

ESSEX PRIMARY HEADS' ASSOCIATION

SEND MEETING WITH LA OFFICERS AND SOUTH HEADTEACHERS AND STAFF

FRIDAY 24 NOVEMBER 2017

1.30 pm – 3.30 pm

Wickford CLC

1. IN ATTENDANCE

LA Officers

Clare Kershaw CK	Director of Education
Ralph Holloway RH	ECC Manager of SEN, Psychology & Assessment
Elaine White EW	Manager of SEN, Psychology and Assessment Services
Ruth Sturdy	Lead School Effectiveness Partner – Inclusion
Ros Somerville RoS	Principal Educational Psychologist
Dan Tunbridge DT	Deputy Principal Education Psychologist, South Manager
Kerry Howard	South Specialist Teaching and Pre-school Service
Cathy Gregory CG	SEN Area Manager

Headteachers/school representatives

Nicola Bache	Glebe Primary	Headteacher
Nicky Barrand	Cherry Tree Primary	Headteacher
Gemma Bray	Whitmore Primary	Assistant Head/Inclusion Leader
Luke Bulpett	Brightside Primary	Headteacher
Clare Barrett	Noak Bridge Primary	SENCo
Lynda Coetzee	Oakfield Primary	Deputy Head
Nic Coggin	Briscoe Primary	Head of School
Lyn Corderoy	Grange Primary	Headteacher
Sue Crace	Downham CE Primary	Headteacher
Lisa Cracknell	Bardfield Academy	Assistant Head/SENCo
Matt Davies	Janet Duke Primary	SENCo
Ryan Duff	Larchwood Primary	Headteacher
Rachel Fitzgerald	Quilters Juniors	SENCo
Emma Greenwood	Cherry Tree Primary	Inclusion Leader
Jacqui Gosnold	William Read Primary	Headteacher
Jon Hazelgrove	Grange Primary	Deputy Head
Stephanie Ireland	South Green Infants	Headteacher
Belinda Jackson	South Green Infants	SENCo
Natalie Jackson	Robert Drake Primary	SENCo
Huma Karim	Noak Bridge Primary	Headteacher
Hannah Lake	Northlands Primary/Lee Chapel MAT	Pupil Support Manager
Helen Liddicot	Great Berry Primary	SENCo/Inclusion Manager
Diana Mason	Montgomerie Primary	Headteacher

Jo Moss	Montgomerie Primary	SENCo
Lisa Patmore	Ghyllgrove Infants	SENCo
Ann Matthews	Canvey Island Infants	Headteacher
Ingrid Nicholson	Doddinghurst Infants	Headteacher
Peter O’Kane	Holy Family School	Headteacher
Harriet Phelps-Knights	Janet Duke Primary	Headteacher
Cristina Portoles	Laindon Park School	Headteacher
Damian Pye	Great Berry Primary	Headteacher
Tom Robinson	The Willows Primary	Deputy Head/Inclusion Manager
Clare Smith	Buttsbury Infants	SENCo
Emma Smith	Larchwood Primary	SENCo
Sean Tobin	Merrylands Primary/ Berlesduna	Headteacher
Karen Tucker	Canvey Juniors	Headteacher
Kerri Tucker	North Crescent Primary	Inclusion Lead

Apologies

Beth Cubberley	Grove Wood Primary
Nicki Kadwill	Jotmans Hall Primary
Penny Lovett	Jotmans Hall Primary
Peter Malcolm	Rayleigh Primary
Sharon Marable	Kents Hill Juniors
Lisa Short	St Anne Line Juniors

2. CONTEXT

At the headteacher meetings in June 2017 there was a preliminary discussion and review of SEND, including seeking feedback from headteachers about their experience of the Specialist Teacher Team, the Statutory Assessment Team and SEND support and provision in general. As the discussion was not concluded, it was agreed to schedule a dedicated meeting in each quadrant to continue the discussion.

Clare Kershaw introduced the LA Officers attending the meeting. She asked for attendees to share their concerns as generically as possible (whilst using individual cases to illustrate their experiences). Meeting have already been held in the other three quadrants in Essex, when many issues were raised by headteachers. The matters raised in all four meetings will contribute to a county-wide plan and separate plans to address local issues in each quadrant.

