

AD EDUCATION NETWORK MEETING

26th January 2024, 10.00am to midday

Present: Sarah Daly (Portsmouth), Kim James (Oxfordshire), Michelle Stanley (Kent), Laura Colville (Hants / IoW), Ming Zhang (Wokingham), Clodagh Freeston (Southampton), Gareth Drawmer (Bucks), Jo Lyons (BHCC), James Fowler (Bucks), Marie Denny (MKC), Elizabeth Funge & Katie Ridgway (E Sussex), Clive Haines (RBWM), Carrie Traill & Julia Katherine (Surrey).

In attendance: Paul Schofield (DfE South-east Region Office)

Apologies: Brian Grady (Reading), Mike Stoneman (Portsmouth), Natalie Smith (Hants / IoW), Sarah Clarke (W Sussex), Celia Buxton & Rebecca Smith (Medway).

Item	Actions
Welcome and introductions / apologies	
1. Joint discussion with DfE Regions (Paul Schofield) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paul talked to a set of slides covering: response to the Ruth Perry coroner's report, the developing area approach and work to develop Local Area Plans, the 'high quality trusts framework' and its application to the academies and re-brokerage, plus updates on addressing exclusions and improving attendance. Key points from the discussion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Re-brokerage of schools / academies: Much discussion about the challenges that result; for example the process from issuing a directive academy order (DAO) especially when the school is voluntary-aided and/or when it is hard to identify a trust to become the sponsor. Case discussed where the time was expended on organisational options, delaying an opportunity for a strong focus on school improvement (especially if the LA had been allowed to bid for turnaround funding). These together with the uncertainty, contributed to reducing numbers on roll and have resulted in a primary that is no longer sustainable. PS confirmed there is no plan to review the DAO policy linked to 'double RI'. An example from W Sussex was mentioned, where a subsequent reinspection following a period of significant improvement (resulting in good or outstanding) and this led to the removal of the DAO from the school. Cherry-picking of the most viable schools by larger trusts, in particular, was another theme discussed and local needs and priorities feature too little in the process. It was highlighted that the system currently risks leaving a 'rump' of declining or 'in limbo' maintained schools and current arrangements leave deficit responsibility with the LA. PS reminded that the DfE cannot direct a trust to take on a specific school. Request to the DfE to consider LAs being 'round the table' when discussing / planning re-brokering. LAs would offer local perspectives that might otherwise be overlooked. Agreement that the Local Area Plans (LAP) present an opportunity, for example to identify wraparound support where there is a 'failing' academy, leading to early and better coordinated intervention. This might take time to evolve and LAPs initially are largely a compilation of existing plans in place in the local area. LAs commented positively about the regular liaison meetings between LA leaders and DfE Regions Office. These can help to identify solutions to problems around particular schools, for example a coordinated approach with a diocese around suitable trusts if rebrokering is necessary. Quality of inclusion is one of the features of a high quality trust according to the DfE's framework. SESLIP members feel it is unclear what are the indicators and the expectations of this; can this be spelt out further? Also, group members are of the view that the DfE is missing insights and information by not routinely seeking information about inclusion practice in a trust from the LA (or LAs if a larger trust). Attendance: is a shared challenge across the system and LAs are committed to their part. However, the guidance has placed additional duties on the LA to fulfil and LAs expressed 	PS

