

Devon Association of Governors

Issues raised at Area Meetings Autumn 2005

This report is a summary of points raised by governors at the Area Meetings held earlier this term in the following Local Learning Communities: Barnstaple, Bideford, Braunton, Ilfracombe, & Torrington; Tiverton, Culm Valley & South Molton; Ottery St Mary, Axe Valley, Honiton & Sidmouth; Clyst Vale, Exeter, Crediton, & Exmouth. These meetings were attended by governors, clerks and headteachers and many schools from the identified areas were represented. Discussion focused initially on the termly 'Checklist' of current issues sent to all Devon schools at the beginning of each term but also embraced other issues of current concern raised by those present. The sections in italics indicate responses (where received) from LEA officers, NGC and NASG to the points raised ... and information emanating from the meetings themselves. Please share this report with the members of your Governing Body.

1. Workforce Remodelling - final phase of the National Agreement. There were three points highlighted as important: PPA Funding, the Work Life Balance of the Headteacher and the Work Life Balance of Governors. The fourth folder of guidance from the National Remodelling Team was circulated.

*** PPA Funding** *Governors present at meetings felt that, although the 10% release time for teachers was seen as a positive move, there was a major question regarding sustainability of funding. It was felt that the initiative was insufficiently funded and that small schools have the added worry of falling rolls which puts a greater strain on the budget. It is important that governors alert the LEA in advance (with specific details) if they feel there may be major problems in the future. Similarly if they feel that the cover they are providing for pupils during PPA time is not adequate, they should contact the LEA. Governors asked DAG to forward the message that funding for PPA needs to be sustained by central government.*

Philippa Court (the Devon Remodelling Team) comments: : " I am not aware of any intention to reduce funding for PPA – however, it goes into the overall school budget, and will not be ring-fenced. PPA as a sustainability issue in individual schools is influenced by additional factors such as:

- The overall class size decisions*
- The range of strategies deployed for enabling PPA.*
- The extent to which PPA time had been timetabled pre-September 2005 or planned into budgets.*
- The sustainability of the provisions of the national agreement in general should have been a consideration for the review of staffing structure. "*

Q. Are there any plans to evaluate PPA? Is it value for money and is the impact on the pupils' welfare and learning being considered?

Philippa Court: " There are two elements to the National agreement - raising standards and reducing workload. In respect of the first element – schools who attended PPA workshops were asked to consider the influence on standards of their PPA strategy and to review the effectiveness of provision. Schools themselves are best placed to consider value for money, impact on pupil welfare and learning and on workloads of staff. It is, though, a statutory requirement and cannot be removed if it is felt that it is not operating as it should – individual schools will need to revisit strategies.

N.B. Sustainability workshops are taking place in the spring term 2006 as follows:

- 15 February: Padbrook Park , Cullompton*
- 3 March: Rosemoor Gardens, Torrington*
- 9 March: Two Bridges, Dartmoor*
- 13 March: Buckfast Abbey*

These can be booked through the CPD website <http://www.dcseducation.org/cpd> "

*** Work Life Balance of the Headteacher** A sheet entitled 'Looking After Your Head' was circulated. DAPH is concerned about the current pressure on Heads. Some Headteachers of small schools are undertaking the PPA cover and this is having an impact as most will have a teaching commitment as well. It was felt that central government was introducing too many new initiatives which are taking Heads away from teaching & learning issues. Governors asked whether DAG can do something to help. *It was suggested that Chairs have most contact with Heads and should talk to them to find out how they are*

getting on. Designating roles like this is a good idea, however don't forget that responsibility lies with the governing body as a whole. Jane Collings is doing a survey for DAPH, please contact her if you have any questions at governor@devon.gov.uk There are also courses on WLB - please look in Devon Governor or on the DAG updates.

Suggestions made at the meetings:

- Would it be a good idea if one of your Headteacher's targets included managing his/her Work Life Balance?
- Look into the possibility of having a Bursar in your school structure plan. They could help take certain financial & admin tasks away from a Headteacher.
- Could a group of small schools share a Bursar?

Q. Who has overall responsibility for the Headteacher? Is it the Governing body, the LEA or Government?

This is an extract taken from the NRT Guidance Pack for Governors on remodelling in a section about Governors' responsibility regarding work/life balance:

" An important element of the National Agreement with respect to governors is the statutory responsibility to have regard to the work/life balance of the headteacher. The headteacher, in turn, has to have regard to the work/life balance of other staff and governing bodies should be asking for a report from the headteacher about the strategies they are adopting with regard to staff work/life balance. The governing body will need to consider measures to ensure that the headteacher's workload is kept at a reasonable level. This may lead to a review of some of the governing body's own practices with relation to the headteacher's workload. It could involve consideration of a number of different issues around distributed leadership, meetings and processes. Below are some examples which governors might wish to consider:

- *Conducting an audit of meetings: governors could have a discussion with the headteacher on timing, introduce time-limited meetings and establish with the Head a limit on the number of meetings per term. Holding meetings earlier in the evening or during the day could be an option. A number of employers give time off for these activities.*
- *A review of committee structure could result in a more streamlined arrangement.*
- *There may be areas of responsibility that a headteacher could delegate to senior staff.*
- *The governors' annual report should be prepared by the governing body rather than the headteacher.*
- *Developing the role of the Clerk to the Governing Body.*
- *Heads and teachers should not carry out administrative functions for governing bodies.*
- *Governors' overall responsibilities are described in detail on governornet. More information is provided on website resources at the end of the pack.*
- *Dedicated Headship Time Training: This included consideration by Governors and Heads about where Dedicated Headship Time was timetabled in order also to address some WLB issues for the Head e.g. timetabling at the beginning or the end of the day or whole day sessions where appropriate. "*

Stephen Adamson (Vice-Chair NASG) comments: *"I am particularly pleased to read what has been said about worklife balance of heads, and how government initiatives are making it impossible. I am planning to take this up with Jacqui Smith in my next meeting with her, so this is good ammunition. Reassuring that Devon governors have the same problems as Cambridgeshire ones (and Leeds, Cumbria, Lambeth, Knowsley.....) "*

*** Work Life Balance of governors (especially Chair)** This was also highlighted. Governors are volunteers and have jobs and family commitments, and the constant introduction of new initiatives is having an impact on them also.

2. The new Ofsted Framework and Self Evaluation Form (SEF) The SEF forms the basis of the new Ofsted visit and it is important that everyone in the school has knowledge or takes part in its completion. *It is important to have several governors who are up to date with the SEF if the Chair is not available due to short notice of inspection. A form was circulated with an example of how a governors' meeting could help to complete the SEF form. Roger Fetherston (DCS) has talked with governors in detail about the use of these forms at this term's Link Governor meetings.*

Q. How often should schools update their SEF?

There seems to be some conflicting advice from different bodies. *Some schools have been advised to update it termly or sooner; however the advice from Ofsted is that there is no need to update it more than twice a year. One suggestion is that evidence of major changes should be put in a box together with the SEF, so that it is available for the inspector to see. At the Link Governor meetings Roger Fetherston recommended that schools revisit the SEF at the time of the publication of the school PANDA and also when setting the budget.*

3. Review of School Staffing Structure to include replacing management allowances with TLRs. This was an initiative given to schools in June with an action plan and date for completion by the end of December 2005. The timeline is very tight to get the structure agreed by the end of December. The draft has to be affordable and agreed by staff and unions. The consultation will need to be done again if the first draft is not agreed.

Several governors felt that this deadline was unrealistic and an example of one of the many initiatives that government has 'landed' on schools recently. They felt that there was a conflict in their duties - they have to ensure statutory duties such as these are carried out, in addition to the duty of looking after the work life balance of their Headteacher. **They asked DAG to relay this message to government.** [This has been done] Governors were asked to write to their MP etc. if they feel strongly about this.

Note: The SSS is more relevant to large schools with large staff - more difficult for smaller schools to action. DAPH are looking at creating a model for smaller schools - ask your Head to contact Charlie Werner for more details.

Q: Can Teaching & Learning Responsibilities be split between two or more teachers?

Answer: Please check with documents circulated or there is support and information available from the LEA & DfES on www.devon.gov.uk/eal/dgfl and www.governet.co.uk

Q: Payroll changes - will changes to payroll have to be done straightaway in January?

The structure needs to be actioned by 2008, but initially it will only be teachers on new TLR scales who will be affected (unless a governing body has decided to implement the whole structure immediately). Please email Ivan Godfrey with any specific queries and he will pass them on to relevant dept.

4. Performance Management of Headteacher This is the last year that external advisors will be used. Review meetings must take place by 31st December 2005. It was suggested that part of the Head's Performance Management could be to demonstrate to governors how the head teacher is managing his/her worklife balance. (See also Work Life Balance of Head above).

5. 'The Effective Governing Body' was sent to all Chairs by Devon Governor Services. This has been well received and is a work in progress, with further updates in the pipeline.

Q. Is it available electronically and can extra copies be ordered?

Debbie Clapshaw (DGS) comments: " I can confirm that our Effective Governing Body folder will not be made available electronically as we intend to market and sell it more widely. We will supply a CD Rom next term with the final three sections. We anticipate it being offered for sale at around £25.

6. Consultation by the LEA on Children's Centre Strategy for Devon There is a consultation underway which affects Nursery Schools. Parental choice over how many days their child attends nursery will impact on the organisation of teaching in nurseries.

