

## LA /ESSEX PRIMARY HEADS' ASSOCIATION NORTH EAST AREA

### WEDNESDAY 17 JUNE 2026

### MEETING SUMMARY: ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Agendas and minutes for these meetings available at [www.essexprimaryheads.co.uk](http://www.essexprimaryheads.co.uk)

#### Attendance List

#### DISTRICT AND EPHA AGENDA (a.m.) (Notes below)

Nick Hutchings, Chair

Essex Research School  
First Site Colchester  
Emotionally Healthy Minds  
Managing parental complaints  
NEEPHA meeting and AGM  
Election of Officers and Local Delivery  
Group representatives  
EPHA updates

#### Welcome to the following Headteachers:

Melanie Atwell Kings Ford Infants  
Rachel Saunders Chase Lane Primary

#### Farewell to the following headteachers:

Liz Bartholomew Mayflower Primary  
Lee Caffull St Andrew's Primary, Weeley (moving school)  
Abbie Fairbairn Lawford CE Primary (moving school)  
Lisa Frith-Sly Camulos Academy  
Carl Messer St George's School  
Amanda Mitchelson Old Heath Primary  
James Newell Wix and Wrabness Primary (moving school)  
Steven Turnbull Hazlemere Infants  
Michelle Wright Montgomery Primary

Rachel Pritchard  
Rachel Skillen  
James Hancock and Sarah Petherick  
Iain Grafton – podcast  
Nick Hutchings

**Chair** Nick Hutchings (Hamilton Primary)  
**Vice-Chair** Richard Potter (Home Farm Primary)

**Colchester West** Nick Hutchings (Hamilton Primary)

**Colchester East** Mark Millbourne (Prettygate Schools)

**Colchester South** to be agreed

**Tendring Mid** Ian MacDonald (Elmstead Primary)

**Tendring North** Becky Keitch (St George's CE Primary)

**Tendring South** Sue Bardetti (Holland Haven Primary)

**Harwich & Dovercourt** Nicky Patrick (Spring Meadow Primary)

**North East Partnership Lead head**

Kerry Malcolm (St Lawrence CE Primary)

#### AREA AGENDA

LA updates on current priorities including:

- p 1-10 • Director's update
- p 10-13 • New TPP quality assurance and impact measures launch
- p 14-17 • Ofsted strategic update

Clare Kershaw  
Lianne Canning and Beth Brown

Peter Stonier, Senior HMI

#### p 18 Key dates

#### NORTH EAST headteacher meetings 2026/27

Wednesday 11 November 2026

Wednesday 3 March 2027

Wednesday 16 June 2027

#### Deputy Headteachers' Annual Conference 2026

Friday 9 October 2026 Colchester Football Stadium

#### Headteachers' Annual Conference 2027

Friday 19 March 2027 Chelmsford City Race Course

#### Small School Headteachers' conference

Wednesday 14 October 2026 The Lion Inn, Boreham

\*Page numbers refer to the full minutes (posted on the EPHA website) of the Summer term Area meetings with LA Officers and Headteachers.

**LA /ESSEX PRIMARY HEADS' ASSOCIATION NORTH EAST AREA**  
**DISTRICT AND AREA MEETING**  
**WEDNESDAY 17 JUNE 2026**  
**ATTENDANCE**

**Present**

|                  |                                      |
|------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Nicole Almond    | Alton Park Juniors                   |
| Melanie Atwell   | Kings Ford Infants                   |
| Sue Bardetti     | Holland Haven Primary                |
| Liz Bartholomew  | The Mayflower Primary                |
| Natasha Bennett  | Millfields Primary                   |
| Susie Bliss      | Walton on the Naze Primary           |
| David Bome       | Copford Primary                      |
| Sarah Bryson     | Alresford/Ardleigh St Mary's Primary |
| Toby Bull        | The Bishop William Ward CE Primary   |
| Alex Candler     | Lexden Primary                       |
| Tracy Cooke      | Brinkley Grove Primary               |
| Margaret Coxhead | Milldene Primary                     |
| Sophie Denyer    | Roach Vale Primary                   |
| Ellie Eames      | White Hall Academy                   |
| Tara Finney      | Great Clacton CE Juniors             |
| Clare French     | Kendall CE Primary                   |
| Alison Grigg     | Broomgrove Infants                   |

