

ESSEX PRIMARY HEADS' ASSOCIATION

SEND MEETING WITH LA OFFICERS AND WEST HEADTEACHERS AND STAFF

MONDAY 18 SEPTEMBER 2017

10.00 am – 12 noon

Harlow Study centre

1. IN ATTENDANCE

LA Officers

Clare Kershaw	Director of Education
Ralph Holloway	ECC Manager of SEN, Psychology & Assessment
Elaine White	Manager of SEN, Psychology and Assessment Services
Ruth Sturdy	Lead School Effectiveness Partner – Inclusion
Ros Somerville	Principal Educational Psychologist
Nicola Woolf	West Lead School Effectiveness Partner
Vanessa Robinson	STT Manager, West
Tracy Nudd	ECC
Chris O’Nias	ECC
Tony Sail	ECC
Debbie Pritchard	ECC

Headteachers/school representatives

Ros Allsop + 1	Headteacher – Clavering Primary
Gina Bailey	Headteacher – St James CE Primary, Harlow
Erica Barnett	Headteacher – Waltham Holy Cross Primary
Sue Beardsmore	High Beech Primary and Ongar Primary
Jackie Blackburn	Headteacher – Upshire Primary
Angela Cook	Birchanger CE Primary
Mandy Copper	Headteacher – Wimbish Primary
Matt Curzon	Deputy – St Mary’s CE Primary, Stansted
Viv Dignan	SENCo - Limes Farm Infants
Chris Fluskey	HEC
Jonathan Furness	Headteacher – Ivy Chimneys Primary
Liz Gelston	Headteacher – The Downs Primary and Nursery
Lisa Gibbs	Acting Headteacher – Leverton Primary
Mark Graves	SENCo and Inclusion – Water Lane Primary Academy
Julie Haigh	Inclusion Manager -Pear Tree Mead Academy
Mary Jo Hall	Headteacher – St Thomas More Catholic Primary
Kath Hill	Hatfield Heath Primary
Chris Jarmain	Headteacher - St John’s Primary School, Buckhurst Hill
Pam Langmead	EPHA Professional Officer
Sinead Macarthy	NET schools-Harlow

Victoria Marrow	Business Director - Hatfield Heath Primary
Lucy Mawson	Stebbing Primary
Janet Matthews	William Martin Infant and Juniors
Kathryn Mayle	SENCo – Great Easton Primary
Bernie Miele	Headteacher – Tany’s Dell Primary
Tracy O’Donnell	Headteacher – Epping Primary
Alev Ozten	Assistant Principal/SENCo – Kingsmoor Primary
Christine Peden	Headteacher – Pear Tree Mead Primary
Katie Pieri	Deputy/Inclusion leader - St Mary’s CE Primary, Saffron Walden
Teresa Phillips	Thomas Willingale Primary
Kathie Moy	SENCo - Katherine Semar Infants
David Rogers	Headteacher – Bentfield Primary
Lorna Shemmings	St John Fisher Catholic Primary
Sarah Spaxman	RA Butler Academies
Christine Tonkins	Headteacher – St Mary’s CE Primary, Stansted
Kathryn Webb	Aspire Academy
Joanne Willcox	Headteacher – Hillhouse Primary
Jan Wilkinson	Nazeing Primary
Julie Witteridge	Headteacher – White Bridge Primary
Matt Woolard	Headteacher – Hereward Primary

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 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).

3. ISSUES RAISED AT THE MEETING

Funding

Major delays in receipt of funding after EHCP had been agreed, funded hours were known etc. For example, one school has just received funding for a pupil – and he is now in year 8!! The IPRA and EHCP funding is managed by a very small team and there are delays in payment – and the accuracy of the payments when they do arrive. This concern was repeated by several attendees.

Increase in numbers of children with mental health issues.

Not being picked up by EWHMS.
Staff in schools lack professional supervision.

Increasing quantity of high needs children – often simply being “held” in schools for years as there are no alternatives for them.
The school’s budget is decreasing, many can’t afford one to one support for individual children who need it.

Increase in the number of children entering Reception and older with English as a second language¹, who whose families haven’t accessed appropriate support. These are the most vulnerable families, but the system is geared towards the articulate and pushy parents – the disadvantaged parents have much less support.

Children with medical needs

These children often fall through the net, and certainly in relation to funding. For example, a one-form entry primary has a disproportionate number of children with severe medical needs, and there is zero funding to support these children in school. The school cannot afford to support these children safely – and yet they have to do so. In addition, equipment that is needed for medical needs (a specialised toilet seat took over 5 months to arrive –eventually the school bought the equipment).

Clarity around expectations of SEND

A new SENCo said that she was very confused about what a SEND child is – there is very conflicting advice and definitions – everyone needs clarity.

One participant said that she had just responded to the autism strategy survey and saw that £88m plus is being spent on SEND Capital programme in Essex– she questioned the impact of this expenditure and argued that it is not fairly distributed to meet the whole county’s need – e.g. what impact has there been for Saffron Walden.