7. Bichard Inquiry *The Headteacher and one governor will need to undertake online training for 'safer recruitment'. The name of the governor should be agreed by the end of December and the training should be completed by the end of March 2006. It does not mean that the governor who has completed the training has to take part in all future interviews, but they should be able to advise other governors on the process. More info from www.ncsl.org.uk*

8. The School Governors' Guide to the Learning & Skills council A paper of interest to all school governors involved in 14-19 further education was circulated. Ivan Godfrey will be interested in any feedback from this. More info. from www.lsc.gov.uk

9. DAG/DGS conference The Child at the Centre' in Exeter, 14th/15th October 2005. This will address the 'Every Child Matters' agenda.

Papers from this conference will be circulated soon.

Q. Governors in north Devon find it difficult to attend meetings in Exeter and requested that conferences such as this be moved to different parts of Devon on a rotation basis. Alternatively, please could DAG/DGS look into the possibility of video or e-conferencing facilities?

The issue of video-conferencing is being explored at the moment.

10. The School Profile This will replace the governors' annual report. More information on content will be coming to schools shortly.

Debbie Clapshaw comments: " There is an article about the School Profile in the Devon Governor and a sample can be seen within the DfES consultation document on their website. "

11. Merger of the two national governor organisations The NGC and NASG are proposing to merge, and governors were asked their views. In principal it was agreed that it would be a good idea to have one national governor voice. Governors were invited to the next DAG executive meeting were the topic will be discussed - please contact Ivan Godfrey for more details.

At their AGMs NASG and NGC members voted by a very large majority to go ahead with merger. It is planned that the new organisation – the NGA (National Governors' Association) will be launched early in 2006.

12. New School Funding Arrangements from 2006-07 An information sheet was circulated. Devon has been given an increase in funding for the next three years, but there is no increase per pupil (Devon is still under funded per pupil in comparison to other local authorities). *Benchmarking data can be found at www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/schoolfunding/schoolfinance and gives comparisons of school expenditure with similar schools. This could be useful for Finance committees when looking at their budget.* The question of multi-year budgets was raised. A school may drop numbers in one year but know that numbers will increase the following year.

Q. Can an overspend be justified in order to retain staff that you know will be required in later years?

If schools have a specific issue with funding they should pass details on to the relevant Headteacher bodies ie. DAPH or DASH.

Further response to follow

13. Primary School Admissions Arrangements for 06/07 This is being co-ordinated for the first time by the LEA. There were several issues/questions:

Q. Planning ahead is more difficult with the new system – doesn't it take away a certain amount of flexibility for schools?

Vicky Rollason (Group Manager for Admissions at County Hall) comments: " It might depend what you mean by flexibility! All of us have to comply with the Code of Practice on Admission. We have had several queries about this, usually in relation to annual budget setting, but as schools will have three year budgets, that will help. Some have also worried about planning for redundancy with falling rolls. Again, I would say that must entail a longer view, and we are making all our data on pupil patterns available to all. Many Local Authorities have operated in a similar way for many years, and quite a few began to comply with the new regulations last year. I have not heard of any major problems! And the change is not just about coordination by the LA, but also about introducing the opportunity for parents to express a second preference (as required by the scheme). In Devon, unlike many parts of the country, this has not been the case previously, as parents could only put down one school.

Additionally, online admissions are now taking effect – we have 18% online for secondary admissions at the moment, and would expect a similar response for primary admissions.

I have no reason to think that patterns of preference will change drastically – most parents still want their child to go to the local school.

We have held a series of briefings for heads this autumn. Paper forms will be returned to schools, so it may be possible to form a view as they arrive.

We will be very happy to keep schools informed as we go, but the exercise of preference must mean we

cannot control things for the benefit of schools quite so much, and you will know that the White Paper emphasises the role of the LEA as “Champion of Parents”!

There has always been an element of uncertainty on school numbers, though, with parents having the right of appeal – and increasingly they are taking that option! We are trying to plan sufficient surplus (but not too much) in the system to maximise the meeting of preferences.

We want to see how it goes, and we can learn next September what the impact has been.

Q. The Admissions Criteria - is it mandatory?

Not sure what this means: all admitting authorities (LA for Community, VC; GB for VA,F) must have clear oversubscription criteria to use if more people apply than there are places in a particular year. The actual criteria must be consulted on annually (December – March now for September 07 admissions) as part of the admissions arrangements. VA and Foundation GBs must let us have their proposed arrangements and we will consult on your behalf. (See the Code of Practice on Admissions:

<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk> and search!)

14. A parent governor representative from a secondary or special school is required for the LEA Scrutiny Committee. If you are interested please contact Ivan Godfrey.

15. Inclusion

Q. Is it likely that the policy of inclusion (eg behavioural problems) may be subject to change of philosophy?

Response to follow

Q. Have heads been faced with insurmountable difficulties?

Response to follow

16. Budgets in small schools

Q. Are there examples of skills in juggling a small school's budget - ie an overview with ideas, good practice, examples and details of expectations of higher authorities on small schools?