Clare noted that headteachers and staff have displayed great passion and commitment for the pupils in their schools, including those with SEND.

The minutes of those meetings can be found on the EPHA website at <https://essexprimaryheads.co.uk/info-and-documents/send-strategy/>

3. ISSUES RAISED AT THE MEETING

Provision mapping

One headteacher noted that she had received an email from a head, who was unable to attend the meeting. He raised the following concern.

The calculation of time allocated to children within the school's budget is being wrongly redefined. In group work, the cost of the adult is not recognised, only the allocation of time divided by the number in the group. Thus, where a child is working in a group of six, only ten minutes of school support is recognised for that child. This reduces the notional support provided by the school for each child meaning schools can rarely meet the nominal 12-13 hours support for each child unless they operate 1:1. This is clearly unsustainable and is in breach of the concept that it is not hours of support but additional cost that is provided for SEND children.

Will the LA recognise that it cannot break time in a group down by the number in the group when calculating allocated school additional resource if it wishes to include children in mainstream? If it does not, it is promoting segregating and excluding children with additional needs whilst making school staffing unsustainable.

This concern resonated with others at the meeting. RoS noted that this method of needs assessment is not new, and this is how the time allocation has always been calculated. However, she said that the system is not trying to encourage one to one support or removal of an individual child from the class or group, and if the group exists for one individual, that should be taken into count. She stressed that the needs assessment aims to calculate the actual cost of provision. HPK suggested that this system needs to be reviewed by the LA. RoS stressed that the system tries to make a fair assessment and that schools need to be fully using the provision and support they already have in place (for example for other children with SEND) - she accepted that the context is important, and that schools need to give as much information as possible in their needs assessment. A head asked if the LA will factor in the expertise (and cost) of the member of staff who delivers the support. RoS confirmed that all information is taken into account. She agreed to review the template to ensure that it is as clear as possible, and gives instructions on how to fill out the needs assessment fully and effectively.

LA

One headteacher noted that it is important that all LA Officers (whatever their team) give consistent advice; for example, some suggest putting in hover support to make the funding go further, others disagree. CK stressed that it is the school's role to deliver the best quality education for every child, with or without additional support. RoS agreed, noting that hover support may be effective and appropriate, but it is just one strategy available to schools.

It was argued that some young children may find it particularly daunting to be on their own with a teacher, and so others are involved in their teaching and support. RoS

reiterated that this reasoning should be made clear on a needs assessment, to ensure that support is assessed fairly.

The group discussed the expectations of parents, that many expect one to one support for their child if s/he has a plan. It was noted that EHCPs no longer talk about “hours” but the funding available. The LA is working with schools to try to explain this distinction to parents.

One headteacher noted that a significant cost to the school is the amount of time spent talking to parents in order to help them to know how to support their child. RoS explained that the Government view is that this type of support is a normal part of educating each child and would be expected to be taken from the AWPU and budget for SEND support.

Communication

It was noted that Wickford schools have had no EP for a year, and that the communication to schools about this has been poor or non-existent. DT noted there have been vacancies in the team and the EP assigned to Wickford has been unwell for an extended period of time. However, he recognised that better communication to all the affected schools would have been helpful.

Early identification at preschool age

A headteacher explained that his school is increasingly admitting children into Reception who have undiagnosed issues and concerns. He argued that other agencies, in particular pre-schools and health professionals should have been involved with these children and identified health and SEND problems. CK agreed that this was a common theme, and one that was raised at the Headteacher Roundtable (HTRT) meeting the previous day. She noted that the contract with VirginCare/Barnados is particularly important and a way of ensuring that pre-school issues are picked up. In addition, the LA plans to look at the correlation between GLD (good level of development) data and SEND. The HTRT has discussed the importance of transition from early years to school and agreed that it is not smooth enough, for children who have identified issues as well as those who do not.