Item	Actions
<p>their frustration that no additional funds have been provided by the DfE in recognition of this.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Next steps:</u> Chris to circulate slides; Paul will be invited to a Network meeting later in 2024 to maintain dialogue. 	PS /CO
<p>2. Notes and matters arising and reflections on item 1</p> <p>- Notes from Nov were agreed as being accurate. Matters arising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft EHE Guidance consultation – points had been circulated following the CME Group last week. • Autumn 2023 CME and EHE dashboard – still three LAs whose result have yet to be received (Medway, IoW and Reading [though the latter were unable to make a return to DfE in autumn 2023]). Chris is chasing and will circulate the dashboard as it is currently for confidential review / comment. • No members of the group sent strategic education partnership docs to Chris to collate and share. The offer is still open. <p><u>Reflections on 1:</u></p> <p>Discussion about decision-making around special free schools and a perceived lack of transparency. One or two LAs who feel they submitted strong bids had them turned down and, as a result, their high needs arrangements are under further pressure due to having to ‘encourage’ mainstreams to continue to take a pupil with an EHCP, but placement failure without access to state special school place is too common in these cases.</p> <p>Examples were shared of active, established partnerships with all secondary headteachers / trusts, to ensure strategic buy-in if there is a growth agenda or challenges about in-year admissions.</p> <p>A comment: more attention should be given to size of reserves held by some MATs, when they are being reluctant to consider rebrokerage of schools with a deficit.</p> <p>Headteacher wellbeing following the death of Ruth Perry: discussion about the Caversham Covenant recently launched in Southampton. Agreed that Clodagh will share about this at the March meeting.</p>	CO CO / CF
<p>3. Secondary school capacity and admissions pressures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ming Zhang (Wokingham) shared a situation they have been working through where there has been significant population growth that was over a short period of time (families moving from London, refugees from Hong Kong and Ukraine), so pupil place modelling had not taken it into account, resulting in a shortage of secondary places. Active engagement with all headteachers has been required and a range of tailored growth packages agreed with individual schools, including one where year 7 places increase was linked to support for 6th form expansion and, for another, the speeded up move to being a co-ed school. As a result, 2024-25 is projected to have just enough total capacity, but these places are not always located where the demand is greatest. • Southampton, Surrey and Milton Keynes (MKC) all shared the same pressure on place availability and strategies adopted. All are making more use of Fair Access processes to deal with the increasing numbers of in-year admissions. One or two examples of were given of academies being unhelpful, such as reducing PAN and/or blocking admissions. A view was expressed that DfE Regions Office are being too ‘hands off’ about the challenge of school places. • Established working / partnership with headteacher groups are essential to getting through these pressures. Marie shared approaches being adopted in MKC with secondary heads to manage 32% increase in in-year placing of students and balancing the need for places with not over-extending one or two schools with school improvement challenges (where it has been agreed to cap PAN). Marie happy to share with colleagues. 	MD

Item	Actions
<p>4. Exclusions: trends and pressures on day 6 provision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elizabeth and Katie summarised challenges in ESCC: significant uptick in exclusions this academic year, under-performing PRUs (process for voluntary transfer is underway) that are over-capacity as well. The PRUs were at capacity by Dec and are taking no new admissions for day-6 provision, plus all students have been put on part-time timetables. There is also something of a stand-off with the few heads who have a higher number of exclusions and are not accepting new admissions. Most agreed that increasing numbers of exclusions is a concern and, for example, that preventative /outreach work is being squeezed out as PRU / AP places are taken by excluded pupils. Another LA described a programme to delegate funds to mainstreams with a focus on preventing exclusion. Julia raised that the SESLIP SEND Network has an interest in AP as well and that discussions and developments could be discussed with the SEND Strategic Group. CO will liaise with Sheelagh Sullivan. Members are interested in finding out more about LA top-up rates for APs / PRUs across the South-east. This could inform sharing approaches about clawback of funding from mainstreams as part of future strategies. Group agreed to share this information. Chris to circulate a request. 	<p>CO</p> <p>CO</p>
<p>Next meetings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>15th Mar in London</u>: As well as session with Ofsted, to have a focus on headteacher wellbeing, in the light of Ruth Perry (Brian from Reading). CO to liaise with Lee about Ofsted's Big Listen and how this Network can connect. In the afternoon to have a 'round robin' with 3 or 4 LAs showing one or more aspect of their support arrangements for the wellbeing of headteachers: including Southampton, Oxfordshire, Further discussion on exclusions and AP commissioning / capacity. 	<p>CO to liaise</p>