**LA Officers**

|                   |                                   |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Clare Kershaw     | Director of Education             |
| Dan Gee           | Assistant Director, North East    |
| Stephen Chynoweth | EY and Education Manager, N East  |
| Jo Barclay        | Head of Education Safeguarding    |
| Janine Hanson     | SEND Quadrant Manager, North East |
| Nicky Everett     | School Effectiveness Partner      |
| Carole Farrer     | School Effectiveness Partner      |
| Sue Thomas        | ECC                               |

|                    |                                 |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| Nick Hutchings     | N East Chair/ Hamilton Primary  |
| Karen Jackson      | Kings Ford Academy              |
| Rebecca Loader     | Stanway Primary                 |
| Kerry Malcolm      | St Lawrence CE Primary Rowhedge |
| Rebekah May        | Birch CE Primary                |
| Rebecca McCutcheon | Monkwick Juniors                |
| Carl Messer        | St George's Primary             |
| Mark Millbourne    | Prettygate Infant and Juniors   |
| Gail Morgan        | St Michaels Primary & Nursery   |
| Martin Moriarty    | Tiptree St Luke's CE Primary    |
| Charlotte Newley   | Cherry Tree Primary             |
| Richard Potter     | Home Farm Primary               |
| Chris Ruck         | Friars Grove Primary            |
| Claire Russell     | Braibswick Primary              |
| Adam Squirrel      | Stanway Fiveways Primary        |
| Steven Turnbull    | Hazelmere Infants and Nursery   |
| Tania Wright       | Mersea Island School            |

**In Attendance**

|                  |                                  |
|------------------|----------------------------------|
| Pam Langmead     | EPHA Professional Officer        |
| Bridgette Gough  | St Andrew's/Feering Primary      |
| Lisa Instance    | Beaulieu Park Primary            |
| Rory Bullivant   | Cherry Tree Primary              |
| Caroline White   | Kinetix                          |
| Rachel Pritchard | Essex Research School/Lyons Hall |
| James Hancock    | Emotionally Healthy Minds        |
| Sarah Petherick  | Emotionally Healthy Minds        |
| Peter Stonier    | Ofsted                           |

**Apologies**

|                 |                        |
|-----------------|------------------------|
| Abbie Fairbairn | Lawford CE Primary     |
| Debbie Griggs   | Myland Primary         |
| Becky Keitch    | St Georges' CE Primary |
| Tara Marshall   | Highfields Primary     |

Note: If your attendance or apologies have not been noted please contact the EPHA Professional Officer at [pam@langmead.me.uk](mailto:pam@langmead.me.uk) for amendment.

## NORTH EAST EPHA AREA MEETING MINUTES 17 JUNE 2026

### 1. WELCOME

Nick Hutchings, the North East Area Chair welcomed headteachers to the meeting.

#### **Welcome to the following Headteachers:**

|                 |                    |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| Melanie Atwell  | Kings Ford Infants |
| Rachel Saunders | Chase Lane Primary |

#### **Farewell to the following headteachers:**

|                   |                                             |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Liz Bartholomew   | Mayflower Primary                           |
| Lee Caffull       | St Andrew's Primary, Weeley (moving school) |
| Abbie Fairbairn   | Lawford CE Primary (moving school)          |
| Lisa Frith-Sly    | Camulos Academy                             |
| Carl Messer       | St George's School                          |
| Amanda Mitchelson | Old Heath Primary                           |
| James Newell      | Wix and Wrabness Primary (moving school)    |
| Steven Turnbull   | Hazlemere Infants                           |
| Michelle Wright   | Montgomery Primary                          |

Nick also thanked Carol Farrer for her long service as a Local Authority adviser, and for her invaluable support and challenge to headteachers in the North East. He wished her a long and happy retirement.

