

SEND STRATEGY – HEADTEACHER ROUND TABLE

WEDNESDAY 7 NOVEMBER 2018

2.00 pm – 4.00 pm

Hamptons Sports and Social Club

1. IN ATTENDANCE

Ruth Sturdy (RS)	ECC Lead School Effectiveness Partner – Inclusion
Clare Kershaw (CK)	Director of Education
Councillor Ray Gooding (CRG)	Cabinet Member for Education and Skills
Ralph Holloway (RH)	SEND Transformation Manager
Philippa Holliday	Assistant Director, North East Essex
Pam Langmead (PL)	EPHA Professional Officer
Harriet Phelps-Knights	EPHA Chair/Headteacher Janet Duke Primary (South)
David Rogers	Headteacher, Bentfield Primary and Enhanced Provision (West)
Matt O’Grady (MO’G)	Headteacher, West Horndon Primary (South)
Andrew Smith (AS)	CEO/Headteacher Lyons Hall (Mid)
Dominic Mullholland(DM)	Headteacher, Mildmay Juniors (Mid)
Deborah Bailey	Headteacher, John Bunyan Primary
Simon Thompson	ASHE Executive Director
Andy Hodgkinson (AH)	Headteacher, Sweyne Park School (South)
Dan Woodham	Headteacher, Edith Borthwick School (Mid)
John Hunter	ESGA

Apologies

Councillor Tony Ball	Deputy Cabinet Member for Education and Skills
Debs Watson	Headteacher, Tanglewood Nursery
Jane Bass	Executive Headteacher, Connected Learning MAT
Helena Boast	Headteacher, The Thomas Lord Audley School (N East)
Joanne Newitt	Headteacher, Willow Brook Primary (North East)
Jason Carey	Headteacher, James Hornsby School (South)
Jo Hickford	Honywood School (North West)
Helen Dudley-Smith	Previous Essex primary headteacher
Sean Tobin	CE Berlesduna Academy Trust, Merrylands Primary (South)
Teresa Phillips	Headteacher, Thomas Willingale Primary (West)

2. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING

The minutes of the meeting on 2 October 2018 were agreed.

RS noted that Deborah Bailey and Jane Bass had expressed an interest in joining the Headteacher Roundtable. Jane had sent her apologies for the meeting, but Deborah Bailey was in attendance and was welcomed to the group.

3. ESSEX INCLUSION STATEMENT

At the last meeting it was noted that the sign up to the SEN inclusion statement (publicised several times through Education Essex) had been disappointing. At that stage just 2 secondary schools had signed up. As agreed, AH gave a presentation at the ASHE Council meeting and as a result 6 more secondary schools signed the statement. RS had also met with ENPro and a number of questions had been raised.

In October, 26 primary schools had signed up. The statement was discussed at the EPHA Executive meeting on 11 October, and will be mentioned at the EPHA termly meetings. At this stage, around 10% of schools have signed up to the Statement. It was agreed that this may simply be that schools have not got round to it, or have not yet had the chance to discuss the Statement with their governors, although a few schools have had concerns about the statement.

There has been some feedback from headteachers and staff in schools, including questions about the statement. RS circulated a paper setting out the concerns from schools, which the group discussed.

It was noted that Clare had included a note in the editorial of Education Essex on Monday 5 November which stated: *I am aware that some headteachers have raised some concerns about the Essex Inclusion Statement. I would like to remind everyone that the statement has been produced by the Headteacher Roundtable, is it not a Local Authority document and many headteachers including all three professional associations (ASHE, EPHA and ESSET) as well as ESGA are members of this group. I would also like to be clear that the statement is a values based statement of principle and intent, and nothing more than that.*

In addition, the NAHT has been advising headteachers to “be wary” about signing up to the statement. A recent email from NAHT to its members in Essex had stated:

“schools should be careful in signing up to any statement that can then be produced in a tribunal.

For example, the inclusion statement if produced during an exclusion tribunal may hold the school to justifying “all methods” had been used. Understanding that schools should be making every attempt to include children, at a time when resources have never been tighter, schools should be wary.”

PL noted that she was disappointed that the Essex NAHT branch officer(s) had not approached the SEND Headteacher Roundtable (or EPHA) to discuss the statement, before issuing this advice to their members. The union response was discussed, and CK was certain that there would not be legal implications for schools if they signed up to the Inclusion Statement, as there is nothing in the document that is not in line with the DfE exclusions guidance or the SEN Code of Practice. Both of these documents state the expectation that schools will explore all possible options to support pupils, particularly if they have SEND needs, before making the decision to exclude. The Essex Inclusion Statement does not commit any school to doing more than it already must to justify an exclusion.

