

Professional Officer Report for EPHA Annual General Meeting 2021

Nearly 19 months ago, midway through March 2020, none of us could have anticipated the impact and challenges that a global pandemic was about to have on the whole of society, both personally and professionally. However, Essex primary, junior and infant schools have soldiered on throughout, and have managed – somehow – to get to grips with constantly changing (and sometimes, downright confusing) operational and educational guidance. Schools enjoyed a brief respite from the stress of the Ofsted call and SATs, but these are now back with a vengeance, alongside the continued challenges of Covid-19. EPHA is well aware that it is NOT YET “business as usual” and recognises the stresses as well as the joys of primary headship.

Throughout it all the Association has adapted and my role as Professional Officer continues to be busy and, I hope, has added value for headteachers and their schools.

While I have continued to attend a variety of meetings on behalf of primary headteachers, mostly online, an essential part of my role has been the regular meetings with Clare Kershaw, LA officers and colleagues from ASHE (the secondary heads association). These have provided a direct and very effective way of communicating with the LA and ensuring that primary headteachers have continued to be heard during the pandemic. These conference calls are now held weekly (rather than daily at the outset of lockdown), but continue to be an important direct line to Clare, and through her to the DfE and Ofsted.

The EPHA Colleague Supporter programme continues to support headteachers across the county. At the time of writing I am arranging Colleague Support for the many headteachers and heads of schools who have taken up posts this term. Thank you to those serving headteachers who continue to give their time and expertise to the programme.

One unexpected benefit of the pandemic has been the dramatic development of our use of technology and I was proud – and more than a little surprised – that we managed to hold both last year’s Deputy Conference and the Headteacher’s conference online. I learnt a lot about breakout rooms (don’t use them!) and the joys of the mute button. A few delegates preferred attending the conferences from the comfort of their own home, but on the whole most want to get back to some face to face events, not least to enjoy a day out with good food and company. However we will continue to hold webcasts, some meetings and training online, as it is certainly an efficient and effective way to get large numbers together.

The headteacher briefings continue to be an important of my role, taking up lots of time in the first few weeks of each term. I am now delivering these briefings to 28 clusters across the county, plus an “overspill” meeting for those who can’t attend a local meeting. Most have continued online for the time being, but I am assuming some groups will want to return to in-person briefings in due course, or perhaps a mixture of the two.

The “Seven minute staff meetings” remain popular with headteachers and school leaders. Whilst they mainly focus on safeguarding issues, they also include subjects such as data protection, Ofsted and now Covid-19.

EPHA continues to provide free (or heavily subsidised) training and events for headteachers. Since lockdown we have been running webcasts with Mike Gogarty (Public Health Director) and representatives from Ofsted, as well as hosting a conference about Healthy Schools partnered with the Essex Child and Family Welfare Service. These are well attended and give our heads a chance to hear from, and question, key figures in education.

I continue to attend numerous meetings on behalf of EPHA, as detailed in my termly report to the Executive. In addition to attendance at those meetings (and writing follow-up reports), my work for the Association has included:

- Information, emails, guidance and communications with all headteachers, including in response to the Covid-19 pandemic;
- Responding to queries and actions from the Executive, ECC, other association officers, interested companies;
- Individual support for headteachers when issues arise;
- Identifying and supporting new headteachers;
- Managing the Colleague Supporter programme;
- Briefings to headteacher groups – 28 partnerships/clusters are now holding termly briefings – researching and writing briefing notes and presentations –and keeping them up to date as new directives, guidance and documents are introduced;
- Writing 7 minute staff meetings, including updating all KCSiE presentations, and bringing all in line with 2021 guidance;
- Updating support materials for schools, including statutory policy lists, website checklists, and the Support Directory;
- Organisation and management of the area termly headteacher meetings;
- Organising and running webcasts;
- Managing the EPHA finances: paying claims and invoices (including from Colleague Supporters), producing reports, paying in cheques;
- Managing the bookings, organising the Deputy and Headteacher conferences, future planning for conferences;
- Updating EPHA records and managing the website;
- Other tasks as required.

As ever, it is a great privilege to work for and support primary-phase headteachers in Essex and I look forward to another busy year in 2021/22. However, I also hope that this school year proves much less dramatic and traumatic for us all, and that life, both in schools and out, can return to something approaching normal as soon as possible.

Pam Langmead, EPHA Professional Officer, September 2021