

ASSOCIATION NEWS - SUMMER 2015

Welcome

First of all, warm welcomes to Dudley are extended to Tony Oakman and to Deanne Fishbourne. Tony has joined the Authority as Strategic Director with responsibility for People (so clearly Education lies within his remit) whereas Deanne is the Interim Head of Educational Outcomes. Tony has not had to travel too far to join us as he had previously worked in Stoke (and many will remember Dave Perrett, a former Assistant Director in Dudley, moved to Stoke not long ago), whilst Deanne was previously in Cornwall (although did have previous experience in neighbouring Sandwell). Their individual remits, and how they integrate, will become clearer before too long.

Mindfulness

One of the latest buzz-words to reach us from the DfE is “mindfulness” and with it comes the requirement (watch out for Ofsted here) for governors to know and be able to discuss what their schools are doing to embed this into the curriculum, and what benefits are derived from it. When I first encountered this, my first reaction, as, I guess, that of most people, was that this simply meant “the state of being aware of our surroundings, both physical and emotional etc” as in “being mindful of one’s responsibilities”. Actually it goes a great deal deeper and is the very opposite of being a buzz-word; it seeks to declutter the mind and to remove the ‘buzz’. As a technique using breathing exercises it helps to achieve mental clarity (focussing on the here and now, without the distractions of the past or the future) and to improved creativity. As far as schools are concerned the technique aims to improve both self-esteem and performance in class. Its supporters point to schools where this has been trialled and found to be effective in achieving those objectives. Those who are interested (whether sceptical or otherwise) should look up “Mindfulness In Schools Project “ and form their own judgements. Perhaps that may help to demonstrate how schools have actually found the time in an increasingly frenetic workload to deliver this and the values gained from it.

Character

Yet another focus for all schools (again from DfE and therefore watch for Ofsted here too) is the development of ‘character’ in young people. The list of virtues will probably include Courage, Justice, Honesty, Compassion for others, Self-Discipline, Gratitude and Humility/Modesty but how they may be displayed will depend very much upon circumstances surrounding each individual. Much work on this has been undertaken locally at the Jubilee Centre (for Character and virtues) at Birmingham University.

A Schools of Character Kite-Mark is being launched in September 2016 and it is possible to find out more directly from the Jubilee Centre.

Student Exclusions

The national figures have been released for 2013/2014 and the figures for state-funded Secondary schools in Dudley show that we have the worst record (jointly with Tameside) in the country. This begs many questions but it is vital that governors get hold of this record and discuss it in depth with Senior Management at their schools. Equally well, if this level occurs at Secondary level one might expect that the issues which are manifest there should have their roots at Primary level as well yet the statistics do not demonstrate any such evidence. Perhaps the whole issue of exclusions should not only figure on the termly agenda of every Governing body meeting for all types of schools in the Borough, but should also be the subject of critical challenge.

Pupil Premium

There is much evidence around to investigate the “closing the gap” issue, whether in respect of the differences between students in receipt of pupil premium and those not, of the inevitable differences in academic performance of boys and girls and in other areas. We must ensure that governors take on board the evidence available to them (through statistical sources) and that this is regularly discussed.

Not Enough Outstanding Schools in Dudley

Specifically the figure for schools in Ofsted categories 1 and 2 (Outstanding and Good) in Dudley is rising above the national average for our primary schools and falling below that average for our secondary schools. In either case the figures indicate that we have too few of these as Outstanding even if those for Good are healthy. The challenge for governors is therefore to push for movement from being “merely” Good to being Outstanding at both Primary and at Secondary levels.

General Election

Although the results are now history the statements we obtained from the three “main” parties and which appeared prominently on our web site earlier have now been moved to our “previous articles” section and can still be viewed there as can the equivalent statements for 2010. Members who are so minded might wish to view both and to task their local and/or national politicians about any comparisons between declared intended actions and those actions which are in practice evident today.

Reconstitution

Most, if not all, of governing bodies in the borough have addressed this issue – many are smaller in consequence although some have remained the same size. There is a change in emphasis coming down from Westminster which suggests that, rather than simply having representation from parents, school staff, local authority and co-opted (or community) governors ‘on board’ as has been the traditional position for quite some years the emphasis

should really be to get 'the right people around the table'. Now, whilst the two alternatives could simply co-exist, we are going to have to defend the structure of our Governing bodies a great deal more than we have in the past. What happens, for example, if an Ofsted inspector asks "what contribution does each member of the GB bring to the activities of the Governing Body?". To some extent this is no different from asking the Head Teacher about the use of their staff and it does mean that we do need to ensure that each person has a role to play and a contribution to make – the Minutes of Governing Body meetings will almost certainly be a start to evidence this. Another might possibly be for governors to be individually set objectives and performance managed as with staff. Some might well say that this is a bridge too far but it should at least focus all governors on why they are there in the first place.

Primary School Sports Premium

This was dealt with at some length in the previous issue but it is clear that many of the same issues exist at a number of schools, both within Dudley and beyond. Do please check up on this with your own Governing body.

Congratulations

We are delighted to report that one of our governor colleagues, Lynn Boleyn, was awarded the MBE in the Queens Birthday Honours list this Summer. The reasons are cited as leading the campaign to save Maidensbridge Primary School when it was threatened with closure some 9 or 10 years ago and also her work with the Kewford Eagles football club which is one of the largest of its type in the country.

At the same time we must mention Andy Griffiths, head teacher at Ellowes Hall Secondary School, who was awarded the OBE at the same time for his services to Education. Andy is credited with transforming his school from near-bottom of the local secondary league tables to being top during his 13 years as Head. His wife, Lucy Griffiths, recently retired as Head Teacher of Jesson's Primary school.

Congratulations are due to both Lynn and Andy on their achievements.

We should also mention that Margot James, who is/was on the Governing body at Redhill school was re-elected as MP for Stourbridge and that Mike Wood, a governor at Halesbury Special School has become MP for Dudley South.

**Brian Patterson,
Chair DAGB**