

## **ASSOCIATION NEWS - WINTER 2016**

### **Key Stage 2 issues**

In the Summer we wrote of the problems with both the KS2 assessments and with the certification of results. We wrote to our local MPs and to both the Secretary of State for Education and to the Schools Minister to express our concerns about both problems. We have had bland responses from the Ministers but it is significant that a Review is now being held over the assessment issues and we trust that the outcomes of this Review will be made public. It would have been quite remarkable had our letters triggered this on their own, but it is evident that by pressure being placed on Westminster by ourselves alongside other bodies, notably the teaching unions, that Ministers do take note and can make changes as a direct consequence. Granted, any changes cannot make good the loss of trust and the turmoil caused in schools and to families as the result of the Summer debacle, but if they can make outcomes more equitable in the future then we have achieved something worthwhile. The second issue also identified, concerning the publication of individual results reports to the parents of KS2 children, has been answered in that the Government has not proscribed the format of such reports and it is down to individual schools or groups of schools as to how these results are communicated to parents. Governors might consider asking to see the format used within their own schools and considering the suitability (or otherwise) of these for their KS2 children.

### **Staff Recruitment Issues**

Regrettably this topic keeps appearing in the news. We now know that, of teachers who started their careers just over five years ago, some 30% have already left the profession. At the same time, reports are showing that there is a very significant shortfall in qualified teachers employed within the Nursery sector – the pattern varies dramatically across the country with as few as 16% in some London boroughs and as ‘many’ as 86% in Sunderland. The reports also indicate that, nationally, as few as only two in three children are actually ready to commence their primary education in Reception classes. Clearly this has a direct effect upon the ability of primary schools throughout the country to get children prepared in turn for secondary education. Perhaps therefore it would make more sense for the government to target the nursery sector first of all before being critical of primary and secondary and, in order to do this, they need to ensure that teachers in the nursery sector are fully qualified in the first place. With respect to the high numbers of teachers leaving the profession early, it might be worth suggesting that ALL schools should conduct an exit interview of teaching staff in order to ascertain whether they are moving to another teaching appointment or whether leaving the profession and, in this latter case to find out the reasons. If those reasons relate to individual schools there is an opportunity to address the issues; if relating to the Local Authority then the reasons should be communicated to the Council – but if a National issue, then MPs and the Association should be notified.

## **Children's Mental Health**

Articles produced for this Newsletter on other occasions have indicated a growing level of concern about this issue. Things have not improved and it is quite clear that such negative aspects must impact both upon student behaviour and upon academic performance. It was most gratifying for the Association for some five members of the Executive to be invited to take part in a recent meeting with a small number of head teachers and health care professionals by James Morris MP for Halesowen and Rowley Regis. James has chaired the All Party Parliamentary Group on Mental Health and is currently Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Minister of Health, Jeremy Hunt. It is hoped that the work of this group may help to improve the welfare of our students locally.

In a very recent Report by the Royal College of Psychiatrists it was revealed that the amount planned to be spent on children's mental health services, excluding eating disorders, in 2016-17 was as little as £2 per child. The College, in criticizing NHS Commissioners in England, claims that "this is all the more lamentable given that one in ten children aged 5 to 16 has a diagnosable mental health disorder". Whilst the Association cannot vouch for the accuracy of these allegations and whilst it seems eminently likely that they would be challenged by others, there is little or no doubt but what the issue is of growing importance within the educational sector and needs to be addressed as a matter of some urgency.

One consequence of this is that the Association will be running an evening session on children's mental health at Saltwells from 7.00pm till 9.00pm on the evening of Thursday March 23<sup>rd</sup> 2017. As this particular topic is not currently addressed within Authority governor training we would urge as many governors as possible to put the date into their diaries straight away and to book places as soon as fuller information is circulated early in January.

## **Carol Fletcher**

We have to report that Carol, currently Governor Support Manager, is taking early retirement in December 2016, after looking after the needs of governors within the Borough for some 23 years. Carol has been a mainstay of governor support for so many years and we have all been very fortunate in having her help during that time. Although we will miss her from her current role, she will still be an active school governor herself for the foreseeable future and so we are likely to meet her from time to time at training and DAGB events. Thank you Carol, for all your hard work and professionalism.

## **National Governance Association**

At its recent AGM, it was agreed that the NGA, formerly the National Governors Association, should be re-branded as the National Governance Association, a reflection of the changing role of governors and of the responsibilities of trustees in our Academy-driven educational system.

## **Primary School Physical Education and Sports Premium**

In 2017, primary schools will see the amount given to them under this heading doubled and this is a reflection of the value perceived attributable to the use of the Premium in recent times. A consequence will inevitably be a greater degree of scrutiny regarding the use of this investment which is why this issue of the Newsletter contains an article on how the use of the Premium should be shown on school websites, as this will be the first port of call for those responsible for all such monitoring, Ofsted and others.

An all-day Conference on the use of the PSpESP is being organised for Thursday March 30<sup>th</sup> 2017 at The Molyneaux in Wolverhampton to which school governors are warmly invited. Do please put this date in your diaries.

We have also queried with Ministers about the extra cash investment for secondary schools with regard to sport and P.E. which was announced as a use for the sugar levy introduced by the then-Chancellor before Easter of 2016. The response we have got indicates that “ .... funding from the sugar levy should help up to 25% of Secondary Schools provide a longer school day, to include a range of activities including sport. The department is currently determining the details of how the funding will be allocated. We will provide further details in due course so that schools have sufficient time to apply for the funding and implement their plans.” We await these details.

### **In conclusion**

Massive changes in assessment, the delay in establishing a National Funding Formula (yet again), and numerous other factors mean that 2017 is going to be, yet again, full of challenges for schools and for governance within schools. We thank all governors for their hard work and dedication in this most challenging of times and hope that we do get closer to finding that elusive crock of gold at the end of the rainbow.

**Brian Patterson,**  
**Chair DAGB**