

ESSEX PRIMARY HEADTEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

MEETING OF THE EPHA SMALL SCHOOLS SUPPORT GROUP

HELD ON THURSDAY 13 JULY 2023 3.30 – 5.00 pm

Venue online

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

1. IN ATTENDANCE

Charlotte Brown	Messing School
Ruth Cornell	Fingringhoe CE Primary
Samantha Dunne	Colne Engaine CE Primary
Hayley Dyer	Crays Hill Primary
Emma Flin	Great Yeldham CE Primary
Becky Keitch	St George's CE Primary, Great Bromley
Sarah Meares	Terling CE Primary
Jinnie Nichols	Chorus Schools Federation – Chair
Andrew Price	Manuden Primary
Jane Scawthorn	St John the Baptist CE Primary, Pebmarsh
Amy Wareham	Matching Green CE Primary

Governors

Jo Clayman	St John the Baptist CE Primary, Pebmarsh
Sarah McNamara	Terling CE Primary
Pip Parmenter	Messing School
Pam Langmead	EPHA Professional Officer
Sean Tobin	Berlesduna MAT/Member of DfE small schools roundtable
Alison Fiala	Head of EY and Education, Mid/Small Schools lead

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Mark Carter-Tufnell	St Osyth and Mistley Norman Primaries
Judith Dale	Baynards Primary
Jenny Kemp	Latchingdon Primary
Stephanie Newland	St Margaret's CE Primary, Toppesfield
Melissa Taylor	Margaretting CE Primary
Sharon Vessey	Birchanger CE Primary

Jinnie Nichols, Chair of the SSSG, welcomed everyone and, in particular, the three governors who had joined the meeting.

She noted today's welcome announcement from the Government that they have accepted the recommendation from the School Teacher's Review Body to increase teachers' pay by 6.5% from September. There will be additional funding from the DfE to fund the pay rise (schools will fund the first 3% from existing budgets) and the Unions will recommend that their members accept this pay offer, so averting future strikes.

3. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

The minutes of the meeting held on 10th May 2023 were approved as an accurate record. The follow matters arising were noted:

a) Saffron Academy Trust RE scheme (Minute 6 refers)

The Professional Officer noted that she has had the following statement from Julie Sarti, Education Department, Diocese of Chelmsford:

We have had lots of enquiries about the Saffron Academy Trust RE scheme, which has recently been made available to a wider group of schools, including church schools.

The Diocese of Chelmsford Education team welcomes the SAT RE scheme, originally designed for schools within their Trust to support the delivery of the Essex Agreed Syllabus.

This is a carefully planned resource, built on strong pedagogy. It has been thoroughly trialled within SAT schools, to ensure consistency and progression – and provides a wealth of materials that can be adapted to meet the context of individual schools.

Our Church Schools should be mindful that in addition to following the guidance of the Essex Agreed Syllabus, there is also a requirement to fulfil the Church of England's RE Statement of Entitlement, [RE Statement of Entitlement for Church Schools.pdf \(churchofengland.org\)](#).

This states that -

- *The RE curriculum should be intrinsic to the outworking of a Church school's own Christian vision in enabling all pupils to flourish.*
- *Christianity should be the majority religion studied in each year group and should be at least 50% of RE curriculum time. (Please note that the expectation for non-Church schools as outlined in the Essex Agreed Syllabus is 35%).*
- *Sufficient dedicated curriculum time, meeting explicitly RE objectives, should be committed to the delivery of RE. This should aim to be close to 10% but must be no less than 5% in key stages 1-4.*

Taking this into account, it is the view of the Diocese that -

- *The SAT RE scheme is a helpful, well-constructed resource, which could support the teaching of high-quality RE*
- *For Church Schools to meet the requirements of the RE Statement of Entitlement, they will need a clear rationale for how the RE curriculum is intrinsically linked to their school's distinctive Christian Vision and how it reflects the context of their local community.*
- *Church schools that choose to use the SAT RE scheme should supplement the materials with additional high quality RE resources to ensure sufficient dedicated curriculum time for RE and appropriate weighting for Christianity, in line with the RE Statement of Entitlement.*

For further support in curriculum design please contact your allocated School Adviser or the RE Lead Ruth Everett.

