

ASSOCIATION NEWS - WINTER 2018

Children's Mental Health

On October 23rd we welcomed Sandra Vaughan, Executive Director of Dudley MIND, to speak to a packed Saltwells main hall about this topic. The growing importance of the issue of Children's Mental Health was clearly reflected by the numbers present and by the questions posed subsequently. (We will feature a report on this meeting in the next Newsletter, at Easter). The two most significant questions on everyone's mind were (a) what can we as school governors do in order to minimize the negative impact of the issue and (b) how can we get a greater degree of support from CAMHS, the Children and Adolescents Mental Health Service which appears unable to cater for the demands placed upon it.

As far as that first question is concerned we, as your Association, will be following it up and reporting back but, good news for once, we are aware that the local health service are able to run training for the Mental Health First Aid course which is targeted at the needs of young people especially at those in primary and secondary schools. This is funded partly by Public Health and by DWMH and is FREE granted, it is a two-day full-time course so that staff cover costs would be incurred but as we are aware that the "public" cost for such a course is of the order of £300 plus per delegate (on top of which staff cover would still have to be found) this would be an excellent starting point for any school. Having talked separately with Sandra Vaughan about this, the thinking is that ideally two or three staff should be trained so as to provide for a measure of continuity and team working.

As to the second question the Association will undertake to pressure Government Ministers and local Members of Parliament to reinforce the CAMHS service. We will also continue to research good practice both local and national to assist schools to deliver so that, as governors, we can reinforce the importance of tackling this issue and be seen to be doing so.

Primary School Physical Education and Sports Premium

Although this "only" impinges directly upon Primary Schools, a number of Secondary schools do provide some training for a number of sports in their local primaries so that all will be interested in learning that there will be a Conference, directly relevant to this, on March 7th at the Copthorne Hotel in Brierley Hill – details should have been circulated already to all local schools. Governors will be most welcome and several have attended previous events in the four Black Country boroughs over the last few years. This will be the fifth in the series, the first having taken place in Dudley in 2014 – we anticipate up to 200 delegates and, relevant to the earlier part of this report, it will include a workshop on the place of sport and physical activity as an antidote to mental health problems in young people. The

National Governance Association (NGA) will be represented on the Question and Answer Panel by their current Chair, Maggi Bull.

Exclusions

We are pleased to be able to include an article on this subject in this issue of the DAGB Newsletter. Clearly we would all wish to see the need for exclusions (both short-term and permanent) reduced and we are well aware that many schools tackle the issue, usually of disciplinary matters, in an assortment of ways, some more effective than others. Clearly we need to investigate examples of good practice and will be doing so as an Association. However we must recognise that, for a small number of students, the “traditional” school environment simply does not work for them. There is, in consequence, a need for an Alternative Provision and Dudley’s alternative provision is proving to be too small for the number of young people requiring it. We shall be investigating this shortly.

School Cuts

There is just not enough money in the system to pay for schools to do what they need to be able to do in order to raise standards and to provide a safe and stimulating environment in which young people, both in Dudley and elsewhere, can benefit and achieve their full potential. We are all too well aware of this and the problem is a safe topic of conversation and of concern for every school and, doubtless, just about every Governing Body meeting. We have lobbied on this topic, the NGA we know have also done so and numerous other organisations, parent bodies etc have all done so. As far as we can judge, on those rare occasions when it “appears” as if more money is forthcoming we discover that it is never “new money” but has been diverted from other budgets (and often other education-related budgets) within the Treasury. Unfortunately the current focus of Westminster is on that dreaded issue, Brexit, so that finding sources of extra money for the Education system is not going to figure as a high priority. Nevertheless we will continue to pursue it.

You may be aware of a “School Cuts” campaign and an associated web-site which identifies the likely impact on every maintained school in the country in respect of budgetary constraints and measures this by staffing reductions. Although we are conscious that there is a political issue behind the campaign and that some of their calculations are inaccurate we are equally well aware that there is a significant degree of truth in their assertions and this has been backed up by the National Audit Office and other similar official sources. So far the best we have achieved with local MPs is a recognition that schools are under significant financial pressures (which is something which might not have been acknowledged a couple of years ago) but that schools are themselves responsible for dealing with the problem. Our response, apart from the obvious “well come down to our school, look at our budget, and show us how to improve things” is to parallel a domestic scenario – we need (not merely want) something we cannot currently afford (and saving for it is inappropriate) and we are averse to borrowing – so what do we do? Many of us have

had no choice but to bite the bullet and find additional sources of income we know of many people who have had to do just this and sometimes simply to exist at an acceptable level. Any useful suggestions please from any of our readers?

National Governance Association

A number of newer governors possibly know very little about the NGA. It was formed in 2006 by the merger of two earlier bodies, the National Governors' Council (NGC) and the National Association of School Governors (NASG). Based conveniently (for us) in Birmingham it started off with just a staff of three or so – now there are nearly forty people working there. DAGB is, as it has been since the formation of the NGA, an Association member and is always represented at local and national events. This has enabled us to be involved with a wide variety of their activities including a section for Special Needs governance and more recently one for Multi-Academy Trust members (trustees and local governing body members alike).

Ethical Leadership

An article on this theme has been included in this Newsletter in order that we consider the fundamental purpose of our educational system and how we may best achieve it. Perhaps a copy should be sent to those who value academic excellence at all costs. It is not only the case that room should be found within the school day for the non-examinable components such as music and sport, both as antidotes to the pressures of the day for students and for staff alike; but also we should consider the desirable (surely?) objective of developing good citizens by having role models in front of them.

In conclusion we wish all our readers and their schools an Outstanding (Ofsted-speak) 2019.

Brian Patterson,
Chair DAGB