

Association News – December 2012

This last year has been filled with many elements which directly or in some cases, indirectly, impact upon education both within Dudley and elsewhere. Possibly the one thing which most people will recall best from the Summer was the London Olympics and Paralympics and the “feel good” atmosphere it created. To see athletes from the Borough involved and winning medals really brought it home to us all. A direct consequence of these events was an increase of people, but especially from the younger age groups, wanting to participate in similar activities now and into the future and we do need to do our best to ensure that they are enabled to do so.

Whilst we recognise that funding is inevitably going to be difficult to come by, we also need to realize that the whole theme of a “healthy lifestyle” which we have been actively promoting for the past few years does have financial benefits to the country. As people are fitter and generally healthier so there are fewer demands upon the Health Service. Equally, by getting more and more young people involved in sport and a variety of other physical activities, there is less likelihood of their being involved in anti-social behaviour (which is not infrequently caused by boredom). We have been actively pursuing the need for the legacy of the Olympics to be addressed by contacts made with the Secretaries of State for Health and for Sport as well as with Lord Coe, the Chairman of the British Olympic Association.

Whilst on the issue of a “healthy lifestyle” it is right to congratulate the winners of last year’s competition – Bromley-Pensnett in the Primary category and Hillcrest School and Community College in the Secondary section. In each school the work done by the students working with the artist in residence (the prize awarded) is now on display for the foreseeable future. Congratulations to all those who took part and our thanks to those other schools who entered the competition even although they were not winners. We are hoping to run a similar competition in the early part of 2013 and the Health Service are just as anxious to support us, subject to being able to source the necessary funding – why does it so often have to come down to what can be afforded ?

Earlier this term we ran a mini-conference on “Using Data to Raise Attainment” and were fortunate to be able to secure as our key-note speaker Paul Charman, who was responsible for the development of RAISEonline whilst working with Research Machines – he has now moved to work with Fischer Family Trust. Members were able to hear from practitioners from all three sectors (Primary, Secondary and Special) as to how to make best use of data in their fields; feedback received was most encouraging.

When GCSE examination results were declared in August there were, nationally, questions asked about the grades awarded in English Language since it appeared that Examination Boards had changed their criteria mid-year leading to a significant number of students failing to achieve the grade C they had been predicted. We have supported the Local Authority who have complained about this but are not able as yet to form any useable

conclusions. Whatever the outcomes of investigations, we accept that it will achieve little or nothing for the students adversely affected by the situation; however it may reduce the likelihood of a recurrence for others next year. Predicted grades are estimates based upon pupils' progress and teachers' experience and may not correspond exactly with grades achieved but it does seem that the mismatch on this occasion is sufficiently different as to raise doubts about the accuracy of the awards. Significantly, Hansard records Michael Gove as saying (on October 29th 2012) "... what went wrong this year ..." in a Parliamentary statement about the GCSE English results. Although the Ofqual report on this subject had not been released at the time of writing, there does seem to be a belief, even from the Secretary of State, that students had been disadvantaged in the process.

At the same time as the GCSE results are being challenged we are also aware that the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, has indicated that he wants to see "O" levels reintroduced. Exactly what this really means is not clear as yet so we are pursuing this issue and expect to be able to report back in due course. It seems hard to believe that he would want to recreate a system which, at the time, was perceived as being elitist although it certainly did challenge the "more able" students. Attempts to promote a nominally 'all-inclusive' system of assessment have never succeeded (yet) so it will be interesting to see where this "reintroduction" might lead.

We have repeatedly brought issues to do with the Pupil Premium to the attention of the five Borough Members of Parliament. The mismatch between those claiming Free School Meals (FSM) and so getting the Premium for their schools and those entitled to, but not claiming, FSM has led to a number of schools receiving less than they ought. This imbalance has been recognised nationally and the Department for Education is shortly due to present a report on the "massive differences between the take-up of Free School Meals" in different areas of the country; in some the take-up is 100% whilst in some others one-third who are entitled to FSM fail to claim it. As the value of the Pupil Premium is set to increase to £900 per qualifying child in 2013 this is anything but trivial and it is good to know that the message we have tried to get across at Westminster is bearing fruit. At the same time, members may be interested to learn that a "catch-up premium" of £500 is being introduced in respect of every Year 7 child who failed to achieve basic standards of literacy and numeracy by the time they left primary school.

We would like to invite members to get back to us with their own views and experiences on the new Ofsted framework (effective September 2012). Certainly there is a higher profile for school governance and we can expect to see Governing Bodies being subjected to greater scrutiny in the process. We might at the same time ask why the "Every Child Matters" (ECM) Agenda appears to be of less importance now; when ECM was introduced, not that many years ago, it gave importance to aspects of childrens' development which do not seem to square with the main Ofsted headings. As already indicated we do want to hear from members on these points whether individually or collectively – it would really be

encouraging to learn that a Governing Body has taken the time to discuss these points and to provide feed-back to us so as to enable us better to represent your concerns.

Our best wishes go to all members for a happy and successful 2013.

Brian Patterson

Chair, DAGB