More and better support needed for new headteachers and SENCos

Recruitment of suitable staff

There is a recruitment issue for all schools and they need help with this – ideally through funding, recruitment and training – and at least a recognition by the LA of this problem. One to one LSAs are poorly paid, but they have a highly responsible job and have to be prepared to accept verbal and physical abuse from some children. This issue needs to be linked to communication with parents; they need to understand that recruiting the right person may take time and that 1:1 support is unlikely to be full time – this is not automatic. Parents often don’t understand that this support simply tops up what is already offered by the school.

Communication

Significant communication issues between SAS and schools. Schools count on the expertise and support from the LA, but there is a real void and schools feel very isolated.

1. English as an additional language is not in itself an SEN and children should not be labelled SEN automatically.

Schools often send messages/emails asking for support and advice and simply don't receive response.

Conflicting advice and guidance - One headteacher was advised to permanently exclude, but refused to do so.

Parents

There needs to be more and realistic information and guidance for parents about what the limitations in a mainstream school are. Parents are over-promised by the SAS.

Experience of a blame culture of the LA to parents "It's the school's fault that the needs of this child aren't being met."

There is a big issue for schools around parental rights and parental choice. For example, the reluctance of parents to accept that their child is best placed in a particular setting such as a special school, preferring to stay in a mainstream school (which cannot meet their needs). It was accepted that the Local Authority can't gainsay the choice – but it can influence the parents' understanding and shouldn't offer unreasonable expectations.

One headteacher noted that she has a son with ADHD and attended a parent workshop run by the Specialist Teacher team. She, and other parents, were told that the STT would solve all their problems and that they needed to simply ask the school to organise this support. As a headteacher (who remained quiet in that meeting!) she knows that this is simply not true. Teams need to be careful about the unrealistic messages that they are giving parents.

Specialist Teacher Team – SEMH Team

This headteacher has come from working in other LAs and said that she doesn't get the support that she has had previously. Several headteachers felt that they don't get the support they need from the behaviour team and often don't bother to call them in. A common criticism is that team members don't spend sufficient time with a child before writing detailed and influential reports.

Trust headteachers and school staff as fellow experts and professionals

For example, a school had to return to a panel three times as the SAS team refused to accept and believe the reports and information from the school.

Headteachers feel they are being criticised unreasonably. The school's professionalism and experience is simply not taken seriously.

Pressure in schools

For SENCos, getting into the classroom and actually supporting children is impossible. Endless writing of reports, too much bureaucracy.

No input from health – referrals from health back to the schools adding to workload of schools and EP service.

Planning and admissions

Lots of children are coming to West schools from other authorities who have been permanently excluded – they arrive with no warning or information.

In Harlow, there is a very uneven spread of high needs pupils. For example, just one of the five secondary schools in the town takes 53% of the secondary age students with an EHCP. By comparison, it was reported that the 2 MATs have a low percentage of children with high needs. They are subject to a funding agreement which states their responsibility for all pupils, but somehow they are influencing parental choice to choose a particular school.

Headteachers noted that this is beginning to happen at primary level – for example, some schools are saying to parents that they should move their child to another school to avoid permanent exclusion. Another comment that has been heard is that schools have told parents that their SEND budget is used up and they should go elsewhere.

An associated problem is the time it then takes to get any funding for a child who has been moved – at least 20 weeks, and in the meantime that child must be properly integrated and supported.

Parents may not even have visited a school to find out if their child can be managed and supported, despite naming it as their school of choice.

One headteacher sounded a positive note, saying that he had received helpful support from the Statutory Assessment Team and the transition for one child was being managed well, but this was at the cost of additional time put in by school staff.

Alternative provision and support

Requests made by Aspire AP have taken around 36 weeks for those pupils who are named to attend special schools – there can be an further 48 weeks until they actually get a place. Alternative provision is effectively a holding pen for these pupils. It was noted that it was likely that these children have already been “held” in mainstream schools with inadequate funding and inappropriate support. This can amount to many years that a child is inadequately educated. It was argued that there is a lack of intelligent decision making around this system, whilst recognising that there needs to be a huge shift in thinking to change this cycle.

4. RESPONSES FROM CLARE KERSHAW AND LA OFFICERS

Clare noted a number of themes that had arisen, including

The need to clarify and offer support around how things work. The LA needs to adhere

to the law, but there needs to be consistency and clarity about their approach and messages.

There is a key issue around SEN and permanent exclusion.

There is a clear need for more training, help and support for schools.

Clare Kershaw spoke about the funding issues around SEND. The High Needs Block is the source of funding for pupils with SEND – it is currently £100 million but it is over-spent. Even though we know there will be an additional £4.5 million in the next financial year it is a challenge to stay within budget.

The LA work around capital investment had the aim of providing an Essex education for every child, when the new provisions are completed there will be an opportunity to begin to claw back the funding currently being used for “out of county” places in some cases. These provisions will include two new special schools for ASC and a 24 place provision at Oakview School.