A concern was raised about the quality of paperwork in pre-schools and among early year’s practitioners. One SENCo stated that she spends a huge amount of time supporting pre-school staff with paperwork for EHCPs. It was argued that schools are wasting a huge amount of time trying to sort out information that should have been recognised by other professionals, as early as from birth in some cases. This is particularly the case with speech and language problems; there has been a significant increase in the number of children who are unable to process speech and this should be picked up much earlier than when they start school.

CK accepted that there is a lot more work to do with Health and Social Care. CG

explained that she meets with health colleagues regularly and is trying to ensure that the system is more cohesive. For example, her team has recently trained health professionals about One-planning. In addition, staff across the Specialist Teaching and Pre-school Service continue to work with EY settings and schools to encourage better communication to support transition.

IPRA funding

The problem of IPRA funding only being allocated for one term when a child with additional needs starts school was discussed at length. EW noted that some children have an obvious need related to a condition (such as Downs Syndrome) but that others are less clear, and IPRA funding is intended to be short-term funding whilst a child's longer term needs are being assessed. However, heads and SENCos argued that one term (particular the first term of a child's schooling) is not enough to gather sufficient evidence, particularly when a child is referred to a paediatrician – an appointment can often not be available for months. It was agreed that the LA would consider whether IPRA funding should be extended to two terms to enable schools time to gather evidence.

LA

It was noted that this is even more acute when a child is admitted to a school mid-year and hasn't been included on the January census. In this case, the school doesn't even have AWPU funding and may need to be providing huge amounts of support. One example was given of 6 year old twins admitted mid-year who had never been to school.

Another example was given of a child admitted to year 1, who had never been to school and was still in buggy and wearing nappies. The school can't decide whether this child has SEND or delayed development and was turned down for IPRA funding. EW agreed that this would be a reasonable use of IPRA funding and that she would look again at this case. CG noted that the Local Management Team will stick closely to IPRA funding criteria, but it was accepted that there may be a need to include social need as one of the criteria – the LA will consider this.

EW

LA

Quality assurance of Specialist Teacher Teams

A headteacher asked about the quality assurance and accountability of the specialist teachers. CK explained that the LA has a performance management process and ultimately she is accountable for the quality of the teams. She noted that the recommendations and feedback from last year's review of the Specialist Teacher Team and Statutory Assessment Service (carried out by Simon Carpenter) are informing the quality assurance process. She stressed that if schools have concerns about the quality of a member of staff, they should discuss this with the team manager. The proposed education restructure is aimed at improving the communication and collaboration between teams.

On a positive note, headteachers said that members of the STT are excellent, and EPs are also very good.

SEND funding in schools

One headteacher noted that her school has 10 children with EHCPs and much of the SEN budget is needed to support their extremely complex needs. She worries about the children who need school support and argued that the SEN budget simply doesn't meet the needs of children with lower-level SEN. In addition, it was argued that many children have mental health problems; they are not eligible for an EHCP but are taking up a huge number of resources. Another headteacher noted that his school has 17 children with EHCPs and asked at what point a school can refuse to take any more pupils with complex needs. It was agreed that, legally, as school cannot refuse pupils with SEND, but it is essential that parents can have confidence in every school in relation to SEND.

CK conceded that there is not likely to be extra funding for either schools or the LA, and so existing resources need to be used differently and stretched further. However, the LA is bidding for money from the School Improvement Fund to support children with mental health issues and attachment disorders in particular.

The reform of SEND is Essex aims to consider the whole system, including the need for better and more support for mainstream schools. Part of the review is looking at developing a workforce which is able to support mainstream schools, and also pre-schools.

A headteacher stressed that the key issue for schools – and the health service – is around adequate funding. He stated that if provision is spread too thinly, eventually there will be gaps. He noted that every school is having to make support staff redundant and schools are getting to breaking point. He argued that schools are “at the chalk face” supporting children and families with huge social problems and an increasing number of senior leaders in schools are simply refusing to take on the responsibilities of headship. He is an optimistic person, but noted that the budget the day before had given no additional funding to primary schools and none for mental health. He asked how the Local Authority lobbied central Government on these issues, particularly given the size and population of Essex.