If you are leaving please make use of the EPHA new heads' checklist, and complete it for your successor. This is available on the EPHA website at

<https://essexprimaryheads.co.uk/info-and-documents/good-practice/>

### 2. ESSEX RESEARCH SCHOOL

Rachel Pritchard, Headteacher at Lyons Hall Primary and part of the Essex Research School, was welcomed to the meeting. She shared the following information about the Essex Research School.

#### **Who we are**

Essex Research School is part of the national Research Schools Network, a group of 32 schools supported by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) to help educators put research evidence into practice.

We are based at Lyons Hall Primary School in Essex supporting teachers, leaders and governors to improve outcomes for all pupils, particularly those facing disadvantage.

Our work is rooted in a shared moral purpose with the EEF: to break the link between family income and educational attainment by improving the quality of teaching and leadership through evidence-informed practice.

#### **What we do**

At [Essex Research School](#), we translate high-quality research into practical, accessible support for schools. We do this by:

- Delivering evidence-informed professional development for teachers and leaders
- Supporting school and trust leaders to embed research into strategy and improvement planning
- Designing and leading regionally-relevant programmes that respond to local needs and disadvantage

- Sharing learning through blogs, resources and events that are rooted in classroom and leadership practice
- We work closely with schools, trusts and system leaders to move beyond “what works” and focus on how evidence is implemented well in real contexts.

### **‘Spell It Like It Is’ pilot**

We are currently leading an evidence-informed spelling intervention pilot across Essex and the wider Eastern region.

The pilot focuses on:

- Improving pupils’ spelling and writing accuracy
- Strengthening the application of disciplinary vocabulary
- Building pupil confidence in written outcomes

The programme has a strong track record in KS2 and is now being tested in KS3 classrooms. Early evidence shows increased confidence and measurable improvements in pupils’ spelling and writing.

*Looking ahead:* We plan to scale this work next year, recruiting 15 to 20 additional schools from both primary and secondary phases.

### **East Coast Collective: Leadership and Disadvantage**

The East Coast Collective is a two-year leadership programme bringing together 30 Primary headteachers and CEOs from across Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk.

The programme:

- Focuses on reducing educational disadvantage in coastal and underserved areas
- Combines evidence-informed leadership learning, collaboration and coaching
- Builds capacity in senior and middle leaders to drive sustainable, whole-school change
- Year 1 focuses on leadership strategy and systems, with subsequent years shifting the emphasis towards classroom practice and teaching quality.

### **Professional development and events**

We deliver a rolling programme of professional development events, designed to be practical, evidence-aligned and immediately useful for schools.

Upcoming events include sessions on:

- [Leadership and disadvantage](#) , 1 June 2026, 4pm – 5pm
- [Effective assessment in KS1 mathematics](#) - 6 July 2026, 4pm -5pm.

Alongside our programmes and events, we regularly [publish blogs and articles](#) written by our team and [Evidence Leads in Education](#). These draw directly on classroom experience, leadership practice and current research and cover areas such as:

- Assessment and feedback
- Literacy and spelling
- Leadership through the lens of disadvantage
- Belonging, culture and high expectations

### **Clips from the Classroom:**

We also produce videos that exemplify classroom practice. We have a series in the making surrounding [Primary Maths Assessment](#). Our next video in the series will be released in June

2026. You can also access a wealth of videos via the [Clips from the Classroom](#) webpage. These short videos cover a range of topics and can be great tools to support in-school PD.

### Get involved

Schools, trusts and individual educators engage with Essex Research School in many ways, including:

- Attending events and webinars
- Taking part in pilot projects and programmes
- Working with us on leadership or school improvement priorities
- Accessing blogs, resources and evidence summaries
- Get involved with [EEF funded Promising Projects and](#)

[Programmes](#) To stay connected, [subscribe to our newsletter](#) or visit our [website](#).

**Direct contact:** Sarah-Louise Johnston, Director of Essex Research School:  
[s.johnston.essex@researchschool.org.uk](mailto:s.johnston.essex@researchschool.org.uk).

