

ASSOCIATION NEWS - SUMMER 2018

Looking Forward

During the academic year 2017 – 2018, we had three “Open” meetings which have been reported separately. For 2018 – 2019 we have also agreed to run three such (free to members only) meetings (plus the A.G.M. of course) to which ALL our members are cordially invited. The dates for these are Tuesday October 23rd 2018, Thursday March 21st 2019 and Thursday May 9th 2019, all at Saltwells E.D.C. from 7.00 pm until 9.00 pm. We would urge you to note these dates into your diaries/calendars etc straight away. The topics will be announced in due course, but, as we want to make them as topical as possible, are not yet all confirmed. Do please feel free to contact us to make any suggestions from your school G.B.

Staffing Shortfall in Nursery Education

A recent report by “Save the Children” has revealed that there is a highly significant shortfall in qualified teachers in nursery settings. Based on a Freedom of Information request they conclude that about one third of a million 2-, 3- and 4-year olds nationally do not have access to a graduate teacher with relevant early-years qualification in their pre-school settings. Specifically they claim that there are 11,000 too few suitably qualified staff nationally in such settings. They also report very wide disparities geographically quoting that “Such children in Sunderland are five times more likely to have access to an appropriately qualified teacher than those in Shropshire”. They cite a figure of 50% of West Midlands children having such an opportunity. Their statistics do not enable us to verify the figure for Dudley M.B.C. The charity are unequivocal in saying “Start Behind – Stay Behind” and there is clear evidence from other sources that if a child starts their formal education with inadequate preparation, it is very difficult, if not almost impossible, for them to catch up later.

Inevitably the Department for Education claim that the “Save the Children” charity has not drawn correct conclusions from the data with which they provided but in fact the teaching unions do back up many of the statements made in the charity’s report. We are well aware that the current Secretary of State for Education, Damian Hinds, has made extremely clear his concerns that so many youngsters are commencing their educational journey very ill-prepared for it. So much so, that he has “promised” to halve in the next ten years the proportion of children starting formal education with inadequate talking and reading skills. We would like to think that he also acknowledges that these children frequently lack not only talking and reading skills but also many of the so-called social skills they require. We hear daily of youngsters who lack suitable toilet training, ability to play and interact with others, able to sit and eat meals with others and many other criteria which we would like to see taken “as read”.

Mental Issues for the Young

We have previously identified the increasing concern over the state of childrens’ mental health. We have taken this up with Ministers at Westminster as doubtless other bodies have also done. The Secretary of State for Education has responded to these issues by announcing that, with effect from the Autumn of 2020, it will be

compulsory for all schools, at both Primary and Secondary levels, to teach about mental health issues within Sex and Relationship Education (SRE). This should help to build up a degree of mental resilience amongst school children and encourage them to recognize the symptoms should their fellow students be affected and to provide support as appropriate.

Clearly this is, and should be seen as, part of the whole PSHE curriculum. Damian Hinds has stated that he wants to see children eating more healthily and keeping fit as part of his vision for the education provision in England. Other changes to the PSHE syllabus will include such issues as consent, keeping safe (including online) and the whole LGBT+ agenda.

PSHE has not changed much, if at all, during the course of the past two decades so an update, resulting from an earlier consultation paper, was vitally necessary. Many of the problems encountered today have developed, sometimes almost beyond recognition, from what they were like in 2000 when the last overhaul of the curriculum took place.

With an implementation date of September 2020, materials being made available in September of 2019, the Government has been criticized for not introducing this earlier. Of real concern however is the need for teaching staff to take these changes on board in such a way that all children benefit. "Subjects" such as PSHE which do not lead to formal qualifications are notoriously difficult to deliver effectively; whilst some young people will take the content seriously others may not so teaching staff will really have their work cut out to make this work. Much will depend (a) upon the quality of the teaching materials as they become available and (b) upon appropriate CPD for the staff who are going to deliver this enlarged curriculum.

Governors may wish to consider getting staff to present to them just how this will work within their own schools. PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education) should also encompass such things as Financial Literacy and Preparing for the Workplace but all too often these are omitted on the grounds of lack of time and/or lack of suitable materials etc. For reference there are some free materials available at www.young-money.org.uk as well as numerous paid-for elements. If we really are attempting to prepare young people for the life they will lead when they leave the educational system, then there is much work to be done.

Brian Patterson

Chair,
D.A.G.B.