CK noted that the cuts to Local Government are also huge and the ECC Cabinet members are acutely aware of the real term cuts for schools. She noted that the LA is not intending to make any cuts to the SEND workforce and this year managed to secure additional funding from the Council to sustain the EP and SAS teams.

However, she noted that there is not an equal playing field in relation to SEND – some schools go over and above in relation to SEND and others are willing but need additional support. However, some schools are not offering equity in relation to SEND and these schools are increasingly being held to account by the LA and by other schools.

The SEND capital programme is contributing to support for SEND in mainstream schools, investing in autism and SEMH provision. CK noted that the SEND budget is £100 million, and is over-spent, but she accepted that not every £1 is properly or effectively spent, and part of the SEND review will consider the use of the High Needs Block and, in particular, will aim to reduce bureaucracy.

RH noted that one way Essex LA is being heard nationally is by being proactive in relation to SEND. The £115 million capital programme has been recognised by the DfE and the Department has agreed free schools that are actually needed in Essex. RH noted that he meets regularly with Robert Halfon (MP for Harlow and Minister of State for Education) and discusses the challenges for education, including exclusion, mental health issues and so on.

One headteacher asked about the planned education restructure and, in particular, his concern (shared by other headteachers in South) that money was being spent on an additional layer of bureaucracy by introducing the four quadrant Assistant Directors. CK noted that she had not been at the recent South headteacher meeting and that there had been some misunderstanding about the role of the Assistant Directors. She explained that the restructure is intended to pool services to work more cohesively and co-operatively. At the moment, each team (including the Statutory Assessment Service, Education Psychology, Specialist Teacher Service, School Improvement, Early Years and Childcare, School Attendance, and Alternative education) has a team manager and they tend to work in silos. The aim of the restructure is to make the system less bureaucratic and to improve the effectiveness of the management team. The Assistant Directors will have a key job to ensure accountability and quality assurance in the quadrant teams.

Pre-school staffing expertise

One headteacher noted her concern that pre-school staff are often low paid and part time and may not understand even the basics of assessment, such as the need to triangulate evidence. CK noted that problem that, in the main, pre-schools are operating in a commercial sector and with the Government drive for entitlement, more children are taking up places. Pre-schools are inspected by Ofsted and so are subject to regulation but pre-school staff may not be qualified and expert enough to diagnose SEND. The Early Years ST team will play a part in supporting pre-school.

Autism Spectrum Disorder

One headteacher asked if there is an increase in the number of children diagnosed with ASD. It was confirmed that, whilst it is difficult to get information from CCGs, there has been a 400% increase in the numbers of children with a Plan over the last 10 years. Some of the diagnoses from paediatricians are questionable, and the LA is working with health to reach consistency in relation to diagnoses.

It was suggested that the expertise and knowledge of some GPs is out of date in

relation to the SEND Code of Practice, and it is essential that the Department of Health ensures that all clinicians have up to date information about SEND.

A common definition of SEND

One way of encouraging and equity and consistency across schools and other teams (in education and also health and social care) is to develop a common definition of SEND in Essex and the expectations that families should realistically be able to have. CK mentioned the possibility of developing a Kitemark for SEND to acknowledge excellent practice.

The group returned to the inequity of provision across all schools. It was acknowledged that there is a tension between pupil outcomes and the challenges of SEND, and it was noted that it would interesting to investigate how many schools with outstanding results (for example, 100% of children achieving expected or better) have significant numbers of pupils with SEND and Plans. It was agreed that it is important that governors also understand the need not to value outcomes above inclusion.

CK stressed that having a range of children with different abilities and needs in a class improves the practice and expertise of teachers and support staff and can bring benefits to the overall quality of teaching in a school. However, she agreed that schools need support around effectively reporting the outcomes of children with SEND, so that progress they make is regarded as positive.

The group also argued that it would be helpful to explore whether the decision to apply for an EHCP varies from school to school, depending on the school's population (including parents) and location as well as the expertise, capacity and attitude of the school's leadership and staff. EW said that she does look at the Needs Assessments to ensure that decision-making is consistent and she considers whether a school has taken full and appropriate action when assessing need. It was accepted that available support may vary depending on where a school is situated.