DM explained that he had discussed the Inclusion Statement with his staff at length. He is in favour of signing the statement, but had sent in a number of concerns raised by his staff, and so was invited to attend the meeting to discuss them. A key concern for his staff was what measures the Statutory Assessment Service would take to support the school to facilitate the aspirations set out in the statement. He stressed that the school only has a finite amount of money, resources and staffing capacity, and asked how appropriate provision will be addressed to meet the needs of all children. He also asked if Special Schools were also going to sign the statement, and asked about the capacity challenges in PRU and Alternative Provision settings.

It was agreed that these were all valid questions to ask when considering how schools could meet the challenges of the Inclusion Statement, and that the redesign of both the SEND estate and the system itself were in large part to try to solve these challenges. It was stressed once again that the redesign is a partnership approach between school leaders and the local authority. The reference to “we” in the statement does not refer to individual staff members in either schools or LA teams, and they will not be individually held to account in relation to the application of the Inclusion Statement.

AH noted that signing up to the Inclusion Statement won't, in itself, change anything, but that this is part of the shift in emphasis and outlook in relation to SEND. CK reminded the group that without a common agreement in Essex about what inclusion is, it is much more difficult to hold schools to account.

It was noted that RS has responded to a number of headteachers who have had concerns about the Statement and her assurances have been helpful and have allayed their concerns. A group of headteachers in South Tendring have asked to meet representatives of the Roundtable and LA Officers, to discuss their concerns about SEND provision further, and this meeting will take place later this term.

CRG noted that he was attending the meeting in place of Councillor Tony Ball, and he restated his commitment to the prioritisation of the SEND strategy in the County. He argued that the worries in relation to the Inclusion Statement were around application and intent, and stressed that schools are, in the main, following the approach set out in the statement. Schools will not be unreasonably challenged, whether or not they sign up to the Statement.

It was agreed that there needs to be a further communication to address some of the concerns that have been raised. The Roundtable members restated their commitment to the Inclusion Statement, but accepted that the questions raised by schools should be answered. It was

AGREED that CS and RS will write a communication to reassure schools about issues including:

- an explanation that this is an aspirational document that sets out the principle of inclusion in Essex, not a legally binding contract
- the legal ramifications of signing the document;
- reminding schools that the document was written by headteachers and governors, in partnership with LA officers, and that this is not a Local Authority statement;
- explaining who “we” relates to – not just schools but also Local Authority senior officers and team leaders;

CK
RS

- reminding headteachers that this statement is one part of the redesign of SEND provision in Essex, and is part of a 2 – 4 year journey.

4. ESSEX SEND REDESIGN

RH attended the meeting to update the group on the progress of the SEND capital programme and the redesign of services. The latter includes the Educational Psychologist team, the Statutory Assessment Service and the Specialist Teacher Team, as well as some aspects of the tribunal services. He explained that he has talked to these teams as early as possible, and has shared the vision around improving the life chances and opportunities of children and young people with SEND. The aim is to move away from deploying the majority of High Needs Block funding and resources on statutory requirements (largely through the mechanism of EHCPs) to a focus on early, non-statutory intervention. Schools and parents (through the Family Forum) will be part of the redesign process, and the pupil voice will also be sought. RH stressed the need to recognise and retain what is working well, as well as addressing the challenges and gaps in the system.

There is a high percentage of EHCPs in Essex compared with national and statistical neighbours. There are a number of drivers for this, which make the need for reform essential.

- A key (and expensive) contributor includes an increase in post-19 EHCPs (an increase of 302% last year), in line with the SEN reforms. There is no specific funding for this group, and the costs are met from the High Needs Block. In addition, the teams are not currently set up to support this group of young people/adults with complex special needs.
- Another driver is the fact that the identified special educational needs have changed and shifted in the last decade. RH noted that ten years ago autism was rarely diagnosed, now there are around 2,000 children and young people in Essex diagnosed with autism. Any future provision and support needs to be able to address this, and also the identification of need and the response to that needs to be more flexible and reactive in the future.
- The Special Schools in Essex are full or overfull. In addition, the physical space in some special schools is insufficient for the number of pupils.
- There are significant budget pressures on the High Needs Block which need to be addressed.
- Essex is experiencing a significant increase in population, therefore increasing the number of children and young people with SEND. This has been exacerbated by a number of vulnerable families that have been relocated in Essex by London Boroughs. This has put increasing pressure on services, including schools and the LA.
- There have been a rising number of exclusions, both fixed term and permanent, in all phases.
- Parents have a mixed experience of the support for SEND. The recent parental survey suggested that around 60% of parents are positive about the provision in schools, but less so about the support from social care, health and the LA.
- The number of SEND tribunals is significant and a real drain on resources.
- There is an undeveloped post-19 service.

