

ESSEX PRIMARY HEADTEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

**MEETING OF THE EPHA SMALL SCHOOLS SUPPORT GROUP
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 23 NOVEMBER 2022 3.30 – 5.00 pm**

Venue online

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

1. IN ATTENDANCE

Phil Andrews	Rettendon Primary
Emily Bartram	Radwinter CE Primary
Ruth Baugh	White Notley CE Primary
Jamie Bearman	St Peter's CE Primary, West Hanningfield
Charlotte Brown	Messing Primary
Judith Dale	Baynards Primary
Sam Dunne	Colne Engaine Primary
Hayley Dyer	Crays Hill Primary
Llewellen Lawson	Dr Walker's CE Primary, Fyfield
Becky Maguire	St Joseph's CE Primary, Dovercourt
Becky More	Rivenhall Primary
Stephanie Newland	St Margaret's CE Primary, Toppesfield
Jinnie Nichols	Chorus Schools Federation - Chair
Donna Parker	Fingringhoe CE Primary
Grant Strong	St Mary's CE Primary, Hatfield Broad Oak
Lyndsey Wood	St Cedd's CE Primary, Bradwell
Pam Langmead	EPHA Professional Officer
Neil Short	NASS
Yannick Stupples-Whyley	ECC Senior Finance Business Partner

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Ceri Daniels	Holy Trinity CE Primary, Eight Ash Green
Louise Eastbrook	Tolleshunt D'Arcy St Nicholas CE Primary
Maria Luck-Davies	Bradfield Primary
Maire O'Regan	Roxwell CE Primary/Ford End CE Primary
Simon Rance	Ashdon Primary
Melissa Raymond	Finchingfield Primary
Melissa Taylor	Margaretting CE Primary
Danielle Welsman	Stisted Primary
Samantha Wilding	St Andrew's CE Primary, Marks Tey
Sam Willis	Rawreth and Canewdon Primaries

Jinnie Nichols, Chair of the SSSG, welcomed everyone to the meeting. She noted that her federation of schools now includes a third, Wethersfield Primary, and has been renamed The Chorus Schools Federation.

3. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

The minutes of the meeting held on 23rd November 2022 were approved as an accurate record.

- a) It was agreed that there will be regular reminders about FundEd, so that small school headteachers continue to take advantage of membership of the organisation and the information about funding and grants that it provides.
- b) It has been agreed that there will be a second Small Schools Group conference later in the year; the Professional Officer will agree at date with the venue, the Lion Inn, and will notify the group as soon as possible. Professional
Officer
- c) The EPHA Professional Officer reminded headteachers that she will be leading online training for small-school governors (and staff) on suspension and permanent exclusions, from 6.00 pm – 8.00 pm on Monday 6th January.
The Zoom link for the training course is
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85663000914?pwd=MmpGaVVUdGxCWkRUQ25MZ0JQaFFJZz09>
Meeting ID: 856 6300 0914
Passcode: 969986
Headteachers were asked to remind their governors about the training.
- d) It was noted that the agenda for the meeting includes input from the ECC Senior Finance Manager about school funding and the new criteria for the falling rolls fund in Essex.
- e) The Professional Officer noted that she had contacted an Executive Headteacher of a federation in Norfolk who, unfortunately, had not been able to make this meeting. It was agreed that the focus on federations will be included in the March meeting. SSSG
16 March
2023

4. NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SMALL SCHOOLS

Neil Short, the Chair of NASS, was welcomed to the meeting. The Chair noted that Neil had attended a meeting with Ofsted about the challenges of inspection in small schools in November, and that the group would welcome any feedback about the meeting.

Neil noted that many small school headteachers can be isolated and so it was good to hear about the establishment of the EPHA Small Schools Support Group. He explained that NASS was established in the 1970s, originally with the purpose of saving small schools that were under threat of closure – the first name of the association was the National Association for Saving Small Schools. The officers of NASS are volunteers, all with a background in education and experience of running small schools. Neil was a headteacher of a small school in the 1980s and worked with the National College. He became Chair of NASS in 2014. The aims of the association now are to:

- Represent small schools and their communities across the country
- Promote the value and virtues of the human scale aspects of small schools
- Offer advice tailored to meet the needs of teachers, heads, parents, pupils and governors on an individual or group basis
- Promote best practice from the many outstanding small schools across the country in

order to share expertise

- Publicise events which will enable the dissemination of good practice via effective collaboration
- Inform all branches of the media on the many benefits of small schools
- Advise those small schools whose existence and autonomy may be threatened
- Provide expert guidance to decision makers where this should be requested

NASS produces three newsletters a year, and also provides advice and support (including a helpline) to small school headteachers. The Association is also involved in national research and policy development and have links with local authorities, universities and headteacher associations.

