

ASSOCIATION NEWS - SUMMER 2017

Welcome

The start of a new school year, a set of new (and many, still current, old) challenges to be addressed – welcome to another year of school governance in Dudley !!!!

Student Exclusions

Two years ago, we highlighted the issues, in Dudley, of the high levels of Permanent Exclusions from schools within the Borough and recommended that all Governing Bodies should keep the topic as a specific item on their termly meetings. We have just reviewed the DfE published figures for 2015-2016 and the figures once again provide very real cause for concern.

Permanent Exclusions related to Mental Health Issues

The following bullet points are extracted from a recent report from the Institute for Public Policy Research and relate to the National picture for permanent exclusions in 2015-2016, the data for which have just been released.

- Half of pupils permanently excluded from primary, secondary and special schools suffered from some sort of mental health problem or learning difficulty
- Whereas at least 1 in 2 permanently excluded pupils had high levels of mental health problems this contrasted with 1 in 50 in the wider population
- Of pupils permanently excluded only 1% would go on to obtain 5 good GCSE passes
- Of a prison population of 86,000, in excess of 54,000 had been excluded at some point whilst at school
- Those excluded were four times more likely (as those not) to grow up in poverty and twice as likely to be living in care
- Those eligible for Free School Meals were four times as likely to be excluded as those who were not.
- Boys were 3.5 times more likely to be excluded than girls
- The highest number of exclusions was in Year 9
- There was no significant difference between exclusion rates for academies and those for local authority maintained schools
- The exclusion rate in Special Schools was no different from that in mainstream schools.
- Whereas at one time it might have been almost unthinkable that primary-age pupils would be excluded, the current rate is 0.02% for this age group as

against 0.17% in secondary schools. 50 of these were in Reception, 95 in Year 1 and 135 in Y2.

- With an overall exclusion rate of 0.08% this equates to one exclusion per 1200 students (boys and girls and all age groups combined)
- Of the reasons cited for exclusions, 1 in 3 were for persistent disruptive behaviour and 1 in 9 for assault on an adult.
- Whilst exclusion rates had been slowly falling for the previous ten years those for 2015-2016 showed an increase over those for 2014-2015.
- The West Midlands has the highest rate of permanent exclusions in the country (as it also did in the previous year).

The position in Dudley

Nationally, during 2015-2016, there were some 6685 Permanent Exclusions and 82 of these were in Dudley, our rate in the Borough being about twice the national average. The rate in Dudley is also the second highest in the West Midlands Region. In fact only 8 other Local Authorities have higher rates nationally. It does seem very likely that there is a measure of correlation between the Permanent Exclusion rate and the relevant index of multiple deprivation but this assumption might also imply that Dudley ranks within the top dozen authorities in the country in respect of its deprivation index. Even if this were indeed the case we really ought to be reviewing exclusions within the borough's schools (a) with a view to minimizing the rates of exclusion and (b) in order to break the cycle of exclusions leading to disastrous examination outcomes for the individuals concerned and to social issues impacting upon life choices for them as well.

This is not to suggest that schools are at all eager to exclude students, but the problem (and possibly the solution) lies beyond the ability of any one school to address easily, especially given the plethora of other pressures on all our schools. We seek therefore the combined wisdom of many organisations (including DfE, research elsewhere and our own local authority) if we are to improve on the present position.

Mental Health Issues

We offer no apologies for re-iterating our concerns about Children and Adolescent Mental Health problems and the earlier references to its links with rates of permanent exclusions reinforce this. As was reported in our previous issue we ran a well-attended Conference in March 2017 on this very topic and, since the problems are not going to go away we will want to address this issue for the foreseeable future (amongst others, naturally). It might be helpful for colleagues to follow up a number of links first to get a measure of the current situation. The most recent is the result of research by the DfE entitled "Supporting Mental Health in Schools and Colleges" which was published on August 3rd 2017; as a research document it is more a "state of the nation" type publication, but well worth reading for all

that. We now await a structured approach to tackling the problem to support the Prime Minister's promise earlier this year.

KS2 and GCSE Examination Outcomes

We are already aware (early July) that Key Stage 2 results nationally show an improvement from the 53% rate (of 2016) to 61% for this year. This figure is provisional at the time of writing and figures by local authority are due for release on August 31st. Although Reading still remains, nationally, the area of lowest attainment for students, it has improved slightly since last year.

By the time this article is published we should also know the outcomes of the GCSE assessments and particular notice will be taken over the results for English and for Mathematics, being the first two subjects for assessment in the revised "9 to 1" system. We are still concerned, however, about the distinctions between Levels 4 and 5 since both are described as "Pass" grades, the difference being that Level 4 is referred to as a 'standard' pass and Level 5 as a 'strong' pass. As the word 'pass' does not occur in any other level, it does create, potentially, a measure of some confusion. Local F.E. colleges are requiring Level 4 results to replace the 'old' Grade C but there is concern that Secondary Schools will be judged on success with Level 5 instead – there will certainly be many candidates who will *just* do enough to gain the lower of these two whilst their schools may well be assessed on the higher Level. We have raised this particular issue with Government already.

Free Meals in School Holidays

The Welsh government has invested some half a million pounds for the provision of free meals during the Summer holiday period, aimed at those who would qualify for free school meals normally. In addition, the schools, involved in what is a pilot scheme, have provided a programme of activities during the daytime for these same children. Whilst it could well be argued that this falls into the category of social work as distinct from educational, there is no doubt but what the edges are getting increasingly blurred. It will be interesting to read in due course of any report on this experiment and to see if it is repeated in Wales or elsewhere – given that some English MPs have made reference to the issues involved this will be judged quite critically by them as by others.

Memories of World War 1

During the course of the past year or so, we have all been aware of commemorative events concerned with the 1914-1918 conflict. What has just come to light is the extent to which some of the most significant battles have been evidenced in the names of children born in the years which followed sometimes, tragically, remembering relatives killed during that war. Today there are still a small number of young people bearing names like Ypres and Somme, names handed down within families, a century later. One girl reported that the

choice of her name, Passchendaele, was “bitter-sweet but a name with links to her family history”.

A request for your help

The function of the Association is to act on behalf of our members, governors throughout the Borough, and an Executive Committee (see separate list elsewhere in this Newsletter) was elected at the Annual General Meeting in June. The committee will address a number of issues during the next twelvemonth but they would welcome any suggestions by any governor or governing body as regards issues that we should be addressing, should there be any risk of them being otherwise overlooked. Governing Bodies in DAGB membership are asked to nominate a Rep(resentative) who can not only cascade information from the Association to members of the GB but who can also act as a conduit for requests to be uploaded to us as well. Please make suggestions through the Reps to enable us to work for all.

Notice-board

Please be aware that the Association now has the use of a notice-board in the entrance corridor at Saltwells.

Certificates of Attendance

In future the attendance of members at DAGB events will lead to the creation of Certificates of Attendance, to be distributed at meetings of their Governing Body and recorded in their training records by Governor Support. These will be back-dated so as to include the Mental Health Conference in March 2017.

Brian Patterson,
Chair DAGB