Response to follow

17. Gifted and Talented pupils

Q. Are funds available for children highlighted as gifted & talented, for example as for Special Educational Needs children?

Phil Creek (dcs Adviser for Art and Design, Gifted and Talented) comments: “ There is no ‘additional’ money centrally identified in school budgets for Gifted and Talented Children as is the case with children who are considered to have Special Educational Needs. Any money that a school decides to use to support such gifted and talented children or to develop provision would normally come from the school budget share. This is also the case for all other children. SEN funding is a general exception as regards this kind of targeted funding.

Devon does provide a number of day or residential enrichment and extension activities for G&T pupils and there are bursaries available from dcs for parents/carers who cannot afford this provision or whom schools are unable to support financially. DCC also holds a small fund of money to support individual children who wish to take part in national opportunities where the cost may be prohibitive for them. Dcs has also part funded pupils attending National Summer Schools over the last four years where the school has not been able to support individuals financially. “

18. Foundation Schools The government is encouraging Foundation Schools - there are no Primary Foundation schools in Devon at the moment.

Q. What does the LEA think about primary foundation status?

Response to follow

19. Criminal Record Bureau checks

Q. Should all governors have a CRB check?

Maria Chakraborty (Human Resources) comments: “ DfES guidance currently advises that Governors have a minimum of a List 99 check, but the Governing Body can request more rigorous checks depending

on Governors involvement within the school, eg. having unsupervised access, unrestricted access in school and attending classes etc. DCC's policy suggests that a CRB disclosure should be requested if there are grounds for concern in relation to specific governors. Governors who refuse to do this can be disqualified. "

Q. Does one person need to have a separate CRB for different organisations (eg. a school, scouts, sports club, after school club etc.)

MC: " Disclosure certificates are issued in relation to the specific post outlined on the Application form. Police Authorities issue information based on the relevance they feel it has to the post. CRB consider certificates to be portable, except for checks involving adult posts/organisations and schools with overnight accommodation. DCC, however, does not feel that it is as clear cut as this. It is up to the Governing Body to decide whether to accept a check completed for another role. This decision should be based upon a risk assessment of the situation. Full details of risk assessments and portability can be found in the guidance attached in sections 9 and 14 respectively. " [I have a copy of this guidance and can forward it, if requested]

Q. Once a CRB has been carried out, how long is it valid for?

MC: " According to CRB guidance, Disclosure certificates are only valid for their day of issue, as after this time further charges, convictions or information could come to light. However, DCC's policy regarding portability advises that as long as a person stays in the same role a check is valid, but full details can be found in Section 14 of the attached guidance document. "

Q. Is it the governing body's responsibility to ensure all teachers have been checked?

MC: " The Head has the ultimate responsibility to manage their staff, ensuring that the children under their care are safe. The Governing Body should check that it is being done and that the Head has also been checked by DfES. "

Debbie Clapshaw adds: " There is a leaflet within this term's Devon Governor re child protection. DGS are offering a two part course in March in addition to the online training which is about interviewing and appointing staff specifically. "

20. Special Needs

Q. Why does it take so long for schools to receive monies for special needs children?

Response to follow

Q. The delay in statementing children is too long - can something be done to address this?

Response to follow

21. Extended Schools

Q. Is there an expectation for all schools to become an extended school?

Jon Bell (Extended Schools' Manager) comments: " The short answer is, ' Yes! ' During the summer the DfES published an Extended School prospectus www.teachernet.gov.uk/extendedschools which outlined the intentions for all schools to develop extended services. At the time this caused a great deal of concern as the press picked up the main issue of schools being open from 8.00am till 6.00pm. However schools are being encouraged to deliver the 'core offer' of extended services outlined in the prospectus in conjunction with other schools and other providers.

Earlier this term I circulated a document entitled ' Achieving the Core Offer' to all Heads and Chairs of Governors. I hope this document removes some of the more immediate worries. For example for a small school to achieve the wrap around childcare offer, it may be enough to be able to supply the name and contact details for local childminders. " [I can e-mail copies of this document and the covering letter to those who have not seen it.]

22. DAG are looking for a new Assistant Secretary - please contact Ivan Godfrey or Jenny Currie for more details. An honorarium and expenses are paid. The role would suit a Clerk or Governor who has a computer and is able to attend evening meetings in Exeter and across Devon. Very interesting work and will give you an extra insight into the issues that affect governors.

23. Ivan and Sue Godfrey are back from their walk across the Pyrenees and have offered to talk to schools about their trip (in French if requested). They would like to thank all the governors and schools who have contributed to their fundraising for Hospiscare and the Children's Hospice.