Jinnie noted that church schools will need to meet the requirements of the RE Statement of Entitlement, including being aware of the different needs of age groups. It was agreed that introducing the RE syllabus and ensuring that the requirements are addressed has been a huge piece of work and many headteachers feel that they are doing this on their own.

It was **AGREED** that it would be helpful to run an online workshop in the autumn term to discuss how church schools have implemented the RE Syllabus and enable schools to share good practice. The EPHA Professional Officer will organise this and circulate the date and time to headteachers.

Professional
Officer

b) Small Schools Group annual conference (Minute 3c refers)

The Professional Officer reminded headteachers that this has been booked at the Lion Inn, Boreham, on Wednesday 18th October 2023. The afternoon will focus on wellbeing, and the speakers for the day are being partly subsidised by the Essex Taskforce. Pam explained that she will send the conference programme out before the end of term, and urged ALL small school heads to attend the conference and make it a priority. She reminded heads that the conference is free and EPHA is able to offer supply cover for the day, if funding is a barrier to any headteacher attending.

All other matters arising were addressed during the meeting.

4. NATIONAL SMALL SCHOOLS ROUNDTABLE

Sean Tobin, CEO of Berlesduna MAT, and representative on the National Small Schools Roundtable was welcomed to the meeting. He noted that the Roundtable had recently had a meeting and the discussions and outcomes were positive. The group is independent of the DfE, but has secure government backing. The group has morphed into focusing on small, rural schools, and the membership of the roundtable will become national (currently the members are in the South of the country). The membership includes CST (Confederation of School Trusts) headteachers and CEOs, and representatives from the Anglican Diocese as so many small schools are also church schools. The group has support from Nick Gibb, and Baroness Barron will engage with the meetings. The Professional Officer suggested that NASS (the National Association of Small Schools) should be involved, and agreed to forward contact details to Sean. However, Sean stressed that one of the strengths of the group is that it remains quite small.

Professional
Officer

The key foci for discussion has been the system approach, conversion, financial viability, building costs, Ofsted etc and the Roundtable aims to be a voice for small schools, in much the same way that the EPHA group is. They are considering redefining small schools, to include those with one form entry and fewer. Sean noted that new terms of reference for the group should be published by September, and he agreed to circulate these to the SSSG.

Sean Tobin

He referred to the Church of England report: Our Hope for a Flourishing Schools System, launched on 1st July, which sets out their vision for small schools. This is relevant to all small schools, whether church schools or not.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/our-hope-for-a-flourishing-schools-system-report.pdf>

Sean stressed that the DfE is now focused on quality rather than school size or even having to join a MAT, recognising the value of small schools in the community. The DfE stresses that being a small school should not be a deterrent or determinant for joining a multi academy trust.

Sean noted that they was a really good conversation with Oliver Burwood, CEO of DNEAT - the Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust. They have developed a range of metrics for small schools, including their criteria for support and sustainability, and how to determine the future of a small school; they believe that the minimum number of pupils on roll should be 50, in order to maintain a 3 class structure, to ensure the success and viability of a small school.

Alison Fiala joined the meeting at 4.00 pm

It was noted that there are a very small number of schools in Essex with less than 50 pupils. Alison Fiala noted that the Rural Schools Protection Bill often prevents the closure of a small school, assuming that it is some distance from the next school and provides a valuable service to a community, including additional facilities such as childcare, before and after-school clubs and so on. She stressed that it is important for small schools to understand and evidence their intrinsic value to a community.

It was **AGREED** that Sean would regularly report back to the Small Schools Support Group about the Roundtable. Their meetings are likely to be termly, with an extra meeting in September to approve the terms of reference.

