

Where Essex leads

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Just over five years ago, in the spring of 2021, I was invited by Essex councillors to chair a new Task Force.

Council and executive leaders bravely set out a post-Covid vision of *Renewal, Equality, Ambition*. The Essex Education Task Force was established with two core goals:

- To minimise the impact of the pandemic on all children and young people as quickly as possible, with a three-to-five-year overview of phases of regeneration.
- To capture and promote current innovation and best practice across the education system in Essex.

A total of £4 million has been invested over the 2021 - 2026 period. The Education Policy Institute (EPI) produced a number of research reports to identify where investments have been most needed, and to highlight impact on children's attainment and well-being: [Pupil Wellbeing in Essex](#)

The Years Of....

The nimble and dedicated Task Force - with an empowering secretariat - has focused on three 'Years Of', neatly orchestrated over five years:

- Year of Reading 2021 - 23
- Year of Numbers 2023 - 2025
- Year of Opportunity 2025 - 2026

Each of these creatively linked 'Years Of' has seen an abundance of projects across the county - within and well beyond schools - with an unashamed ambition to improve all children's basic command of reading and mathematics, the foundation stones to flourish in school.

The current Year of Opportunity has looked to raise the profile of careers, skills and employability from the earliest ages. And vitally, to ensure that *all* young

people in Essex see that **purposeful employment is pleasurable, rewarding and key to a flourishing adult life.**

One particular highlight is the *My Futures* programme now running in all Essex primaries, bringing diverse employers face-to-face with children in a strong spirit of 'You cannot be what you cannot see'. Reactions from children, parents, visitors and staff alike have been wonderful - a model for every county!

We have talked a lot about lessons learned and legacy

Essex County Council's education department has pioneered successfully a number of initiatives over the past decade in relation to tackling the learning needs of disadvantaged children and those with special educational needs. The investments of the Task Force have championed those initiatives – and added value to all that settings, schools and colleges are doing every day.

From the evaluated work of the 'Years Of', there has been measurable impact on many children and young people's attainment, from early years and primary through secondary and colleges.

Culture and climate surveys indicate positive impact on young people's wellbeing, and the strengthening of communities through participation in a wide range of activities.

Careers and employability projects have had a significant impact in primary, special and secondary schools; and there is a united and powerful approach to reducing NEETs in Essex.

Importantly for cross-county working, there are some delightful 'lessons learned'.

- We are in the people business as much as we are in the education business. The impact of working across Essex directorates and with the voluntary sector and businesses, small and large, is there for all to see – people have stepped happily out of their silos and come together to improve children and young people's life-chances.
- The active Partners list is impressive: libraries, colleges, parks department, fire service, cricket clubs, dementia care, Lord Lieutenant's Office, music service, seconded teachers, intergeneration team, RAF, Active Essex, HSBC - and many more.
- The financial investments made by the Task Force have levered in a significant amount of extra funding and people capacity from the commercial world; new lasting networks have been established.

- No surprise! People love working together to a common goal and then go way beyond expectations. All the *unplanned* events have been quite as exciting and joyful as the planned.
- ‘Every year is a Year of Reading’ has often been the cry coming out of the Essex Year of Reading, voiced memorably by one of the leading councillors. That is true legacy!

Roy Blatchford is editor of [‘The A – Z Series’](#).