

## News From The Association

The Autumn term has seen a mix of events with no one issue dominating. The appreciation that there will be a General Election at some point in the course of the next six months has provided one focus which has occupied some little time so far. Although the Association is categorically not political, it would be totally naïve to ignore the fact that education, for most of us, is guaranteed to be one issue about which any of us might want to quiz our potential representatives at Westminster, no matter what their particular political colour. For this reason we are approaching the candidates from each of the major parties and requesting them to explain what their party would do for Education, specifically within this Borough, were they to form the next Government; the outcomes from this will be communicated to member governors at some stage during the run-in to the General Election. The School DAGB representatives have already been asked to provide questions which will help to target the responses from the candidates. This will also help our eventual representatives at Westminster to know what our aspirations are in respect of education and (indirectly) help to advise whichever party forms the next Government as to what are the major educational issues at least from the Dudley area.

Although we will not be running meetings with the current MPs in each of the four constituencies which make up the Borough after Christmas since it would seem too much like offering a platform for electioneering (with the General Election so close) we are still in regular contact with all four. We will continue to maintain contact after the election, hoping to set up fairly regular opportunities for governors throughout the Borough to quiz their elected representatives.

The Summer of 2009 saw a far quieter SATs presence and only one school (as far as we have been advised) experienced any problems with marking standards. We have written to support them and scripts have been remarked with, in consequence, considerable improvements made to the results. The survey we conducted earlier in the year on League Tables and SATs testing is reported on elsewhere within this newsletter and copies have been sent to all constituency MPs as well as to the Secretary of State for Children's Services and the two opposition spokesmen.

Reference was made in a previous newsletter to the situation regarding Traded Services and to the increase in charges being experienced. As a direct consequence of our involvement the format of the annual process, whereby departments offer services to schools, has been fundamentally changed. In future all departments will be required to fully justify any increase in their annual charges, especially when that increase is above an agreed 'norm'; equally they will have to justify any change in the services being offered. Whereas in the past the Traded Services Management Board simply 'received' figures from individual departments, they have agreed to accept the principle of achieving best value for consumers. We are grateful to our representatives on that Board for the work that they have done to make this reality.

We have held a series of meetings with staff from Corporate Property (the new name for Dudley Property Consultancy) concerning the results of the 2008 survey amongst DAGB members. These have been very positive and apart from 'simply' addressing members' observations about the service, the remit has extended. Staff have agreed to a number of proposals which will feature in a later edition of this Newsletter. Additionally it has been noted that governors do not all have access to sources which define some of the legal, and other, issues involved and attempts are being made to redress this imbalance. Linked in to this is the issue of the increasing number of requirements for a variety of surveys which come under the general umbrella of Health and Safety; again we hope to bring a summary of these into the next issue of the Newsletter.

We were pleased to welcome the new Director of Childrens' Services, Mark Wyatt, as our guest speaker at our November Area Meeting. He outlined clearly the issues facing schools in the Borough over the course of the next year or so and coped with the wide variety of questions raised by members both in advance of the meeting and from the floor. He did make clear how important he saw the role of school governors in the process and thanked everyone present for the work they continued to do.

Finally, childhood obesity has been a cause of concern to many of our members and Dudley has fared none too well in national statistics in this regard. We have addressed this issue both amongst governor colleagues and also with the chair and staff of the Primary Care Trust in Dudley. At this point in time it is slightly too early to provide full details of the proposed actions but we have agreed to take steps to support any initiative which will reduce the incidence of obesity but, more widely, to support the whole Healthy Lifestyle initiative. Watch this space !!!

Brian Patterson  
Chair, DAGB