5. LOCAL AUTHORITY SUSTAINABLE SCHOOLS TOOLKIT

Alison Fiala was welcomed to the meeting. She reminded the group that she referred to the Essex Sustainable Schools Strategy, and the Dashboard and Self Evaluation criteria for schools at the last meeting in May. She noted that this is a pivotal time for the toolkit as during the summer she will be working with ECC colleagues Rhona (School Organisation), Joe Chell (place planning), Yannick Stupples-Whyley (Finance Manager), Mark Gant (data intelligence) to update and refresh the document. If schools use the current version it will give them a benchmark for the 2022/23 school year.

She congratulated Essex primary schools on their pupil results this year; the combined results have improved by 4%.

Alison shared a presentation explaining the toolkit.

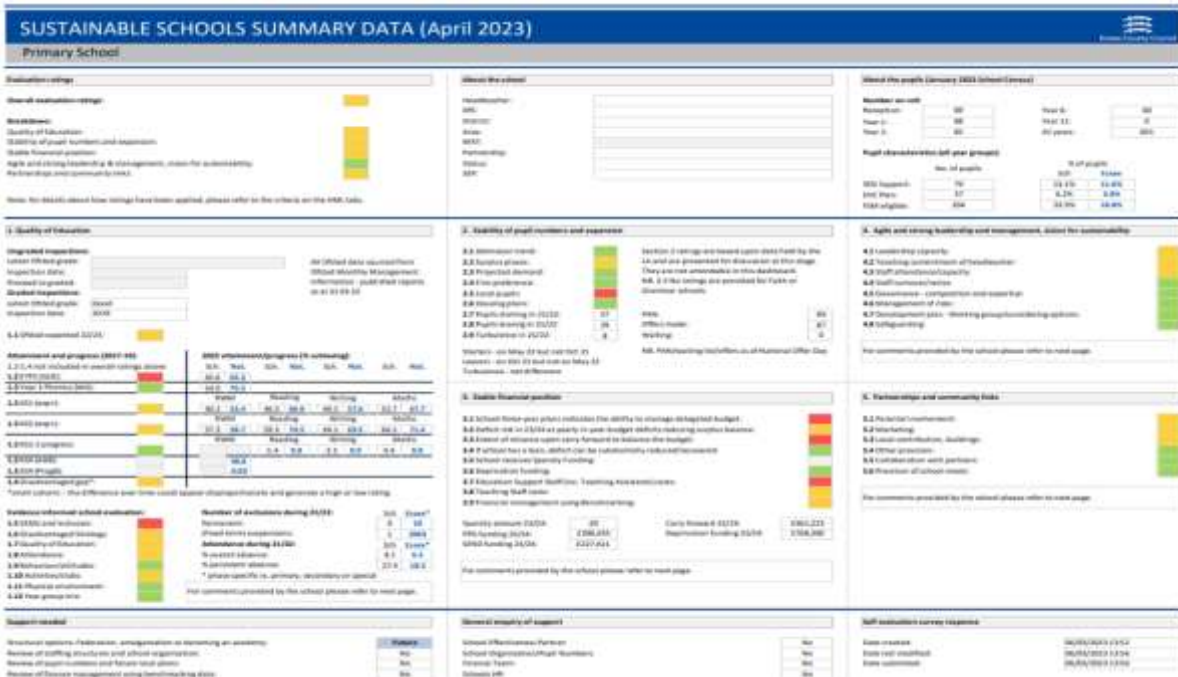
Strategy for Sustainable Schools in Essex

- Building on the learning from the Small Schools Strategy
 - Impact of National Funding Formula and reduction in Lump Sum
 - Falling roll in some localities, expansion in others which is impacting on forward planning including staffing
 - Proactive approach to keeping sustainability at the heart of decision making
 - Process map co-designed with internal and external review using several relevant quantitative and qualitative indicators to support leaders and governors evaluate viability
 - Consideration of sustainability criteria and indicators does not mean that where problems are identified, closure or amalgamation needs to be pursued. However, difficulties with one or more factors should draw attention to the need for a more detailed review and evaluation.
 - Publication of strategy, criteria and audit tool – Sept 2021



The summary data includes a range of areas.

