

Association News – Summer 2012

When I was writing the equivalent article about Association news not much more than six months ago last December I commented upon the number of records that were being broken with respect to weather conditions and here again we could note “the wettest April to June” ever. At the time of writing it also appears as if July 2012 may reach the record books for a similar reason. Although this article should not be about the weather it does seem as if records of school student attainment may follow suit – the 2012 GCSE and A level results will be in the public domain before this Newsletter reaches our members and, given the track record of the last 20 plus years, it seems very likely indeed that they will, once again, be the “best ever”. When GCSE was introduced in the 1980s we (possibly) actually were so naive as to believe such statements – now we are far more cynical. Of course it is quite possible that results might indeed indicate an overall improvement over that period of time **but** in any (and possibly all) similar situations there would be some year-on-year fluctuations, some ups and some downs even if the overall trend were to be upwards. If the announcement of results this Summer fails to conform to what has become the accepted pattern of the past two decades it will be astonishing indeed and heads may indeed roll !!!

Healthy Lifestyle Competition

It is good to be able to congratulate this year’s winners, Bromley-Pensnett Primary in the Key-Stage 2 category and Hillcrest School and Community College in the Secondary category. Each of these schools secured the prize, donated by the local Healthy Schools Team of the NHS, of an artist in residence for the Summer term, working with students to create a piece of lasting art work for their school, with a healthy schools theme. That at Bromley-Pensnett is called “Burst of Creativity” and I am very much looking forward to being present at the official “unveiling” on the penultimate day of the Summer term and to presenting certificates to the students who won the award for their school. Both schools received the relevant DAGB shields earlier in the term and the Hillcrest School will combine the first showing of their work in September with the extensions to their building being officially opened. Once again we are grateful both to the Healthy Schools Team for their support, both financial and otherwise, and to the team who judged all the entries in the two competitions.

Premises Check List

Reference was made in earlier reports to the existence of a 121-item check list being gradually introduced to schools in the Borough. We have been pleased to hear favourable comments being made about the value of such a document, as we were responsible for having it put in place. The issue as to whether it is justified that schools have to spend so much of their limited resources in this way is very much a different matter and we intend to see if it is not possible to reduce the length of the list – this is not a criticism of the Local Authority who have to adhere to current legislation but rather a matter for Government to appreciate the extent to which educational finance fails to directly impact upon the educational needs of young people.

Traded Services

At meetings of the Traded Services Management Board, members are now receiving annually details of changes made to the costs of services, following on from your Association lobbying

for this to be more fully monitored than had previously been the case. Most of the charges for the forthcoming year remain as they were last year since the bulk of the costs incurred relate to salaries and, since these have been frozen, only a small measure of incremental drift has to be accommodated. However we are all well aware that fuel costs have escalated and that the costs for using landfill sites has also increased considerably; the loss of lottery funding for environmental education also impacts adversely. In consequence charges which involve these factors will have increased beyond the ability of the Authority to maintain earlier rates.

Meetings with MPs

We have completed the cycle of meetings with the five constituency MPs and every governor in membership has had the opportunity of being involved in discussions with our “representatives at Westminster” over educational issues. Attendance has not been particularly good, due in part to the necessity of holding such meetings on Friday evenings when MPs tend to be back in their constituencies, coupled with very poor weather conditions on some occasions. We are, however, in regular communication with the five and will continue to ensure that they are advised of concerns expressed by our members.

All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG)

The APPG for Education Governance and Leadership has had three meetings to date and your Association has attended all three, enabling us to raise salient issues at an even higher level than was possible hitherto. Cynics may say that the existence of such a group is merely paying lip-service to the principles of consultation and debate but the very fact of its existence is the best indication we have had for a long time that we, as governors, have a higher profile than ever before.

Ofsted

The article concerning Sir Michael Wilshaw’s speech and that on the “20 questions” both relate to the need to address Ofsted issues and to recognise the fact that inspection of governance is taking a still higher prominence than ever before. We may or may not be comfortable with the nature of the Ofsted inspections although most people do accept that such monitoring is necessary. What is galling however is the speed with which goal-posts get regularly moved and the way in which Ofsted judgements keep changing.

Using Data to Raise Attainment

Although details are not available as yet, it is hoped to run an evening meeting on this theme at Saltwells on Thursday November 8th 2012 from 7.00pm to 9.30pm. Several of us attended a similar event earlier this year in Sandwell which attracted some 60 delegates, even on a Saturday morning. We felt that the subject matter was sufficiently important, and doubly so with the increasing responsibilities of governors (Ofsted inspections yet again) that a modified version of the same event would be of value to our members. I am aware that some of those who attended the earlier event have already indicated their desire to attend again. It is intended that there will be separate presentations to cover Primary, Secondary and Special Schools. Full details will be made available as soon as they are known but bookings will be necessary but meanwhile might I ask you to note the date and time in your diaries – the keynote speaker and one of the other speakers have already confirmed their attendance.

In conclusion

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have supported us throughout the past year, our GB representatives and members of the Executive, those at Westox and in the

Council who have given us of the time and to all of you have, in any way whatsoever, contributed to the Association. It may be too late to wish you a happy Summer (although we would if we could) but we do certainly hope that the year in prospect will be fulfilling.

Brian Patterson
Chair, DAGB