

Association News – Summer 2013

At the time of starting to write this report the country is “coping” with a heat-wave, the longest unbroken spell of good weather for seven years and with daytime temperatures hovering around the 30 degree Celsius mark. I have just tried to obtain a forecast for the next two weeks and find, if it is to be believed, that the weather is expected to start to deteriorate markedly on the very first day of the school Summer holidays. No comment is necessary !!!

Healthy Lifestyle Competition

For the fourth successive year we have run this competition with the benefit of funding and support from what is now the Office of Public Health. On this occasion students were asked to submit a recipe for a healthy meal (breakfast, lunch, desert or snack etc) including instructions for making it and illustrating the result accordingly. Schools responded to this by the creation of well in excess of a thousand entries which were whittled down to a few hundred for judging.

The judging took place in early June, before a panel which included both a chef and a nutritionist and, after much discussion, the final 18 winners were agreed. Just over two weeks later we welcomed the winners, their families and representatives of their schools for the Award Presentation Evening at Saltwells.



We were delighted that Andy Waters, a leading Midlands chef, had accepted our invitation to both assist in the judging and to present the prizes to the winners. The evening, blessed as it was with good weather, proved to be a great success and we were delighted with the outcomes, certainly the best of the Annual Competitions so far. The two schools, winners in the two categories, were Mount Pleasant Primary School and Thorns Community College. Our congratulations go to all the students who submitted entries and to the schools and staff who supported them.

Assessment of Children from Age 5 years

We have just seen the proposals for increasing the amount of assessment being done, this time by placing children from the age of five years (or earlier) into one of ten categories (or deciles) – whilst this is “out for consultation” at just before the start of the school holidays, it is already causing very strong adverse reaction from numerous sources. If agreed and implemented it could mean that a five-year old child is told that s/he is in the lowest decile (the bottom ten percent) of students in the country – so much for encouragement !! We would expect to be able to report further on this later in the year as more becomes clear.

The Commons Education Select Committee Report on School Governance

This report was only published at the start of July so it is rather premature to make too many observations as yet but some of its points include:-

- Incentives to business to give time off for governance duties
- More use of powers of intervention; a suggestion to give Governing Bodies more powers to remove ineffective governors
- The importance of training, although the Committee did not go so far as the NGA’s committed view on mandatory induction training
- Ofsted’s expectation that governors should have attended training
- No payment for governor duties unless there are special circumstances such as assisting another school’s Governing Body
- DfE to work with the NGA to rectify the loss of much of the detail in the new Governor’s Handbook
- Endorsement of the importance of high quality clerking support: the Committee endorsed a project to establish a system where clerks were recognised as professional advisers to Governing Bodies
- Governance was not broken but there were some areas for improvement
- The profile of governors should be raised and improved; it was right that they should be held to account, but too often in announcements only the downside was stressed. What was needed was to celebrate good governance – and if there was good practice it would spread.

Annual General Meeting

At the Association A.G.M. which took place on Thursday July 4th 2013, it was proposed and accepted by those present that the annual subscription should be increased to £60 as from the Autumn of 2014. It will nevertheless remain (as agreed last year) at £55 for 2013 to 2014. The cost of membership has remained static for several years and, although expenditure has exceeded income during that time, we have tried to minimize the impact upon member schools. However with the cumulative effects of inflation the time has, regretfully, come to make a change. Members did however agree that it offered good value for money; it was noted that in one of our neighbouring authorities, their equivalent governors’ association were paying in excess of double our rate.

The Executive for the forthcoming year were elected as follows (Officers were elected subsequently by members of the new Executive and designations appear in brackets):-

Martin Bradney
Doreen Calder
Jim Conway (Vice-Chair)
George Craig
Simon Hanson

Martin Jones
Geoff Lawley
Paul Leyshon
Jane Morgan (Treasurer)
Brian Patterson (Chair)
Terry Reynolds
Roger Spencer
Pam Stevenson
Roger Timmins
Ron Wicken

Issues for 2013 to 2014

Many of the issues which have been actioned during the past year will not have gone away but we have already noted some new ones which will be addressed initially in September. These will include (a) Increasing concerns about social media and the vulnerability of young people, (b) The new legislation concerning pupil attendance, (c) Assessment of young people from Reception and even earlier and (d) Educational and funding issues concerning the children of travellers. It may safely be assumed that there will be numerous others at both local and at national levels.

Area Meeting for October 2013

This will be held on the evening of Thursday October 17th at 7.00 pm at Saltwells. The two topics will be the FFT (Fischer Family Trust) Data Dashboard and the Pupil Premium. Both topics are of especial importance as they will both form the cornerstone of discussions at the time of an Ofsted inspection. The FFT Data Dashboard is far easier to understand than the voluminous Raiseonline and offers a very straightforward way to “know your school” so that this meeting will particularly suit the needs of those who are relatively new to governance as well as to those anticipating an Ofsted visit. This programme has been put together with the support of the Local Authority and dovetails with the rest of the Governor Support courses on offer.

In conclusion

I would like to take this opportunity to give thanks to all those who have supported us in any way whatsoever throughout the past year, to our representatives on member governing bodies and to members of the Executive, to those at Westox House and to those working for the Council, not forgetting our local Members of Parliament, who have given us of their time during the past twelvemonth and to all of you who have contributed in such a wide variety of ways, to the Association. Whilst it may be too late to wish you a happy Summer (although we do hope that you have enjoyed one) but we do certainly hope that the year to come will be a rewarding one.

Brian Patterson
Chair, DAGB