- 1 Quality of education
- 2 Stability of pupil numbers and education
- 3 Stable financial position
- 4 Agile and strong school leadership and management, vision for sustainability
- 5 Partnerships and community links



The toolkit is both pre-populated by the Local Authority and by the school itself.

- The completed PDFs for 22/23 financial year are now released with 23/24 Budget information, Ofsted outcomes, pupil numbers and attendance data. SEND financial information is included in this new version.

- Academies' finance information is also be included in the 23/24 new Dashboard. Feedback from governors and leaders has been taken on board for this new version.
- **LA is working with the Diocesan team to support conversations with headteachers and governors** which includes federations, leadership models and sharing curriculum expertise.
- We now have 3 sets of 3 school federations, with increasing number of schools showing interest. Majority are church schools so we are using the Diocesan guidance materials.
- Some interest in converting to academy and joining trusts, again SEP support will be offered.

Alison noted that the LA uses financial benchmarking to explore how schools manage their budgets when a similar size and organisation.

There are significant differences in carry forward amounts in schools with similar number of pupils – for example

- School A has 53 pupils: carry forward is £2.8k
- School B has 55 pupils: carry forward is £104k

Both schools get sparsity amount of £56k in 23/24 (40 LA schools receive sparsity which increased this financial year for most of the schools) yet one school manages to increase the carry forward whilst the other is needing to make very difficult decisions to balance a budget.

13 LA maintained schools have declared deficits of which only 2 are small schools, the majority though are 200+ on roll.

Where to access the Dashboard and survey:

- Schools can now access the refreshed Dashboard and Self-Evaluation Tool. It is an expectation that LA Maintained schools complete the self-evaluation and share this with your SEP as an opportunity to revise 2022/23 outcomes alongside your strategic plan.
- The Dashboard can be found on Perspective Lite. Once logged in, go to LA Documents folder, select Sustainable Schools Dashboard. To access the survey, complete the dashboard for your school use this link:

[2022/23 self-evaluation survey for Sustainable Schools Dashboard](#)

Jane Scawthorn confirmed that her school has recently completed the toolkit and found it useful and informative.

Continued support from the LA: School Effectiveness and School Finance

- For LA maintained schools, we have allocated additional support where schools are reporting a deficit or a likely deficit in the future.
- Where needed, a Finance Monitoring Board will be considered , chaired by the School Effectiveness Partner, to support governors and leaders to draw up and implement a recovery plan.

Contact your School Effectiveness Partner for further support.

Contact the School Finance Monitoring Team for information about application for a loan.

The loan application process is covered in Section 4 of the [Essex Scheme for Financing Schools](#), which can be found in the finance section of the Essex Schools Infolink.

Please email finance.monitoring@essex.gov.uk

Alison reminded the group that she is retiring as Head of Education and Early Years, Mid, in the summer, but will continue to sit on Finance Monitoring Boards, and will support the LA Small Schools Strategy, which is a passion of hers.

The Chair thanked Alison for her offering her support, experience and expertise to primary schools for many years, and in particular her passion for small schools.

Alison Fiala left the meeting at 4.30 pm

6. **SMALL SCHOOL GOVERNANCE**

The Chair noted that this agenda item was included to discuss the challenges faced by governors in small schools and to share any ideas and solutions, including around recruitment of governors, their workload, their role, duty of care to the headteacher. Three governors were welcomed to the meeting; Jo Clayman needed to leave at this point, but Pip Parmenter and Sarah McNamara were thanked for their contribution.

