

ESSEX HEADTEACHER INCLUSION ROUND TABLE**TUESDAY 19 OCTOBER 2021****9.00 am – 10.00 am Online****1. IN ATTENDANCE****ECC**

Clare Kershaw (CK)	Director of Education
Ralph Holloway (RH)	Head of SEND Strategy and Innovation
Vanessa Hockley	SEND Innovation Delivery Partner
Helen Wall (HW)	SEND Strategy Lead: Participation and Inclusion

Primary

Andrew Smith (AS)	CEO/Headteacher Lyons Hall - Chair
Matt O'Grady (MO'G)	Headteacher, West Horndon Primary
Ceri Jones (CJ)	Headteacher, Chipping Hill Primary
Harriet Phelps-Knights (HPK)	EPHA Chair/Headteacher Janet Duke Primary (South)
Marie Staley	Headteacher, Moulsham Juniors
Pam Langmead	EPHA Professional Officer

Secondary

Chris Fluskey	Harlow Education Consortium
Andy Hodgkinson (AH)	CEO Zenith Multi Academy Trust
Vic Goddard	Headteacher, Passmores Academy
Jo Santinelli	Headteacher, St Benedict's Catholic School
Simon Thompson	ASHE Executive Director

Nursery

Debs Watson	Headteacher, Tanglewood Nursery School
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Special

Emily Welton (EW)	ESSET Professional Officer
Jen Grotier	Shorefields School

AP

Philomena Cozens (PC)	Chief Executive Officer, Keys Co-operative Trust
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Governors

Ruth Bird	ESGA
Rod Lane	ESGA

Andrew Smith (Chair) welcomed colleagues to the meeting. Apologies were received from Deborah Bailey (John Bunyan Primary), and it was noted that Teresa Phillips (Thomas Willingale School) has left the group due to other commitments.

He referred the group to the agenda and purpose of the meeting, to consider the following issues:

1. What is the purpose of the HTRT and what is the capacity and commitment required to move from talking to achieving?
2. Priorities for 2021/22 – what three things do we want to work on to lead to systemic change?
3. Dates for the 2021/22 meeting cycle.

1. SYSTEM CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES

RH noted that the challenges of capacity and sufficiency apply to both the Local Authority and schools: budget pressures, specialist provision, resource/support for mainstream, therapies and Eps. Whilst the High Needs Block is in a better state than for years, the system is under severe strain. All of the Special Schools are at capacity, and some are as much as 50% over-capacity.

The pressure on resources and lack of support for mainstream schools was a particular theme at the recent SEND workshops, in particular EPs and other therapists, in particular speech and language therapists. As a result of this shortage, it is sometimes impossible to deliver the actions set out in an Education, Health and Care Plan.

ECC SEND Ops teams under increasing pressure and the increased number of assessments impacts on both the timing and quality of EHCPs.

Ofsted and CQC, and in particular, parent feedback is often critical of the quality of SEND provision in Essex. Last year's Essex Family Forum survey set out the concerns of parents.

What does the data tell us?

Tribunals – 178 registered in 2017 (2% of all appealable decisions); 334 registered in 2020 (3% of all appealable decisions). Essex is out of line with the national average - 1.7%;

EHCPs – 7,288 in 2016 to 10,254 in 2021 (and rising);

Forecast – if current trends continue we will have 12,254 EHCPs in 2025;

Special school places – 2293 pupils in Essex special schools in 2015; 3217 pupils in Essex special schools in 2021 (40% increase). Cost implications – over £9 million in place funding alone.

RH noted that we have added Special School places to the system, but these are full, and the number of pupils in Special Schools continues to grow. The forecast is that there will be another 516 special school places needed by 2025 if the trends continue.

What are we – LA and schools – collectively doing?

- Ongoing commitment from the members of the Headteachers Roundtable;
- The conference – great engagement showcasing inclusive practice in Essex;
- Development and response to the 'why be inclusive?' document setting out the benefits of inclusion;
- The ongoing response to the 2019 CQC/Ofsted inspection;
- Essex's High Needs Block is close to balancing in stark contrast to other LAs (no transfer from Schools Block needed);
- Development of the Inclusion Framework and Trauma Perceptive Practice;
- An inclusive response to the challenges of the pandemic – this has been a real strength in the county.

The group discussed the following questions:

How can the Headteachers' Roundtable work with ECC on building expertise, confidence and capacity within mainstream settings so that inclusion becomes something we all do?

