

Latest News from DAGB

We have just held the Annual General meeting and elected the Executive for the coming year – the list of names appears at the end of this article. Whilst it is good to see a number of “older” faces on the list, it is as important to see “new” ones as well. We do need to maintain a balance between “familiarity with what is going on” and “fresh ideas” and the enlarged Executive has a mixture of both. It was great to see so many members at Saltwells for the evening’s event and, always good this, to hear that so many thought that we were doing the right thing for governance in the borough – lets hope that we can keep on doing so!!

The “Review of the Year” which immediately preceded the AGM did cover much of what has happened this term as well as earlier events, but for the benefit of those who were not there, I am outlining now the more recent activities (although in some cases it is more a case of more recent elements to ‘take on board’ relating to long-running issues).

SATs Testing

At the time of writing we await to hear the results of this Summer’s SATs testing. Probably because of last year’s problems, the press has been rather more interested in issues which might not otherwise have made the columns. In consequence the recent references to problems with markers’ ability to do the job may simply be something which has been blown out of proportion. That apart, there is, as yet, nothing to report on this front.

League Tables

The closing date for the return of questionnaires on this issue has not yet occurred so we do not have all members’ views as yet. Nevertheless an examination of the returns “to date” does certainly suggest a positive dislike for League Tables although a minority of responses do suggest that their form should change if they are to remain – predictably perhaps, the suggestion was voiced that they should do more to reflect a measure of “value-added”, whilst recognising the difficulty of establishing a suitable measure which would adequately reflect other factors. The question about the continued place for KS2 SATs to exist has, so far, brought a rather less polarized viewpoint even if a substantial number of respondents would like to see them discontinued.

When we do have all the responses to hand we will then ensure that members’ views are made known to as many as possible of those who may be able to influence any decisions, including, as the bare minimum, the four Borough MPs, the Secretary of State for Childrens’ Services and the Opposition shadow secretaries.

Traded Services

Reference was made in the previous newsletter about complaints received from some schools about the costs of these. The analysis of the relevant figures for the last three years has certainly been worth doing. Although the majority have kept increases to a

realistic figure (possibly 3% to 4%) there are a few areas where this was not the case – the responsible departments are being asked now to justify excessive mark-ups and the Traded Services Management Board has agreed to change their practice so that, as from now, proposed increases above a realistic level will be challenged before they go into print. It may not be possible to reduce this years' figures (although we *are* trying to get this done) but we have succeeded in reducing the opportunity to “print money” at schools' expense.

Health and Safety Testing (and associated costs)

During the course of the last year there appears to have been a plethora of inspections covering a wide variety of surveys, such as windows, legionella, trees, fire risks, asbestos and several others. Costs have been incurred as the result of these inspections and, since these are all covered as Health and Safety issues these costs, although unplanned, have had to be absorbed within existing budgets. What, however, has proved far more damaging, has been the necessity for carrying out remedial work based upon the outcomes of the inspections and coping with the associated costs – one small primary school has actually had to find some £40K to do this.

The reasons behind this are not completely clear but it seems as if the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) might be flexing its muscles or possibly that European legislation is involved in some way. Whatever the background we want to establish a “reasonable” way forward, whilst wishing to “keep our children and young people safe” yet at the same time being conscious of the financial implications upon school budgets. Watch this space, please.

Childhood Obesity

Colleagues asked us to take on-board this topical issue at a DAGB Reps Briefing meeting. Without doubt the increased levels of adult obesity are worsening nationally and the West Midlands has been named as one area where the incidence is worse than average. We recognise therefore that we have a duty to “our” children to try to reverse that position and, undeniably, schools have a very important part to play in the process. We are heartened to note the number of schools who have secured Health Promoting School status and want to see this become 100% at the earliest opportunity. Obesity is only one part of the far wider “healthy lifestyle” belief and it is that latter ethos we wish to see cultivated. We are planning to run a competition for primary schools as a first step in this process and will announce details at some point in the Autumn term.

DAGB Executive 2009-2010

Martin Bradney	Hillcrest
Doreen Calder	Hob Green
Jim Conway (Vice-Chair)	Ridgewood
Helen Edwards	Sutton
Simon Hanson	Greenfield
Eamonn Hunt	Windsor
Atif Janjua	High Arcal

John Jones
Geoff Lawley
Paul Leyshon
Jane Morgan
Brian Patterson (Chair)
Catherine Rann
Cllr Allan Taylor
Roger Timmins
Revd Garry Ward (Treasurer)
Neil Watts

Red Hall
Hawbush
Pens Meadow
Bromley Hills
Lutley
Priory
Olive Hall
Brier
Crestwood
Queen Victoria

Brian Patterson
Chair
DAGB