

CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

It is with great pleasure that I can report another comprehensive and enjoyable season of schools football. Once again, I would like to begin by thanking the entire voluntary workforce who give up so much of their time on behalf of schools football.

The contribution has been exemplified this year by five Essex Schools stalwarts: Jeff Saxton, Fred Saxton, Dave Playford, Dave Agass and Graeme Penn. All have received their 50-year ESFA Long Service Award at the Ricoh Arena, Coventry in April this year. I would like to add my own tribute to their combined 250 years of expertise in serving schools football. We are fortunate in benefitting from their immense knowledge of the game, their experience and their unflinching dedication in promoting football at this level.

In terms of national success this season, the Under 18 Boys' county squad led the way in the ESFA Inter-County Trophy, beating Durham at the Ricoh Arena 2-1 after extra time. Congratulations also to Barking Abbey Under 18s Girls on their national Individual Schools Trophy victory and Loyola School on their success in the Under 11s National Small Schools Soccer Sevens Final.

In South-East England Schools FA (SEESFA) competitions, a full programme of county matches took place. In terms of success it was the Under 16s Girls squad who took pride of place in winning their competition final against Bedfordshire on penalties, 4-3 after a 2-2 draw at full time. I would like to thank all County Schools Managers for their time and enthusiasm during the season.

In District Under 11s competitions, Chelmsford & Mid Essex were winners in the small-sided competition and the Finch Shield, whilst Thurrock claimed the Under 11s Finch Cup. In the Secondary District age groups, honours were spread around, with Chelmsford & Mid Essex (Under 12s), Waltham Forest (Under 13s), Newham (Under 14s), and Redbridge (Under 15s) successful in winning the honours this season. Thank you to Graeme Farquhar (Under 11s) and Dave Agass (Under 12s-15s) for organizing these competitions.

It would not be a true reflection on the season if I did not draw attention to one of the challenges affecting schools football in Essex and, no doubt, beyond. The increasing influence of professional football academies in removing boys from schools football is increasingly a major concern. There are too many issues to be addressed in this foreword, but suffice to say that the leaders of our national sport in schools are seemingly unable or unwilling to influence this agenda.

I would like to thank Martin Rayner for all his work on competition entries and affiliations, and to all Competition Secretaries for their work in keeping all competitions running smoothly throughout the season. There have been 19 individual competition finals, all concluded by mid-May. I would like to thank the following for their help in providing suitable venues for the individual competitions:

Dagenham & Redbridge FC, Brentwood School, Canvey Island FC, Thurrock FC, Bishops Stortford FC, Shenfield High School, Chigwell School, Len Forge Centre, Grange Farm Trust. Thank you, in particular, to Lakeside Sports Trust for their exceptional support in staging many of our county schools finals.

Thank you to the staff at the Essex County FA office - Rob Craven, Mark Wallis, Chris Evans et al - for their support with match programmes, reports, photographs and publicity. Also, thank you to James Lisher and Rhys Elmer for their help in appointing officials.

Finally, I would like to wish everyone an enjoyable 2017/18 season.

Graham Hall
Chairman