**Minutes**

**Virtual MSC meeting – North/MID Secondary Essex**

**Wednesday 8th July 2020**

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It was the turn of our secondary aged students and our last MSC meeting of the academic year! This was another meeting held virtually and it was great to have so many individuals involved. We did our usual introductions and made sure everyone was able to work the microphones and the hand up signals ready to give their views to the group.

We started our meeting by discussing wellbeing in school. Currently, students will be expected to return to school in September and we asked the group to think about the thing’s schools could be doing to support wellbeing and mental health. Ideas included opportunities to work in smaller groups as there have been huge advantages to this, virtual information to be available before returning to school, clarity on what’s going to be happening, teachers acknowledging that learning from home has been hard and providing catch up lessons and to have a gradual build up of work. Doucecroft school also commented on the high levels of anxiety that are present about September and this needs to be considered.

It was a great place to start and we moved swiftly on to discussing our main topic for this term, Homelessness. The group showed a lot of consideration about this point and we had a range of ideas that included better education in school, awareness of charities such as crisis and how their support is spent/used, bake sales in school, speaking with local MP’s, petitions, more information/statistics, sponsored sleep out and a supporting food banks competition. All these points and ideas will be combined with other ideas from across our Essex meetings and we will look at what’s most achievable moving into the new academic year.

Our final agenda point was to discuss early intervention. Many children who get a diagnosis don’t have the information to understand it or feel as if their friends are never going to understand them. We asked the group to think about how this could be changed, and we had a brilliant response;

* How will my diagnosis affect me?
* What support will I get in school?
* More education provided for teachers and teacher training is key
* Advice on friendships
* More general autism awareness
* What are the coping mechanisms in different situations?
* How do we explain a diagnosis?
* Education in all schools is so important
* Will I be treated differently?
* To have more support after the diagnosis, a network of young people who they can speak to and ask questions

It sparked a fantastic conversation and some children were also keen to ensure that it should not be used as a negative label or should they feel under pressure to explain a diagnosis. Generally, the group felt as if everyone should be aware of our differences and different peoples needs. It was a great discussion and it will inform our feedback when we head back to our steering group meeting around supporting children & families and the importance of early interventions.

We then finished the meeting and thanked everyone for attending, many for the first time. The star of our meeting was Eva from Colchester County High School for girls for a brilliant point made about the understanding of SEND in schools and her comments about early intervention. We are not setting any follow up points from this meeting as we know schools already have enough to think about right now, but we do hope to get our face to face meetings back in the new term, if things are safe to do so. The next meetings are planned for; **Friday 13th November, 10:30am – 12pm, Venue TBC (North strand) & Friday 20th November, 10:30am – 12pm, Columbus school and College (MID strand)**