A research paper, Collaboration, not Collision, a study investigating the ways that small schools across the country are working together, has been published and can be accessed on the EPHA website. <https://essexprimaryheads.co.uk/files/collaboration-not-collision-report.pdf>

The next NASS meeting in February will have a focus on wellbeing.

The cost of membership is £15 a year, and it was AGREED that EPHA should negotiate and fund group membership for all of its small schools.

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

**Professional
Officer**

Neil noted that many heads will have read the TES article from September which featured the headline

Ofsted: Small primaries five times more likely to be 'inadequate'

<https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/primary/ofsted-small-primaries-five-times-more-likely-be-inadequate>

In the article it was reported that 174 of the smallest schools (less than 144 on roll) were inspected but none had been judged outstanding. They were also less likely to be 'good' and five times more likely to be judged 'inadequate'. It was also seen that none of the schools previously judged 'outstanding' had retained that grade.

It was perhaps as a result of these figures that Ofsted 'as part of our ongoing evaluation of the implementation of the Education Inspection Framework (EIF)' have formed a reference group of stakeholders with expertise in small schools. The purpose of the group will be 'a sounding board for Ofsted as they develop inspector training around inspecting the curriculum in schools that have small numbers of staff and mixed-age classes.'

NASS have been invited to join this group. They have already surveyed members as to their thoughts on how changes can be suggested which will enable small schools to demonstrate their qualities during future inspections. (*Small school heads will remember that they were asked for their feedback at the conference in October, and that this was fed back to the Ofsted meeting in November.*)

This initial meeting took place on November 16th and Neil attended, along with HMIs, small

school heads, CEOs and some LA officers. The group is led by Sandra Hayes, Senior HMI with experience of small schools. He noted that there are currently some restrictions on what can be reported on the discussions, but he felt that the meeting had been productive and focused on the key issues, including managing deep dives, subject leads with multiple responsibilities, and so on. He explained that Ofsted is taking note, and in particular is looking at ways in which training for Ofsted inspectors will be more fit for purpose.

There was a general discussion about the meeting, in particular whether Ofsted had an aim for the piece of work. It was noted that a key concern about inspection is whether the process is going to be fair, and in particular whether the inspector(s) will have an understanding and experience of the unique challenges that small schools face. Neil noted that Mike Sheridan, Senior HMI, is now HMI for East Midlands and East and he has expertise and experience in relation to small schools; he wrote an article (and ran webinars) about conducting deep dives in a small school. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5hIQZ6pSGLY>

Ofsted stressed that they train their inspectors rigorously and at least they have acknowledged the particular challenges for small schools in inspection. Neil noted that he does get a lot of feedback about inspections and urged headteachers to complain if they have an inspection that they feel has been poorly or unfairly conducted.

As well as the focus on Ofsted Neil outlined some of the issues explored in relation to small schools, including a recent article by Jessica Hills, "How the MAT era is squeezing out small schools".

<https://schoolsweek.co.uk/how-the-mat-era-is-squeezing-out-small-schools/>

The NAHT has published a paper titled: Under pressure, the financial squeeze on small schools in England.

[https://www.naht.org.uk/Portals/0/PDF's/Policy/NAHT-Small%20Schools%20report%20proof%206-1%20\(FINAL\).pdf?ver=2023-01-10-163120-340](https://www.naht.org.uk/Portals/0/PDF's/Policy/NAHT-Small%20Schools%20report%20proof%206-1%20(FINAL).pdf?ver=2023-01-10-163120-340)

Neil noted that the EPHA Professional Officer has agreed to write an article for the next newsletter about the formation of the Essex Small Schools Support Group.

**Professional
Officer**

The newsletter regularly includes contributions from headteachers about good practice and innovation in their small schools, and they are always on the hunt for individual stories.

5. ESSEX TASKFORCE CONTRIBUTION TO SMALL SCHOOLS

The Professional Officer reminded headteachers that Linda Robinson was proposing additional support from the Essex Education Taskforce wellbeing fund, to support small school headteachers. The proposal suggested:

The rationale for putting forward a request for additional Taskforce funding is as a result of Linda Robinson attending the EPHA Smalls Schools Conference on 19/10/2022. Headteachers were asked by Linda for feedback on current TF contributions for leadership wellbeing support. Overall headteachers feel that time and limited capacity prevent their engagement with the Heart Health Programme. However, it was felt that the Colleague

Support Programme can provide capacity to set aside time to attend wellbeing support initiatives.

Feedback and attendance at the conference also demonstrated that having the opportunity to meet with their peers in an informal environment out of school was supportive to their wellbeing.

Therefore, it is proposed that the Colleague Support Programme is extended to enable EETF funding allocated to EPHA for a small school's leadership wellbeing networking event, possibly half a day with one guest speaker/facilitator to support the morning. Concluding with the opportunity for HTs to develop wellbeing support networks with their peers.

