

ASSOCIATION NEWS - WINTER 2017

Key Stage 2 issues

A year ago we reported upon the actions we had taken with respect to the debacle of the June 2016 Key Stage 2 SATs – and specifically of our correspondence with some of the Ministers at Westminster. We are now able to report that this has borne fruit. A recently published report, commissioned partly due to the impact of our complaints as well as by those of others, has been produced; some 50 plus pages long with numerical statistical analyses, it does indicate (albeit reluctantly) that a number of students were unable to access some of the content of those tests. Our complaints (based upon those you voiced to us) were vindicated. Although schools have had to continue to develop their KS2 teaching, the 2017 tests were found to be fairer.

Special Educational Needs Conference

The Conference is reported upon separately in this Newsletter. We are pleased that it was so well received by delegates but rather concerned that, despite publicity given to the event, there were a significant number of schools which were not represented at the Conference. Following on from announcements in the September Newsletter, Certificates of Attendance will be issued to those present alongside DMBC Certificates for other training. You may also have noticed that events are now being promoted by means of our Display Cabinet in the entrance corridor at Saltwells as well as via our DAGB Representatives.

Changes to Governance Profile

Although we have often referred to the number of governors, nationally, as being in excess of a third of a million, changes to the size of governing bodies have reduced this figure to an estimated 250,000 in state schools. As there is no national database it is impossible to be absolutely certain – and, of course, some individuals are governors at more than one school. However it appears, so the National Governance Association (NGA) tell us, that the typical (average) governor is a white male in his fifties. Of particular interest therefore is that NGA is now giving support to two networks, one for young (under 40 years old) governors and the other for black governors. These are both worth supporting so that we can help to change the profile of this “typical” governor; you might well ask yourselves whether the diversity of your own governing body is similar to that of the community it serves. For those who might be interested, the black governor network has its own web site and can be found at www.nbgn.co.uk, whilst the “young governor” network can be accessed through the NGA web site at www.nga.org.uk

School Improvement Alliance (SIA)

Many governors have asked about the SIA, which was created a year or so ago in order to provide a corporate focus for achieving improvements throughout the schools in the

Borough. We asked Suzanne Edwards, Lead for Education Outcomes within Dudley's People Directorate, about the progress which has been made by the SIA towards these goals and she has provided us with the following statement, which is reproduced verbatim and for which we are most grateful:-

“Dudley's SIA has worked in partnership with the local authority to provide support and challenge across Dudley schools. This has included targeted strategic support for schools causing concern and the development of the consultant headteacher support programme. In partnership with Hales Valley Teaching School, the LA and SIA have trained a number of headteacher SEPs (School Evaluation Partners) who have been allocated across a number of good and outstanding schools to provide peer support, challenge and to develop the spread of best practice. Feedback from heads is that this has been a mutually beneficial programme and one they wish to maintain. This additional capacity has also enabled the local authority and SIA to maintain close working relations with all maintained schools as well as a number of academies.

The LA continue to work with the teaching schools and a number of multi academy trusts to ensure that Dudley schools successfully engage in sub regional school improvement projects funded by the DfE. Covering the 4 Black Country local authorities the sub regional board to date has received DfE approval for two projects targeted at improving outcomes in Early Years and in Key Stage 1 writing. Round two project awaiting approval include a KS4 project aimed at improving progress across 8 subjects and a key stage 3 literacy project.”

Primary School P.E. and Sport Premium

Colleagues in the Primary Sector will be well aware (we hope) that the value of this cash injection has been doubled this year and schools are, typically, receiving about £18,000 which is ring-fenced for this purpose. In conjunction with Active Black Country, we held an event early in December for Head Teachers and Governors to make the most effective use of the Premium. This was not very well attended, partly due to the timing, but also because this was simultaneous with the arrival of the season's first snowfalls (which caused the closures of many schools). However it is worth reminding colleagues that we produced guidance (still available on our web site) about the mandatory requirements for reporting the use of this funding stream on individual school web sites. There is now new guidance from the Association for Physical Education (AfPE) which updates this and governors are urged to check that their school satisfies this requirement. Furthermore it is also well worth reminding all primary school governors that this money is for enhancement of existing provision and not to be used in place of money for national curriculum requirements. For instance it may not be used to meet the cost of swimming lessons, since this is covered by the main school budget; however it could be used to provide additional swimming instruction for children who have not met the national guidelines by the end of their (main school budget funded) statutory swimming lessons.

We need to measure the impact of this spending on the children and we may need to be innovative as to the types of measure we use. For example, if we are trying to measure “increased level of participation in sporting activities” then this is simply a “numbers game”. However if we are attempting to measure “enjoyment” we might wish to create a scale ranging from 0 for “total disinterest” possibly up to 5 for “enthusiastic” or something similar. We must also ensure the sustainability of what we do – ‘how could this activity continue if the funding were to be withdrawn?’ for example – so the up-skilling of teaching staff becomes an issue and a CPD opportunity.

Enough Money in the Coffers?

Although we have had indications from the Government as to the revised budgets for the coming year we are seeing, at this point in time, increases of the order of one half of one per cent for Primary Schools and perhaps two per cent for Secondaries. Given that the teaching unions have made reference to bids for salary increases of up to five per cent it is self-evident that the budgets of many schools will be stretched to breaking point and beyond unless we take drastic actions – reports so far indicate that schools are looking to cut back on teaching assistants and/or full time teachers to cope. Colleagues might wish to visit the web site www.schoolcuts.org.uk to see the potential impact on their own budgets, measured both in cash terms and in terms of staff losses. As an Authority it has been projected that we might need to shed 216 teachers in order to balance our books to 2020. Equally self-evident is that this must seriously threaten the education of the young people in our charge. At the same time we need to be investing in better resources to cater for mental health issues amongst young children and adolescents. As an Association we have already been pressuring our local Members of Parliament about this and are working with other groups (with similar concerns) to tackle these funding issues. How successful we will be remains to be seen but we simply cannot ignore the problem.

Christmas

Whatever difficulties and educational challenges we may face, we must still remember the season which approaches as this is being written but will be over by the time this is read. We wish peace and joy to all at Christmas and a New Year with renewed hope and prospects for better.

**Brian Patterson,
Chair DAGB**