

DEVON ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNORS MONTHLY NEWSLETTER – MARCH / APRIL 2008

The newsletter order is as follows:

- Devon Association of Governors (DAG)
- Local Authority (LA)
- National Governors' Association (NGA)
- Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF)

DAG

The **DAG Website** www.dag.gb.com was officially launched at the DAG Conference and is now active. Governors are encouraged to read it on a regular basis. Monthly newsletters will continue to be produced, but in order to reduce the e-mail loading on schools and Clerks, September's newsletter, and all thereafter, will only appear on the website. That said Intermediate Governors will continue to receive individual copies for distribution as they see fit. If GBs wish to receive individual copies they should consider appointing an Intermediary Governor. Details can be obtained from David Tall. DAG's Executive see the website as the primary method of information and communications. In promoting the website, can I please commend the Model Policy section, with a plea for GBs to share their policies with other GBs through the website by submitting Policies to David Tall. Thank you.

The DAG Governors' Conference held on 29 March at County Hall Exeter, was better attended than last year's event, but still fewer than a third of Devon's schools were represented and absentees missed a golden opportunity to hear from national and local leaders and to attend valuable workshops which addressed SEN Framework; Succession Planning and the Role of SIPs. The stars of a very good day were the youngsters from the newly formed Devon Youth Choral Experience. If you wish to learn more about this wonderful group please contact elfyn.jones@devon.gov.uk I know Elfyn would be delighted to hear from you. The new DAG Constitution was adopted at the Conference and is available on the website. Minutes of the AGM and feedback from the workshops are also on the website. Plans for the 2009 Conference are already underway. Please keep an eye open for details.

The Chair and EO attended the NGA Regional Conference on 15 March. There were 14 other delegates from the Plymouth, Torbay, South Gloucestershire, Gloucestershire, Somerset, Devon and Poole Associations / Forum. This was a very good opportunity to discuss matters of mutual interest with other local groups.

The Chairman, Vice Chair and EO met Anne Whiteley on 15 April. This meeting was followed immediately by one with Mark Hulland, the NGA SW Regional Director, where discussions and issues raised at the Regional Meeting above, were continued.

DAG is pleased to be represented on a number of important LA bodies. One such is the Local Admissions Forum which is a mandatory body set up under the School Standards and Framework Act 1988. The Forum facilitates discussion between all admission authorities (Voluntary Aided, Foundation and LA Community Schools) on how best to organise admissions in the local area, in order to meet as many parents' preferences as possible, and to reach agreement about difficult issues, such as providing school places and sharing pupils with challenging behaviour.

The Membership of Devon's Forum has recently been revised in line with regulations issued by the DCSF. As well as the admission authorities mentioned above the Forum includes representation from community groups such as Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), Devon Association of Governors (DAG) and neighbouring LAs to help ensure a consistent approach.

There is a vacancy for a Governor from a Community School. The Devon Forum meets approximately 3 times a year at regular intervals at County Hall, Exeter. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, 15 July 2008 at 10.30 am. If you are interested please let David Tall know. He is also happy to provide more information on request.

There is also a vacancy for a Primary Governor to represent DAG on the Schools Funding Issues Group (SFIG). A few details are outlined below, but if you would like to know more, please contact David Tall

Purpose of the Schools Funding Issues Group (SFIG)

SFIG provides an opportunity for school representatives to acquire an understanding of the detail of educational funding. The group can take time to look at budget performance and options for change so that the Schools Forum can be confident in the basis upon which recommendations are made.

Objectives of SFIG

- Keep under review the "schools block" funding of the Section 52 statement.
- Monitor how well the formula is delivering what schools need in an equitable way.
- Consider options for formula change and take a lead on any local consultations relating to change.

- Consider the impact of any Government proposals and help to collate responses to Government consultations.
- Make recommendations to the Schools Forum on funding issues.

GBs are reminded that from September 2008, part of the Ofsted inspection regime will include schools' contribution to Community Cohesion.

Are you aware of Mencap's Spellathon? The Spellathon, which is supported by the Oxford University Press and linked to the Primary Framework for Literacy and Citizenship, could raise money for your school and Mencap. Details available from www.mencap.org.uk/spellathon

Schools will shortly receive details of the JE Appeals Process and a Task and Finish Group, with DAG representation, which has been established. It is understood that hitherto there has been a lack of confidence in the JE Helpline. DAG has received assurance that this Helpline has been revamped and concerns addressed to the Helpline will be actioned. It would be helpful to inform DAG, through the website, whether the helpline has improved.

LA

The latest update on the Boundary Commission Review is, noting the precise dates within this timetable may change:

Stage One, a 6 Weeks Relevant background information gathering process on each county area provided by local authorities is now complete. A copy of the Concept is available on Devon Review webpages

Stage Two

14 April – 4 July 2008 12 weeks The Boundary Committee will consider the concepts and seek information as necessary from local authorities and other stakeholders. It will consider this information and make a decision on what to publish in draft proposals

Draft proposals published

Stage Three 7 July – 26 September 2008 12 weeks Public consultation on draft proposals, including on the specific boundaries of any new unitary authorities. Financial information will be collected to assess the affordability of the draft proposals.