One aspect of the redesign of services is that the teams need to be assessed and judged on pupil outcomes, rather than merely using qualitative data such as the number of visits undertaken; all

services need to be able to demonstrate impact. It will also be important to ensure that there is effective and relevant training for staff members. If they are not up to date with relevant and current practice, then they will not be equipped to advise and support schools.

The Local Authority will continue to have to deliver its statutory responsibilities, and the changes needed to the system will take time. There will need to be a cultural shift in approach from all who support SEND, both in the LA teams and in schools. It was noted that the current SEND system has developed organically over time, in response to changing need, events, new reforms and funding streams; Essex County Council has never deliberately designed a SEND service that is fit for purpose now and into the future.

There will need to be engagement with health and social care, so that all partners are working together to produce an effective and collaborative service. There also needs to be better use of technology, to assist in delivering better outcomes.

Last but not least, any new system must be cost-effective; it was accepted that there won't be any additional money in the system.

The ECC approach must:

- Reduce bureaucracy and administration;
- Offer local solutions, but retain an Essex-wide identity;
- Include distributed accountability and appropriate decision-making capabilities;
- Be focused on partnership working;
- Be a leader in digital working;
- Strengthen commissioning decisions and arrangements;
- Be a contributor to and driver for the Essex economy;
- Keep people, whatever their age and needs, safe.

RH reminded the Roundtable of the proposed timetable for the reform of the system.

- Outline structure developed – how to work with schools – by the end of term.
- Spring term – consultation with SEND services staff and schools;
- Likely phased approach to a new design from Autumn 2019;
- Implementation – spring 2020

It was noted that part of the redesign will be informed by appreciative enquiries (such as the one around Annual Reviews being conducted by Helen Wall) to ensure that good practice is not lost to a future system. It is hoped that positive suggestions for change can be introduced earlier than 2020.

PL asked how the LA planned to engage parents and ensure their approval of a future system from outset. Parents reaction and cooperation will be a crucial part of the success of a redesigned system. RH said that the Family Forum will be the starting point. It will be essential to ensure that they – and parents in general – better understand the research around appropriate, effective and affordable support for children with SEND. It was noted that health professionals also need to understand this research.

There was a suggestion that the work and experience of the Specialist Teachers could be improved by basing them within schools. It was **AGREED** that Andrew Smith, Deborah Bailey and Dan Woodham would design a possible approach to trial in schools.

MO'G made the point that if early intervention is missing or reduced, this simply builds up more serious and complex problems in the future, including an increased demand post-19. He argued that the incident of autism, speech, language and communication difficulties and mental health problems are likely to increase. He said that it was vital that Enhanced Provisions are used to their full capacity, and that they have assurances around sustained and long term funding (currently they only have guaranteed funding for a year). RH said that the local admissions process to the GROW provision works well, and he would welcome something similar for enhanced provisions.

MO'G also mentioned his concerns about the transition from enhanced provisions to secondary school. In his experience the issues that are flagged up by primary schools are not always understood or accepted by secondary schools.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- a) CK stressed the value of the SEND Headteacher Roundtable and the part that the group will play in the redesign of the SEND provision. She reiterated that there aren't more resources and funding available, so it will be essential to use the current and future resources carefully and flexibly. Whilst there is some nervousness among team members, many are also relishing the challenge and will welcome change.

b) **NASEN (National Association for Special Educational Needs)**

RS has had a conversation with Esther Brookes, from NASEN. She is keen to link with school leaders in Essex to discuss the provision of SEN in the county. NASEN undertook a parent survey around the SEN reform in 2017. RS suggested that she should be invited to attend a future Roundtable meeting, and this was **AGREED**.

RS

c) **EWMHS survey and evaluation**

It was noted that an independent review of the EWHMS service has been commissioned and schools have been invited to contribute to an online survey and to give their feedback at a series of workshops.

6. NEXT MEETING

Date to be agreed.

Agenda to include

- Notty Stone to feedback on the parent survey
- NASEN