Rachel confirmed that Sarah-Louise is always happy to meet for a one-to-one call to discuss future partnerships.

### 3. FIRST SITE, COLCHESTER

Rachel Skillen was welcomed to the meeting. She explained the importance of creativity and culture in developing children's learning, skills and cultural understanding, and how Firstsite can support schools and families through accessible, low-cost opportunities — from school visits and enrichment activities to family events and creative experiences.

Firstsite is the East of England's contemporary visual arts organisation where schools can experience the most exciting developments in contemporary art, and explore the rich artistic legacy cultivated by the East of England's unique landscape and character.

<https://firstsite.uk/whats-on/>

### 4. EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY MINDS

James Hancock and Sarah Petherick were welcomed to the meeting.

Emotionally Healthy Minds supports schools through staff training, student workshops, and parent sessions that build understanding of emotions and develop practical strategies for managing them, helping to strengthen emotional wellbeing across the school community.

James explained that they are currently a team of 15 (but growing rapidly) who support children whose emotions are stopping them from accessing school. He and Sarah gave an example of an 11 year old pupil, who they call Jade, who is finding it difficult to access school; they stressed that every school will be familiar with a "Jade".

The statistics about the mental health problems in school are worrying.  
Nearly 9 out of 10 teachers and support staff in a National Education Union survey report that they have noticed an increase in prevalence of emotional and mental health issues in students in their setting.  
1 in 5 children aged 8-16 years old have a probable mental health problem.

In 2022/23, 949,200 young people with active referrals to CAMHS:

- 32% received support
- 28% are still waiting for support
- 40% have seen their referral closed without any support

Emotionally Healthy Minds offers staff training, pupil workshops, parent workshops and targeted student support, focusing on a range of activities including

- Regulating Emotions
- Managing Anxiety
- Building Resilience
- Increasing Self-Esteem
- Getting Ready for Year 7
- Starting Primary School

At the core of Emotionally Healthy Minds' training and workshops:

- Emotional education and emotional literacy
- Informative and practical
- Based on tried and tested strategies and neuroscientific research (Emotion Coaching)
- Not about a quick fix
- Addresses issues common to schools right now

The aim is to build emotionally stronger and healthier children

- Supporting neurotypical children, not just neurodiverse
- Equips children with skills for life, not just for now
- Complimentary to TPP and Thrive
- Supports the objectives of the updated primary Health Education curriculum being introduced in September 2026

However, Emotionally Healthy Minds is not about pathologising anxiety or other perceived negative emotions, and rather than asking 'What is wrong?' , ask 'What's going on?'

Contact James Hancock at james@emotionallyhealthyminds.com  
emotionallyhealthyminds.com

## 5. **MANAGING PARENTAL COMPLAINTS**

The Professional Officer explained that she had recently come across a podcast featuring Iain Grafton MBE, focused on understanding and managing complaints, an increasingly stressful problem for schools.

From the reasonable parent who simply wants an apology, to the rare but highly challenging querulous complainant, school governance specialist and former Detective Superintendent Iain Grafton MBE breaks down the characteristics of six different types of complainant and offered tailored response strategies for school leaders. The video can be accessed at <https://www.brownejacobson.com/products/parental-behaviour-support-pack> and the following is part of the transcript of the recording:

The video explained that the framework comes originally from a piece of academic work conducted by the University of Victoria in Australia, probably about 30 years ago now. They were leading the world in trying to better understand why some really serious atrocities committed by people against often multiple victims of homicide took place. What was it about the person that ended up being responsible for those acts that took them from where they started as potentially ordinary, reasonable, normal people, and drove them into a position where they found that the only way they felt they could be heard was to carry out something atrocious in the community.

And as a result of that academic work being shared with law enforcement agencies around the world, the piece of work in question made its way to the United Kingdom in the early 2000s and became the basis for a nationwide rethink by the police forces in England and Wales of the way in which they handle, understand, and support people who make complaints about the police — in order to ensure that the police didn't overlook somebody who may be suffering from a state of mind that could take them from being an ordinary, reasonable person into a state where they could commit something atrocious, as had been the case around the world.