Stage Four

29 Sept – 19 December 2008 12 weeks Consultation responses and financial information considered. Final decision by Committee on what to advice to provide to the Secretary of State

One way to stay in touch with LA education related issues is through the Just4Schools website, www.devon.gov.uk/index/learning/schools/just4schools

School Exclusions Task Group

A review on school exclusions is being carried out by a task group set up by Devon County Council's Children and Young People's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This review will examine the use in Devon of fixed term exclusions, permanent exclusions and managed moves. Members will assess the cost of providing education and support to children excluded from school, and particular attention will be focussed on the impact of effective behaviour management in schools and the Council's role in promoting the former.

The review is being carried out in response to the Government's agenda to reduce exclusions from schools to a minimum, and for councils and schools to look at ways of managing pupils' behaviour.

Schools have a number of mechanisms for dealing with poor behaviour, but when these have been exhausted the ultimate sanction for a school is to use a permanent exclusion. This is usually seen very much as a last resort by schools.

The Task Group is inviting anyone with a view to share about issues relating to school exclusions, whether positive or negative, to contribute to the review.

Councillor Anne Fry, Chairman of the Task Group said: "This review is about examining the overall picture of school exclusions in Devon and looking at how we can best improve the outcomes for those children excluded or at risk from exclusion, and identifying the way forward for the County.

“Public consultation is very important to us and will help to shape the Task Group’s final recommendations so please do get in touch if you have ideas and opinions you would like to share. You can make a real difference.”

Anyone who is interested in taking part and giving evidence to the Task Group, or would like an informal chat or more information can contact Dan Looker in the Scrutiny Team on 01392 382722.

Letters and e-mails are also welcome and can be used as evidence to support this review. E-mail dan.looker@devon.gov.uk, or post to Dan Looker, Scrutiny, CEX, County Hall, Topsham Road, Exeter EX2 4QD.

All submissions should be received by 30 May 2008. It is anticipated that the Task Group will present its final report to the Children and Young People’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 24 July 2008.

NGA

The NGA Board Bulletins for April and May have been sent to all schools and are also on the DAG Website.

Of particular interest you would wish to know that NGA regional meetings have aired the issues likely to figure in a forthcoming consultation. NGA intend responding to the consultation, but that will only count as one reply despite the numbers represented, so we need as many separate responses to DCSF as possible. Information about the consultation will be circulated as soon as NGA has details. So far there is a growing consensus that a governing body of only six (in line with the Interim Executive Board model) is impractical and there is general agreement in favour of mandatory induction training or at least for a strong steer from DCSF and Ministers that there will be an expectation that all new governors participate in induction training. Individual Governors are encouraged to have their say.

Some of you will have received the first edition of the recently launched NGA magazine “Matters Arising”. In the document is an advert from the School Governors’ One Stop Shop offering a free service of recruiting Governors. Devon Governors may wish to know that Devon Governor Services already liaise closely with SGOSS and part of DGS’ role is to deal with requests from people expressing an interest in becoming governors. There is a Devon based process and they do their best to 'matchmake' with schools looking for governors, and people expressing an interest, and they hold a file at Great Moor House. Preferences, such as geographical; Secondary and Primary are always taken into consideration, against vacancies, and DGS always offer people to schools where appropriate.

Following NGA’s attendance at our Conference, I hold a number of spare copies of a Model Food Policy; booklets on Succession Planning and booklets concerning recruiting headteachers and senior leaders. Please e-mail with delivery address if you would like a copy.

If you have been following the various Teaching Unions Conferences over Easter, you may be aware that the NASUWT tabled:

“Conference believes that it is becoming increasingly evident that the majority of governing bodies are not fit for purpose and are failing to provide the appropriate balance of challenge to and support for headteachers. Conf asserts that the increased autonomy for schools is an inappropriate responsibility to vest in a group of well-meaning volunteers. Conf considers that the test of the effectiveness of a system is not when it is working well but how it responds under pressure and that there is a wealth of evidence to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of governors in discharging their responsibilities with regard to the implementation of statutory provisions, workforce issues and curtailing the worst excesses of some school leaders. Conf calls upon the Nat Exec to press the government to undertake a comprehensive review of the governance of schools.”

NGA’s robust response to this motion was:

We find it hard to understand how a major national teachers' association can consider such a motion at its national conference. The motion as it stands appears to display a contempt for both governors and the process of governance.

The NGA rejects the accusation that governors are well meaning amateurs. Many, if not most, governors are professionals in other walks of life and they bring that experience and expertise to bear on their role as governors.

We reject the assertion that the majority of governing bodies are not fit for purpose and we reject the assertion that there is 'a wealth of evidence' demonstrating the ineffectiveness of governors in discharging

their responsibilities. On the contrary there is evidence demonstrating that governors discharge their responsibilities effectively in the majority of schools.

We do not understand the NASUWT hostility to democratic accountability. Governors are either directly elected, or appointed through democratic procedures. Governors give large amounts of time to their schools, with no expectation of reward. They are part of an English tradition of volunteer involvement in community affairs. Does the NASUWT regard local councillors and magistrates as incompetent simply through their volunteer status?

The NGA hopes that this motion goes unsupported by the NASUWT executive and unsupported by the conference delegates.

If the motion is carried we believe that the vote will say much more about the NASUWT than it will say about governors and governing bodies.

DCSF

There are a number of consultations live on the DCSF website, www.dfes.gov.uk.

David Tall
Executive Officer to DAG

5 May 2008