Charlotte Brown (Messing Primary) noted that they will have a very new governance team next year, and suggested that it might be helpful to offer governors in small schools the chance to exchange ideas and experience. It was **AGREED** that the Professional Officer will contact the Small School headteachers and offer to set up a governance network. It was agreed that an email group would be created, and EPHA could host a Zoom meeting for Chairs (and other governors) to get together.

**Professional
Officer**

The group discussed the current practice of holding both face to face and online Governing Body and committee meetings, and it was agreed that a hybrid approach is very helpful, and encourages good attendance.

Charlotte also noted that her school is looking for Co-opted Governors and wondered if a swap system of governors might be viable among small schools. It was noted that this could be discussed using the governors' email group.

The Chair noted that her schools use Governor Hub for support and information (it includes member to the Key for School Governors) and they can be a source of possible governors. She also uses Schools Choice, a Suffolk based organisation which offers a clerking service. <https://www.schoolschoice.co.uk/>

Sarah McNamara stressed that the recruitment of governors is a real issue, and it is challenging to find volunteers with the right balance of skills and capacity. The Professional Officer reminded the group about the value of collaboration, particularly when establishing statutory committees, such as Pupil Disciplinary Committees.

The governors were asked about how they managed their duty of care in relation to the wellbeing of their headteacher. Sarah noted that governors are well aware of this responsibility, but noted that it is a real challenge, particularly in a small school. The group

discussed the benefits of taking leadership time at home, but agreed that this was particularly difficult for a small school headteacher, who rarely has non-teaching senior leaders who can manage the school in their absence. The Professional Officer reminded the group that EPHA can offer financial support to schools who need some occasional capacity, by paying for supply cover for a limited number of days, enabling the headteacher or deputy (or SENCo) to be released to focus on leadership tasks. This is particularly helpful when expecting Ofsted, for example to ensure that the website is up to date and “inspection-ready”. The Professional Officer noted that a number of small schools have benefited from this support and headteachers have reported that it was a significant help to manage their role.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS AND SUGGESTED ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

- a) The Professional Officer noted that she has received a reminder from FundEd to renew the EPHA subscription for the coming year (the current subscription runs out at the end of July). She reminded headteachers that EPHA funds the group sub of £250 and then has paid £15 per small school for individual membership. Those schools that have used FundEd have found it very helpful and the membership can be used by anyone in the school community, including your finance or business manager, PTA and governors.

Schools can:

- **Use the grants database** to search by region, category, or key stage to instantly find the current grants available to match a project. Whether schools need support in finding and applying for a grant, creating a regular giving campaign, accessing business support, FundEd can help.
- **Use their expertise** to review grants and fundraising options for each school. They will analyse a school’s situation and find solutions that will work for them.
- **Receive** a dedicated fundraising page, fully supported, and backed up by templated letters to help a school grow regular giving income or one-off donations from businesses, ex-pupils and the wider school community.
- **Receive the termly magazine** and be inspired by relatable case studies, peer written advice and the latest grants and funding initiatives.

It was **AGREED** that EPHA will renew the subscription and membership for small schools and the Professional Officer will circulate information to headteachers once again.

**Professional
Officer**

The login details you should use for the website:

Site - <http://funded.org.uk/>

Username - EPHA@funded.org.uk

Password - FG722!

b) **Agenda items for the next meeting**

It was suggested that the agenda for the next meeting in November should include:

- An update from Sean Tobin about the national roundtable work and progress;
- Input from Yannick Stupples-Whyley, ECC Senior Finance Manager, to discuss budget planning for the year ahead;
- Feedback from the newly established Governors’ network.

8. DATES AND TIMES OF MEETINGS FOR THE 2023/24 SCHOOL YEAR

- Wednesday 18th October 2023 – conference at The Lion Inn, Boreham, 9.00 am – 3.15 pm (with optional 45 minute wellbeing session at 3.20 pm)
- Tuesday 21st November 2023
- Monday 22nd January 2024
- Wednesday 13th March 2024
- Wednesday 22nd May 2024
- Tuesday 9th July 2024

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

The meeting ended at 5.00 pm