

Association News – Summer 2019

Risk

Two years ago we included an article in the Newsletter on “Risks and Their Management”, anticipating that this would be an important issue for school governors in the (at the time) near future. Clearly we anticipated correctly because Risk is acknowledged as now being on Ofsted’s radar. In consequence we are arranging a meeting at Saltwells E.D.C. on the evening (7pm till 9 pm) of Tuesday October 15th 2019 on this topic for our members. A separate notice will be sent out early in September about this.

Knife Crime

We are all too well aware of the increase in knife crime across the whole country and it is therefore good to be able to report on a local initiative which seeks to make a start on tackling the problem. Twenty one Further Education colleges from across the West Midlands have backed the Safer Students Charter which pledges that College Campuses will “provide safe environments for learners” and ensures that the threat of crime is “responded to robustly and without exception” by colleges and partner agencies, including West Midlands Police.

By signing the Charter, the Colleges have agreed to teach their students about the impact of being involved in crime. The Charter covers not only knife crime but also extremism, sexual and physical health, equality, mental health, exploitation, honour-based violence and financial security.

This group of colleges is chaired by David Williams, Principal of Halesowen College. It makes good sense that colleges share their experiences and best practice. Extending such a scheme into the local secondary sector is more complex, giving the increasing number of autonomous groups (academy chains and multi-academy trusts etc). However the (shrinking) maintained sector within the Local Authority (including many primaries but very few secondary-age schools now) should be developing (indeed should already have developed) an equivalent strategy and it makes much sense if groups of academies accept the need for a common approach. We have formally

requested Dudley Local Authority to respond accordingly and will publish their response in our next issue.

Careers Education

Careers education in the primary sector is being given a financial boost by a £2 million investment by the Careers and Enterprise Company. This will be used to help to increase the scale and impact of nine existing programmes and to support the launch of six new, innovative, programmes working with primary schools. Although there is much good career development practice within the primary sector, the Careers and Enterprise Company is focussing on supporting the development of a clear structure for career-related learning at primary level and consistent approaches across all schools.

The importance of this cannot be over-emphasised. Effective careers-related learning within the primary sector can directly impact upon young people's aspirations, subject choices (by the time they progress into secondary school) and their level of engagement at school.

Innovative programmes can offer children the chance to explore all the opportunities open to them and to challenge stereotypes which exist (and have existed for a long time) around the world of work.

Nick Chambers, CEO of Education and Employers, said "We know from our research that many primary-age children often rule themselves out of potential career paths, so that the more that can be done to bring the world of work to life, to challenge perceptions about job roles and to inspire young people, the better".

One of the organisations which will be securing funding is LOUD, a series of digital films delivering accessible career-related learning content for KS2. Currently they have 20 short films featuring young KS2-aged children interviewing young working professionals across a diverse range of careers, focussing on STEM subjects, the creative industries and on PHSE. These films also have support materials linking careers and the curriculum.

Significantly one of the organisations awarded some of this funding is the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and we are inviting them to write of their experiences for the benefit of school governors in a later Newsletter.

It is however well worth reminding readers that “Young Enterprize” was working in the same general area many years ago, and was featured in an article “Governors in the Classroom” which appeared in this Newsletter in the September of 2002. I had been personally involved in using the materials at a local primary school and the objectives of the scheme were, more or less, as described here. I believe that the scheme was sponsored by Cadbury’s (or was it Rountree’s?) but ceased to run when funding ran out.

Staff Absences

In a recent report figures for school staff absence in the Black Country were quoted for 2017/2018. Without knowing the exact numbers of staff employed within each Local Authority it does look as if the figures for Dudley were roughly in line with those for the other boroughs. In Dudley there were 11,157 days lost, equating to 286 days per school week, or almost 3 days **on average** for every school. If supply staff have to be employed to cover these absences this amounts to some £350 for an “average-sized” school for every week or in excess of £13,000 in one year. Even in cases where permanent staff can be used to cover these absences there still is, realistically, a ‘cost’ to the school. There is absolutely no suggestion whatsoever but what these absences are completely genuine but it does make sense that governors are made aware of the figures, especially in the light of difficulties experienced in “balancing the books” nowadays.

We have said previously that stress-related absence is on the increase and governors need to be aware of the extent of this within their own schools and should be seeking ways to minimize the causes as part of our duty of care “to ensure the well-being of students and of staff”.

Our new Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, has given us an assurance of increased funding for education but at the time of writing this piece, details are “thin on the ground”. Let’s hope that schools get a better deal this time.

Brian Patterson

Chair, DAGB