The cost and location for such an event would be agreed with EPHA and how this could work in practice and potential date to be discussed further.

Impact and evaluation of the networking opportunities can be gathered either verbally or by a brief evaluation sheet. This aligns with the KPIs for the Colleague Support Programme.

This would be in addition to the EPHA Small Conference, that EETF do not fund, which may become an annual event.

The headteachers in attendance discussed the proposal and noted their gratitude for additional support from the Taskforce. However, there was a general feeling that many small schools heads would not be able to attend an additional event solely focused on wellbeing (however beneficial that might prove to be). After discussion, it was suggested that the EETF be asked to support the annual conference in October, and that this could include a wellbeing focus, perhaps in the afternoon. The Professional Officer **AGREED** to report back the outcome of the discussion to Linda Robinson.

Professional
Officer

There was a discussion about whether the EETF might fund subscriptions to The Key, as this is often unaffordable for small schools, but offers excellent advice. The Professional Officer agreed to discuss this with Linda Robinson, but felt that it would too costly for the EETF to agree.

It was noted that a number of small school heads have taken up the offer of a contribution from EPHA to fund leadership release, and that the Taskforce contributes a percentage of that funding.

6. FALLING ROLLS FUND CRITERIA AND SCHOOL BUDGETS

Yannick Stupples-Whyley, ECC Senior Finance Business Manager, was welcomed to the meeting. He explained the new falling rolls funding criteria that was approved by Schools Forum on 11th January 2023. The criteria requires schools to have two consecutive years of falling rolls:

- Primary schools will be funded for the difference between their reception published PAN and the NOR admitted into Reception for the current and previous October census
- Secondary schools will be funded for the difference between their Year 7 PAN and the NOR admitted into Year 7 for the current and previous October census

The criteria are now as follows:

- The school must have been judged as good or outstanding by Ofsted (*this is a DfE requirement, but may change, following a consultation*);
- The NOR must have fallen by 4% in both previous years for primary schools with 210 or

fewer pupils;

- The NOR must have fallen by 7% in both previous years for primary schools with great than 211 pupils up to 420 pupils;
- The NOR must have fallen by 10% in both previous years for primary schools with more than 420 pupils and secondary schools;
- Schools that have a bulge class do not qualify for falling rolls funding when the bulge year leaves the school;
- For infant schools the NOR must be forecast to increase in the third year;
- For junior schools the NOR must be forecast to increase in the third and fourth years;
- For primary and secondary schools the NOR must be forecast to increase in the third, fourth and fifth years

The falling rolls budget for primary schools for 2023/24 is £466,000. Currently 13 primary schools are eligible for funding, based on falling rolls and Ofsted criteria. To be fully eligible for funding, schools must meet the requirement for the roll to increase (by at least one pupil) in the third and consecutive years. No secondary schools currently meet the falling rolls criteria. The Local Authority will contact eligible schools. Yannick confirmed that pupil numbers are based on the October census.

School budget share 2023-24

Yannick explained that in the Autumn statement the government announced an increase to schools funding over the next two years. This funding (£2 billion each year) equates to an increase in Essex of £74.1 million, split between the

- Schools Block - £32.4 million;
- and a new grant, the Mainstream Schools Additional Grant - £37.1 million

Yannick explained that this will equate to roughly 6.8% increase in schools' budgets, which should meet the additional staffing costs. The Pupil Premium Grant will increase by 5%.

The Local Authority is required to submit a return to the DfE by Friday 20th January, and Yannick confirmed this had already been completed. Once the DfE has authorised the LA's allocation plans they will notify the authority, and maintained schools can then be informed of their budget share. (By 28th February at the latest.)

Yannick explained that each year the DfE runs a calculation based on the National Funding Formula and determines a Primary Unit of Funding for each school – in Essex this is £4,719.90. However, Yannick explained that a safer estimate of DSG income is to multiply the number of pupils by the Minimum Per Pupil Funding guaranteed amount, which next financial year will be £4,405.

One headteacher asked whether a school will receive dual payments for one child if they are eligible for both Pupil Premium and the Service Premium; Yannick thought not, but said that he would check.

**Yannick
Stupples-
Whyley**

Yannick was thanked for his input and advice, and he agreed to attend future SSSG meetings if invited. *He left the meeting at 4.57 pm.*

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS AND SUGGESTED ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Jinnie thanked the headteachers who attended the meeting, and asked them to encourage other small school headteachers to attend.

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

- Thursday 16th March 2023
- Wednesday 10th May 2023
- Thursday 13th July 2023

Meetings to be held online (unless otherwise indicated) starting at 3.30 pm

The meeting ended at 5.00 pm