Iain explained that, as a person whose responsibility it is to try and resolve this complaint, headteachers need to be aware that the person you are dealing with who has raised a complaint will probably fit into one of six different categories. And until you understand which of the six categories that person is in, when they have that first interaction with you, you won't have a great chance of resolving the complaint — because for each of the six different types, there are six different approaches to managing that person and their complaint. And the six responses don't mix well with the six types. So the key to this is, firstly, understand why it is someone's complaining and what their complaint is about and where they are on their journey with that complaint. And then select the best approach to dealing with them, focusing all the time on trying to get a pragmatic, settled resolution and an outcome within the policy that you have for dealing with complaints.

So Type 1 we would refer to as normal, reasonable, ordinary people — the vast majority. Type 2 are difficult or awkward people. Type 3 are those who are either acting through a degree of dishonesty or they're motivated by compensation — litigious people. Type 4 are altruistic complainants who are genuine people, but just act on behalf of others and feel they need to do that. Type 5 are people who make complaints for hobbies, because they do exist. And then Type 6 are the tiniest proportion of all the complainants but they present the biggest challenge to organisations, because they are the querulous, the vexatious, the unreasonably difficult, the rude, the irrational, the intolerant. I could go on. People will have an understanding of that sort of category, I'm sure — what we're trying to describe as Type 6, the most difficult and the most challenging.

Type 6 — the querulous complainant — in some ways the most problematic complainant. What are the key warning signs that you might be dealing with a querulous Type 6 complainant?

They'll very quickly be easily identified, but we need to stress that they're very rare. The behaviours that you will get from the outset will be wholly unreasonable. And we've been asked in the past what's unreasonable? What's unreasonable is whatever you think unreasonable is. Forty phone calls to the school in a day is unreasonable.

Sending in a lever arch folder of 275 pages of A4 and expecting the school head to read that because that's the complaint is unreasonable. And those are both true examples of unreasonable behaviour that I've been involved in advising a school about.

Then there is the rudeness, the threats, the extreme threats, the irrational behaviour, the illogical behaviour, the intimidation, the threats on social media. If you can get into a logical conversation with somebody who is in this state of mind, it will be very difficult for them to explain to you what their complaint is. And it will be very difficult for you to understand that complaint, because what you have to know about somebody who's in Type 6 is they're actually talking to you not because they want you to help resolve their complaint. They're talking to you because they have another problem which you're never going to resolve, and they don't want you to resolve the complaint because having a complaint gives them a sense of purpose.

And therein is the first issue we have to remember with Type 5 people who are hobby complainants, because a hobby complainant likes to make complaints. Somebody in Type 6 may well persist with one complaint over years and never want it resolved. They want you to indulge them in their complaint, and they'll go out of their way to ensure that you do that. So if you start to get close to possibly resolving the complaint, they'll reframe it, they'll withdraw it and substitute it with a new complaint. And this is all

about preventing you from getting a successful outcome. So you need to understand with Type 6 people it's unlikely they'll ever get a resolution — they don't want it. If you get too close to it, they'll stop you getting it. So you need a different set of tactics to work with someone who's in a Type 6 state of mind.

#### A Case Example of Type 6 Querulous Behaviour

I was asked to assist a head teacher who felt they were dealing with somebody who was being unreasonable and presenting them with a complaint which was disproportionate to what had happened, and the outcomes they were seeking were frankly undeliverable. I met with the head teacher and we went through how we had got to this position where the relationship between a family member for a child in the school was so polarised from the school.

It began quite simply — the individual in question wanted to have his mobile phone number added to his granddaughter's school record of people to contact in a case of emergency. The wider family didn't want that to happen, and the focus for this man became on the school and why they wouldn't do what he wanted them to do, and he became fixated with school policy. He could not see why it wasn't a reasonable request. He didn't accept that the family wouldn't support it. He didn't ultimately accept the head teacher's decision that they were not going to do that.