VG suggested that there should be an analysis of those children/young people moving schools within an area, determining whether there are notable reasons for the transfer. For example, in his school (in Harlow) the number of pupils with additional needs who seek to move mid-year is disproportionately high.

MS echoed this problem in Chelmsford, suggesting that parents move their child if they feel that their needs aren't being met at their current setting and, on occasion, this move is encouraged by the school. She stressed the need to hold these schools to account.

HPK noted that the Round Table is comprised of headteachers who are utterly committed to inclusion; it is those headteachers who are not inclusive who need to be held to account. She argued that some schools openly discourage some children from applying, and even refuse a place when they find out that a child has additional needs. Unfortunately some of these schools are graded "outstanding". She asked if any studies had been done to determine **mainstream** schools that are at over-capacity in relation to managing pupils with highly complex needs?

PC agreed, noting that there are hardly any children/young people in PRUs without additional needs. RH suggested a mapping exercise to track the transfer of pupils mid-year and their level of need. EW noted that the Mid quadrant had undertaken a data trawl the previous year to map this, and argued that this need to be replicated across the county. She also suggested that Inclusion Partners need to have the confidence to challenge schools where the data suggests they are not being inclusive.

VG argued that we need to lobby Ofsted to inspect the provision of SEND and support for additional needs much more effectively, and to give it much greater weight during inspection.

MO'G noted that many schools want to be inclusive, but are at breaking point, lacking both finance and capacity. He warned that energy levels are still very low and that schools are fire-fighting Covid on a day to day basis. This is coupled with an increase in children coming into schools with more complex additional needs.

CJ noted that he supports a number of schools and a consistent theme is the poor quality of the SENCo, and the inability of the senior leadership team to challenge the practice of their own staff.

AH suggested that a number of outstanding schools are non-inclusive, but that other outstanding schools are excellent. He agreed that schools that are demonstrating poor practice – for example, closing the SEND department during an open evening – must be challenged. He accepted that this will cause controversy and stir things up, but they need to be held to account. He suggested that we revisit the "What inclusive schools do and do not do" document, to re-emphasise this point.

RH noted that the SEND workshops showed that some SENDCos lack experience and confidence, and also that there are some pervasive myths about the SEND system in Essex. He stressed that the LA and schools are on the same side, not opposing one another.

CK noted that we tend to have a repeat discussion at the beginning of each year, and change must be introduced collectively. The opportunities for changed practice are being developed, including:

The Ordinarily Available document that is being published in January. This will set out the minimum expectations of every mainstream school in relation to SEND.

She suggested that there needs to be a carrot and stick approach to inclusion: offering supportive and effective training and CPD and helping to plug the provision gaps. The “stick” must include challenging schools, based on the “do’s and don’ts of inclusion”.

CJ suggested that enhanced provisions could be used more effectively to remove some of the pressure on special schools, and he is very happy to lend his support and expertise to review that sector.

RH noted that the suggestion had been made (at one of the workshops) that there needs to be an equivalent Ordinarily Available document which sets out the minimum offer from the LA and local provision. Another key focus needs to be the role of Partnership SENCOs, to maximise the support to schools.

MS argued that the TPP programme has been hugely beneficial and school staff that have trained as trainers can, and should, be deployed to offer more support to other schools. There is a particular benefit in the fact that they are current practitioners.

PC noted that Lydia Sherborne, one of the TPP trainers, has been extremely effective in the North East, resulting in a significant reduction in exclusions. RH asked the question: how can we replicate this elsewhere in the county? Is this always depended on upon an outstanding individual?

MO’G argued that there needs to be a focus on early identification of need, at pre-school level. He argued that there is a reluctance to identify speech and language problems at an early age. CJ noted that his school has a strategy for working with local pre-schools around early identification of need, which he would be very happy to share.

RH noted that the Sufficiency Strategy that is currently being developed will determine what resource is needed in the county. He suggested that RH, CK, AS and AH should meet to agree the priorities. CK noted that there needs to be a clear focus on 2 or 3 priorities.

PC suggested that we need a 3 or 5 year plan of action.

2. MEETING DATES FOR 2021/2022

The following dates were agreed – meetings to start at 9.00 am :
Tuesday 23rd November

Tuesday 8th February
Tuesday 29th March
Tuesday 17th May
Tuesday 5th July

RH will send invitations out to the Round Table members.