It was agreed that there are similar issues with exclusion – some schools appear to take the decision to exclude quite quickly, whilst others will go to huge lengths to support a pupil and try to change their behaviour, in an attempt to avoid permanent exclusion.

Statutory assessment

A headteacher asked how much the Statutory Assessment Team take into account the current situation of a school when they recommend a particular school to a family. He argued that it was not clear that the team had considered information that they received from a school. It was noted that the team will always put the needs of the child and parent(s) first, but did not consider that team members should be recommending schools that were “good at SEND” to parents.

It was noted that the funding and availability of transport to school is always an issue

and there is some imperative to offer the nearest school that is able to meet a child's needs, not least because it will usually be better for a child to be educated as close to home as possible.

Outreach from Special schools

One headteacher stated that she used to value the support and outreach work that her school received from their local Special school but that this partnership is no longer available. Her school now has very little joint working with the Special school, and this has also reduced the quality of transition if a child moves from her school into a Special school.

RH noted that this is a discussion that is taking place with ESSET (Essex Special Schools Education Trust). Special schools have a notional responsibility for offering outreach support, but this is inconsistent across the county, and may depend on capacity and "who you know", as well as geography.

Essex Steps

It was noted that the Essex Steps programme is valued by mainstream schools, but some primary and infant schools feel that it doesn't work well as a strategy with Reception and early year's children. CK agreed to take this back to ESSET.

CK

Accessing mental health services

Concerns were raised about the number of children who are falling through the net where this is a gap between the available local provision and that which is offered by EWHMS at a more critical level. It was agreed that this needs to be discussed further and also raised at safeguarding forums as this is regarded as a safeguarding issued by many headteachers.

4. SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS AND NEXT STEPS

CK thanked headteachers and school staff for their contribution to the discussions and summarised the issues that were raised.

Provision mapping

A need to understand how needs assessments are considered, further clarification and instructions around the process and a review of the IPRA funding.

Early years

Better diagnosis earlier on, by health as well as education settings. Improved support for pre-schools, particularly with EHCPs and plans for children. Improved transition into school in relation to SEND. Consideration of the needs of children who are entering Reception with previously undiagnosed SEND.

Quality of service

Ensuring consistency and accountability of services to support SEND.

Communication

Improving communication to ensure that schools are aware of changes and possible problems in services (e.g. Wickford schools not informed about the EP service).

SEND funding

A need to review the High Needs Block as well as understanding how school's budgets can be used most effectively to support SEND.

Outreach support from Special Schools

A review of the support available and a need to make this more consistent.

The following next steps have been agreed at this meeting and as result of the other quadrant meetings:

1. A review of the IPRA funding – criteria and length of time it may be available to enable schools to gather evidence for longer term funding needs
2. Agreement by LA officers that there needs to be greater clarity and transparent working practices with shared key information and other data around SEND for quadrants
3. Schools need assurance that there is a clear culture in all SEND teams that children should have the right provision for their needs – a more cooperative system where schools and the LA work together
4. Clearer criteria around the EHCP process and a need for health to get involved.
5. Consideration of space and capacity in schools, particularly in relation to the management and support of autism in mainstream schools
6. As part of the directorate re-design there is a commitment to ensure that the specialist teacher teams work effectively to support schools

7. Commitment to a new education advice and guidance hub as part of the re-design so that schools have access to swift response to concerns and requests for help
8. The re-design will bring more services together in quadrants – school improvement and SEND services so that there is a “wrap around” support for schools and school leaders
9. Better training, support and link with Early Years, and transition into primary
10. Commitment from CK to keep the conversations going – further meetings in clusters with LA officers – to develop and agree a mainstream strategy for SEN and a provision map across the county
11. The development of the Essex Headteacher Round Table will drive strategy forward

CK reminded headteachers and staff not to be afraid of raising single issues with Team Managers as and when they occur, as the earlier the Local Authority is made aware of problems, the quicker they can respond and help de-escalate issues.