

Professional Officer Report for EPHA Annual General Meeting 2022

It was a great relief this term, when writing the briefing notes, not to have to include a Covid section within the presentation! Whilst the pandemic is not quite over (despite what Ofsted and the DfE seem to think), many headteachers are now turning their focus to different challenges, in particular how to manage their budgets in this time of unprecedented financial pressure, along with the relentless return of Ofsted, and the ever-changing ideas and directives from the DfE.

EPHA continues to support and champion Essex primary, infant and junior heads; my role as Professional Officer is as busy as ever and, I hope, has added value for headteachers and their schools. A new initiative this year, and a welcome addition to the support EPHA offers, is the formation of the Small Schools Support Group. This is aimed at around 60 headteachers in schools with fewer than 120 pupils. We hold two meetings a term, and are running our first Small Schools conference in October. The meetings focus on the particular challenges that small schools face, but we also aim to celebrate the positive aspect of these schools.

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 – there are around 59 new heads and at least 40 of them are brand new to headship and/or Essex. Thank you to those serving headteachers who continue to give their time and expertise to the programme. We are also expanding the programme to offer support to any headteacher who wants this, and also brokering additional capacity from other senior leaders in schools.

Headteacher wellbeing has been an important priority for EPHA this year and we funded a pilot programme delivered by Pursuit Wellbeing, focused on HeartHealth. The impact of the programme has been impressive; one headteacher who took part noted:

“I found the sessions to be highly effective and uncovering the science behind emotional responses really helped deal with stressful situations. This is not what you would expect from a well-being session, and I would highly recommend them. Maria who coordinated our course touched base between sessions which was very helpful. I am continuing to apply what I have learnt on a daily basis.”

EPHA is able to subsidise headteachers who want to take up this or other coaching/counselling opportunities, partly supported by funding from the Education Taskforce wellbeing fund.

The headteacher briefings continue to be an important of my role, taking up lots of time in the first few weeks of each term, particularly now that over half have returned to in-person meetings. I am delivering the briefings to 27 clusters across the county, plus an “overspill” meeting for those who can’t attend a local meeting. I have calculated (very approximately) that about 360 headteachers across the county attend these briefings; that’s a lot of people wading their way through the “do-list” each term!

The “Seven minute staff meetings” remain popular with headteachers and school leaders. Although they mainly focus on safeguarding issues, they also include topics such as data protection and Ofsted; recent subjects have included online safety and I’m about to produce one focused on the new Searching, Screening and Confiscation guidance produced by the DfE.

EPHA continues to provide free (or heavily subsidised) training and events for headteachers and we are planning to repeat the exclusions training we held three years ago with Tanya Callman, following the publication of new Suspension and Exclusion guidance. We will continue to hold regular webcasts as an excellent and efficient way to hear from local and national figures in education.

I attend numerous meetings on behalf of EPHA, as detailed in my termly report to the Executive. In addition to attendance at those meetings, my work for the Association has included:

- Information, emails, guidance and communications with all headteachers;
- 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 – 27 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 2022 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, Headteacher and Small School 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 2022/23.

Pam Langmead, EPHA Professional Officer, September 2022