One of the things that does work well with dealing with people who are in the querulous state of mind is to be really clear and really firm about policy and process and what you can and what you can't do. Because if you don't, they'll exploit you and take it into another, potentially another complaint. And that's what happened in this particular case. The head teacher did the right thing, but by this time the gentleman's fixation was so dangerous that he went into a psychotic episode, his behaviour degenerated and ultimately — having found no other way, in his view, of getting his wishes to have the telephone number included on the school record — he waited until the school was being opened in the morning by the caretaker. He waited in his car outside the school grounds, and as he saw the caretaker open the gates and walk through the school car park, he drove at speed at the school caretaker, knocked him down and injured him, which resulted in a criminal investigation, a conviction, and a term of imprisonment. Thankfully a rare case, but a real case of somebody fitting Type 6.

In terms of strategies, what is the best approach to employ with Type 6 complainants?

Type 6 don't want a resolution, but their behaviours might mirror some of Type 2. And the same with dishonesty — Type 6 people can be dishonest, so can Type 3, but not unreasonably so, not to the point where they're threatening and abusive. So understanding and recognising the different types, particularly Type 6, is key. The strategies to deal with them are to be really clear and really firm.

Taking the example of the 275 pages of A4 submitted to a head teacher as a letter of complaint — I worked with that head teacher and we went through very quickly and recognised that page after page was copy-and-paste material from the internet, irrelevant material. What we decided to do was to construct a letter to send back to the complainant and say: "What you have submitted is unreasonable, and we are not prepared to read it. Please condense your 275 pages into no more than one side of A4 and please return it to school within seven days. If you don't, we will consider the matter closed." And you have to be that blunt and that direct with people who are being wholly unreasonable.

We do not employ head teachers and senior leaders — we don't even require governors as volunteers — to engage in dialogue or in correspondence with intemperate, rude, threatening, or aggressive letters or phone calls. It's not what they're there to do.

Type 6 complainants will often go off to other third-party agencies too — so in the school context, to Ofsted, the Department for Education and others, particularly where they face robust pushback from the school. Is there anything that schools and trusts can do to help them respond effectively to DfE or Ofsted challenges of that nature?

Record keeping is critical. It's critical in any case, and schools are good at keeping records. We keep good records about safeguarding issues, and we're used to keeping logs about incidents in school. The same must apply to dealing with a complaint — keep a log, a register, or however you wish to record it, of your interaction with that person, particularly if they're Type 6, and stick rigidly to policy. A deviation

from policy will simply give that complainant another complaint to raise and another investigation, and therefore give more life to the complaint that they don't want the resolution to anyway. And they will then use that as an example to show why they were right to complain — because you can't even follow your own policy properly.

It's sad to say it, but you need to expect, if you're corresponding with people in this state of mind, to have your most recent email or letter sent back to you and annotated — potentially with your grammar corrected, potentially with your spelling picked up. And that's not because they feel that's helpful, but because they want to show that they are in control and that you are nowhere near resolving their complaint. So these are tangents that arise from the process of trying to deal with this. Stick rigidly to policy, and keep a written record of all that you do, such that if Ofsted or the Department for Education do respond to what they'll also be receiving from the same person, you can demonstrate that you have done everything that was reasonable and proportionate to deal with this particular person.

Are there any key characteristics of Type 6 correspondence to be aware of?

There are. I think the first thing is the volume. Be prepared, if they do resort to writing to you, to receive significant amounts of paperwork. The lever arch folder example I gave earlier is not unusual. However, within that correspondence, there are also some key features that might be more obvious in the initial emails you first receive from the complainant. What we would expect to find — and I have an example of a letter from a case, one page of a nine-page letter, one of many, many letters — is that on page one of the letter you'll see the use of threatening language, of aggressive language, of some irrational behaviours. Some use of very bold print, lots of underlining, different font sizes, different text sizes, excessive use of quotation marks. And as you read through this one page, you begin to get a feel for what this person's state of mind might be. And page one is page one of nine — page nine doesn't end with anything that says what the complaint is. So there's a nine-page letter that doesn't actually tell you what the complaint is. And it's that sort of tone, content, and particular way in which the keyboard is used that are a good indicator that you are dealing with somebody who's in Type 6.

