through by all LA Officers.

Jinnie thanked the headteachers who attended the meeting, and for supporting the group.

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

- Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> July 2023
- Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> October 2023 – conference at The Lion Inn, Boreham, 9.00 am – 3.30 pm
- Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2023
- Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2024
- Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> March 2024
- Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2024
- Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> July 2024

All meetings at 3.30 pm online (apart from the annual conference)

The meeting ended at 5.10 pm