There is a rise in requests for special school places and not enough places to meet that demand when EHCPs name special school provision – it is a challenge.

FUNDING ISSUES

The issue of delay of payments to schools for pupils with EHCPs was discussed and the strain this put on school budgets illustrated. Tracey Nudd explained that changes to the database systems used by Statutory Assessment had led to some issues in this regard. There was also a discussion about the accuracy of the funding received and the time it takes schools to check this and then follow it up with the local authority.

It was agreed that CK and RH would investigate the systems used further and respond. TN invited affected schools to email her with concerns and issues so she could investigate specific concerns

Clare Kershaw accepted that there was a need to develop clarity around the systems used by the LA around EHCP and funding. She will work with TS to ensure that there is consistency in approach across the SAS team and that clear expectations are shared with schools and the SAS team. This will make clear accountability and responsibility of all.

CHILDREN WITH MEDICAL NEEDS.

EW and R Somerville explained that these children do not need an EHCP solely for their medical needs- they must have a Health Care plan provided and agreed with Health. If any equipment is needed generally health pay for it, if the equipment needs are

educational, then education pay.

All the information about this is on the Essex Local Offer – there is a clear policy there which explains all including what to do if a child with medical needs receives their interventions from a provision outside Essex.

EW offered to pick up any concerns about individual cases after the meeting.

A question was raised about why schools cannot refer directly to CDCs . RSm explained how she was developing links locally to work on EHCP writing with health professionals and that she was also meeting with paediatricians where she will raise the issue of referrals. Schools expressed concerns that by Health expecting parents to go to a GP to ask for a referral meant that some children missed out on the assessment they need.

EHCP Issues

EW gave the context that Essex has 3.3% of the school population with an EHCP which is higher than our statistical neighbours (2.9%) or nationally (2.8%). We also identify children as having SEND at a younger age and we move to EHCP quicker. As a result there is considerable pressure on budgets.

It was clarified that children who are disadvantaged or slower to learn are not SEND- those with underlying difficulties are the ones with SEND.

There is a need for a further discussion/ research /work together around how best to use the scarce resources schools have to meet the needs of children with SEND. Is LSA employment always the best use of resources?

It was confirmed that EHCPs should be naming an amount of money not hours of support.

EW explained that we do not decline EHCPs when we have hit a target number or when a quota has been reached. Decisions are made on need. There is a need to ensure consistency around showing the work already done by schools so that decisions can be made on an equitable footing. There are two tests for EHCP decisions – what is the level of need? What has been done to meet the need?

Since 2016 all SENCOs have been asked to discuss children and young people with their EP if they think an EHCP might be needed. Over time this will help to ensure that the EP has had involvement prior to the start of an EHC needs assessment. In the short term it will help to ensure that schools are providing with panel with the appropriate information.

RH was able to confirm that there will be more SEMH provisions in West. These will be

in Epping, Harlow and Uttlesford.

A question was asked about whether a section 23 notification was necessary for an EY specialist teacher to be involved with a child or for an EHCP request. It was clarified that it was not necessary in either case. VR confirmed that if a maintained nursery wanted to make a referral to the EY STT team it could be done by contacting the STT enquiry box and it would be passed on.

TN explained that the nearest suitable school must be consulted when an EHCP is being agreed. Hence schools receive consultations they may not have been expecting. It does not follow that there is an expectation that the school will be named. Concern was expressed about the lack of communication and clarity around this and how it adds to the pressures of running a school.

HTs asked if the LA can influence parent/carers requests for a particular school. This is not possible as the law enshrines parental preference as a central right. Schools requested that when new EHCPs are to be agreed and professionals meet with parents/carers that clear information is given about all options for schools are given so that parental decisions are well informed.

HTs expressed frustration at the difficulties they have getting responses from SAS officers. They gave examples of having to threaten permanent exclusion in order to get support when they need it. When SAS staff are on holiday it means that schools find it very difficult to have contact with anyone who knows a child and their situation which again adds to difficulties when challenging situations arise.

Summary of key points and next steps

1. Agreement by LA officers that there needs to be open and transparent working practices with shared key information and other data around SEND for quadrants
2. Schools need assurance that there is a clear culture in all SEND teams that children should have the right provision for their needs
3. CK will consider the issues raised about recruitment of suitably skilled LSAs
4. CK and her team will follow up on parental expectations of provision and look at ways to support schools in this where we can within the law
5. Need to consider the issue around the rise in permanent exclusions and work with schools to develop new approaches to supporting children between provisions
6. As part of the directorate re-design there was 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. Intensive support team for children at risk of failing/ being failed by provisions to be developed as part of re-design
10. There is a drive to develop partnerships so that we champion inclusion together building on the ASC Hub approach (mainstream and special schools working together) leading to a school led- approach to SEND
11. Commitment from CK to keep the conversations going – further meetings in clusters with LA officers
12. The development of an Essex Headteacher Round Table will drive strategy forward – please volunteer by contacting Ruth Sturdy or Clare Kershaw