What are the common mistakes that schools make in handling complaints?

I think probably the way to answer that is to say: what are the three top things to do when dealing with a complaint?

Number one — you have to make dealing with that complaint your priority on that day. We know full well that the speed of response and the authenticity of that speed of response is the greatest chance you have of resolving the complaint. So number one, deal with it quickly.

Number two — if you have to resort to policy, and you don't always have to because you can deal with these things at a lower, more informal level, but if you do have to resort to policy, please stick to your school's policy and follow it, because that will be tested, potentially, by the DfE later on if the parent or person is not content with the outcome.

And the third thing — please make a written record of what you've done. Keep a written record so that in the future you can demonstrate what your response was to that particular complaint. And of course, if in doubt, please do come and seek some advice from governance professionals who can support you with this piece of work.

We talk a lot in our training about aiming for resolution, but planning for escalation. How does that fit in with all we've talked about today in terms of the profiles of the complainants and the ways of responding to them?

It fits really well. I would say similarly: begin with the end in mind. What do you want out of this? What does the complainant want out of this? Do you have any common ground on day one that you can both agree on, or are you going to have to escalate this through a policy? And if you go through the policy, what's really important is that you make it clear to the person complaining what that policy allows you to do and not to do, because their expectations need to be managed through that process.

My final recommendation is this: most of the people that you deal with who make a complaint will be normal, ordinary, reasonable people. Deal with them as quickly as you can and respond to their

complaint with a view to resolving it. We've talked a lot today about people who are in Type 6 — they are the rarest. I wouldn't want anyone to leave today thinking that the Type 6 complainant is going to be something they've got to deal with regularly. It isn't. The majority of people — 95% of people — will be ordinary, reasonable people that you can deal with, but you need to deal with them quickly in order to get the best chance of an outcome.

Iain Grafton can be contacted at [foveoltd@mail.com](mailto:foveoltd@mail.com) if you want support or advice about complaints.

## **6. NORTH EAST EPHA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

### **a) CHAIR'S REPORT**

Nick Hutchings, Chair of North East EPHA, gave the following report.

#### **Review of the year**

Where does the year go? I can't quite believe we are in the summer term again! It seems that during a school year it is a massive slog with all sorts of issues, disasters and often incredulous things going on, and you can't wait for it to end. Then you blink and you're in the maelstrom of the last part of the summer term, racing through assessments, report writing and reading, sorting staff for the following year and trying your best to keep up!

I remember being told many years ago that; 'If you stand still long enough in education, you become an innovator.' I couldn't really grasp the concept of this nearly 30 years ago when I was told this, but the saying holds true! We seem to be revisiting the same issues again and again. SEND has vexed us all this year, funding and the lack of it, has again occupied our brains, as it always has for colleagues decades ago. Yet we all still turn up each day to do the best we can for the children and the communities we serve.

Ofsted has started its new inspection process this year, with some mixed results. I know we can focus on the awful process, but it gets us nowhere very fast. I'm sure over the coming years, there will be a little more flex in the system and some slightly less difficult judgements. We need to make sure we support each other through this and the other things that hit us in the face day in day out.

We've had local elections this year, which have changed the County Council. I have no idea how this is going to impact Local Government Review and how we will be working together, but I do know that it won't stop us from picking up a phone to talk to each other, to share a laugh and to look for some support.

EPHA has again been working hard with colleagues at a local and national level to get the best it can for Heads. This year our priorities have been to engage in Local Government Reorganisation, Looking at Early Years and Ofsted and having a focus on SEND with a final priority of Headteacher well-being. You will have seen in minutes of meetings that we continue to challenge the local authority in all of these areas.

At this point I would like to ask the EPHA Exec team to stand up. These heads represent you on working parties and within other meetings, ensuring that each area has a voice. Let's give them a round of applause for their service this year!

I would also like to thank Pam again for another brilliant year. Her termly briefings are a life line to us all, although often a depressing one! The fact that she is now presenting a similar one to governors means that they have some idea of the breadth of our jobs. The seven minute staff meetings continue to be a hit and the conferences for the WEPHA, the Heads and Deputy's rival any national ones. Let's give it up for Pam everyone!

#### **What is to come?**

So Local Government Reform is going to occupy the minds of the local authority and us for a bit this year. Navigating 5 Unitary Authorities is going to be very new. How this will look for us as school leaders is not quite yet known. The biggest risk is the breaking up of EPHA. We don't realise how lucky we are to be able to meet like this on a termly basis and have a group of heads across the county working towards the

same goal. This is something that Harriet, Pam and I will be working feverishly on over the next year. We have to find a way to stick together.

I think SEND will continue to be very challenging for all schools, having to do more with less and managing more complex children in a mainstream setting. But this has been a theme for many many years now.

Finally we have a curriculum review that has taken place, and it seems to have been very quiet on that front, so be prepared for some further changes on what the government think our children need to learn to be successful in the future.

It has been a pleasure to chair the meetings again this year and as I do every year, if someone else would like to have a go, please let me or Pam know.

#### **b) ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND LOCAL DELIVERY GROUP REPRESENTATIVES**

|                                         |                                        |
|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| <b>Chair</b>                            | Nick Hutchings (Hamilton Primary)      |
| <b>Vice-Chair</b>                       | Richard Potter (Home Farm Primary)     |
| <b>Colchester West</b>                  | Nick Hutchings (Hamilton Primary)      |
| <b>Colchester East</b>                  | Mark Millbourne (Prettygate Schools)   |
| <b>Colchester South</b>                 | to be agreed by the consortium         |
| <b>Tendring Mid</b>                     | Ian MacDonald (Elmstead Primary)       |
| <b>Tendring North</b>                   | Becky Keitch (St George's CE Primary)  |
| <b>Tendring South</b>                   | Sue Bardetti (Holland Haven Primary)   |
| <b>Harwich &amp; Dovercourt</b>         | Nicky Patrick (Spring Meadow Primary)  |
| <b>North East Partnership Lead head</b> | Kerry Malcolm (St Lawrence CE Primary) |

The officers and Local Delivery Group representatives were thanked for the hard work that they do on behalf of headteachers in the North East Area and for agreeing to continue in their roles or taking on new positions.

#### **4. EPHA UPDATES**

- a) The Summer term EPHA newsletter**, including dates for the 2026/27 school year, was circulated to headteachers in advance of the meeting -these can also be found on the EPHA website [www.essexprimaryheads.co.uk](http://www.essexprimaryheads.co.uk).

**b) EPHA County Annual General Meeting**

The EPHA county AGM will be held on Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> October at the Lion Inn, Boreham.

**c) Conferences**

Headteachers were reminded that the Deputy Headteachers' conference will be held on Friday 9<sup>th</sup> October 2026, at the Colchester Football Stadium and next year's annual Headteachers' conference will be held on Friday 19<sup>th</sup> March 2027 at Chelmsford City Race Course.

The programme and booking form for the Deputy Conference will be emailed to schools at the end of June.

There will be a conference for the Small Schools Headteacher group on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> October 2025 at the Lion Inn, Boreham.

**d) How can governors support their headteacher**

Headteachers were reminded that the Professional Officer will be running training for governors, online, on Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> July, focused on how they can support their headteacher.

Headteachers at the meeting were asked to share their views on what their governors do well, and what they would like them to do better, so that these ideas could be included in the training.

**6. FUTURE DATES**

**NORTH EAST headteacher meetings 2026/27**

Wednesday 11 November 2026

Wednesday 3 March 2027

Wednesday 16 June 2027

**Deputy Headteachers' Annual Conference 2026**

Friday 9 October 2026 Colchester Football Stadium

**Small Schools headteacher conference**

Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> October 2026 The Lion Inn, Boreham

**Headteachers' Annual Conference 2027**

Friday 19 March 2027 Chelmsford City Race Course