

No I don't like league tables either but there has to be something wrong when Greenwich is so consistently low in the comparisons with other London authorities. Although our results are, in general, improving so those in all the other authorities. I can see no reason why Greenwich should be down the bottom, we know that many other London authorities have the same social and economic problems as us. The low

LEAGUE TABLES A plea from the Chair

achievement of so many of our young people must be addressed quickly and this can only be done by co-operation between schools management, governing bodies and the Local Authority. What will not help is if we get into the blame game with everyone pointing the finger at each other. I, like most of you, only became governor because I wanted to improve and protect education, I believe Greenwich is now at a point where we must take painful decisions to ensure that there is a dramatic improvement in our results.

Jim Draper
Chair, AGG

Voice



THE SCHOOLS FORUM

In case you're not sure what it is, the Schools Forum is a committee which the Council was required to establish under the 2002 Education Act. It consists of 27 members – 11 governors, 11 head teachers and 5 non-school members. The non-school members are elected Members of the Council. Our term of office is two financial years. Our functions are defined by regulations, but essentially we are a forum for consultation with the Authority on the Schools Budget in an open and transparent way. We are expected to reach a view and have our views taken into account, although the ultimate decision rests with the elected Members.

I can assure you that the governors you have elected to serve on the Forum scrutinise and question the reports that are presented by the Authority in an extremely rigorous and thorough way. Whilst we represent our various categories of school on the Forum, we all have the aim of ensuring that provision is distributed as fairly as possible for the benefit of all children in the borough. If the Forum feels that transparency is lacking, they will not hesitate to ask the Authority to take a report back for clarification at the next meeting, as happened at the September Forum meeting with regard to the Schools Major Maintenance Programme.

SEN funding has been a major area of concern to the Forum, and the September meeting agreed to a consultation paper containing a number of proposals which will have a significant impact on the SEN procedures within schools and within the Authority. You will all have the opportunity to respond to these proposals before the Forum makes a final decision.

During 2006/7 a number of major decisions on budget priorities and pressures, and funding formula amendments were recommended by the Forum and

agreed by the Council. In some cases the Forum has asked for progress reports to be provided.

With the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) about to embark on a consultation process on the way the Dedicated Schools Grant will be distributed from 2011, the Forum will continue to have an important part to play into the future.

The Forum meetings are open to the press and public, so why not come along to one and see how we operate?!

Roy Moore
Chair of Schools Forum

NEW LOOK AGG

Following the AGM of the Association we now have a new and larger committee. We have moved from meeting in someone's front room to having a Committee Room in the Town Hall. Most importantly it gives us the opportunity to gather a larger number of opinions and ensure that we are speaking to the LA with greater authority. The challenge for us is to keep the momentum going and to continue to forge links with the LA and our schools with the clear and direct aim of improving education in Greenwich. Cllr. Jackie Smith, the lead member with responsibility for education, has said that she wants governors to be clear in their role as Critical Friends in the pursuit of school improvement.

Finally, an apology to anyone who signed up to be a committee member and has not been contacted. A few forms were without home addresses and the emails appear to be incorrect. Please contact me at jim.draper@hotmail.co.uk or phone 0208311 0429.

Jim Draper
AGG Chair

ALDERWOOD PRIMARY SCHOOL'S BREAKFAST CLUB

A thriving Breakfast Club is just one of the services that Alderwood Primary School offers to its pupils and parents. The club runs daily from 8.00am until 8.45am. There is a wide range of choice available to the children that chose to start their school day early. Along with traditional breakfasts, such as beans on toast and scrambled egg, there are also more modern options such as toasted cheese sandwiches and cereals. As Alderwood School has achieved Healthy School Status, the items on the menu are in line with this initiative and there is always a healthy option available. It is also important that the pupils and parents feel that their views are being listened to, so a questionnaire has been carried out to ensure that the people that use this service remain satisfied. All of the items on the menu are reasonably priced and the children are often seen tucking into a substantial breakfast. It is not unusual for parents to accompany their children and actually eat with them. This creates an opportunity for discussion between children and their parents. It is also common for members of staff to regularly use the facility. The Head Teacher of Alderwood is always present during this time to ensure that all children are properly supervised and cared for. The children that attend our Breakfast Club enjoy the opportunity to chat with their friends and spend some quality time with children from different areas of the school. The Breakfast Club also joins in with different campaigns that raise awareness for the importance of eating a balanced breakfast. Alderwood Breakfast Club is continually growing in popularity, with both pupils and parents, not to mention staff!

Katie Virtue

Alderwood Primary School

Note from the Editor:

Has your school or governing body done anything you think might be of interest to other governors? We welcome letters and articles – contact Margery Nzerem, 8858 3544, margery@nzerem.com

PLUMSTEAD MANOR HAS A STUDENT GOVERNOR

At Plumstead Manor School we have a very open governing body. Apart from the 20 full governors we have Deputy and Assistant Headteachers as Associate Governors. Recently we considered the possibility of co-opting a student Associate Governor, and decided that if there was a 6th Form student interested, then we would proceed to co-opt. When the Head of the 6th Form reported, she asked if we could have two, one to give the other moral support. This was agreed to, and we are now pleased to have two Student Associate Governors on our Governing Body

Frank Lerner

Chair of Governors
Plumstead Manor School

P.S. from the Editor:

Blackheath Bluecoat School is also going to have two students as Associate Governors.

YOU MIGHT WANT TO ASK YOUR SIP TO A MEETING

Some SIPs have agreed to come to a governors' meeting to discuss their annual report to governors. If you haven't already arranged that with your SIP, it might be worth asking if they will come.

GOVERNOR ALLOWANCES AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

A survey of schools in England in 2005 indicated that just over 30% schools did not have a policy regarding the payment of allowances (expenses) to governors. Within Greenwich the Schools Forum has recently approved changes to the Scheme for Financing Greenwich Schools to bring the Scheme inline with the Education (Governor Allowances) Regulations 2003. These regulations recognise that being a governor is not a cost free activity and allows for the payment of expenses to meet out of pocket expenses. These expenses do not include loss of earning or form the basis for paying an allowance for attending meetings. The main thrust is towards covering the cost of travel and costs incurred for care of children or dependants. While many governors do not claim expenses it should be recognised that not all governors may have the ability to meet the costs of being a governor. Two simple examples are the cost of childcare for an evening meeting and the cost of attending a training session at the PDC which could easily reach £8.00. The demand for Social Inclusion can only be met if the governing body has in place a policy for paying these types of expenses.

A model policy jointly agreed between the DfES and the NGC (both sets of initials have now out of date) is available and I will forward a copy to anyone who emails me on jim.draper@hotmail.co.uk

Jim Draper

IMPORTANT CLARIFICATION ON GREENWICH'S DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURE

Many sections of Greenwich's Model Disciplinary Procedure as revised in 2006 give time limits as to when things must happen. These are often given as '5 days' or '10 days'. It's important to note that these limits must be read in conjunction with the last bullet point on p4, which says that 'throughout this procedure references to time limits relate to school working days'.

GREENWICH SAFER SCHOOL TEAM

In June, together with PC Duncan Law (Crown Woods and St Thomas More schools) I was invited to attend the Governor services conference at Charlton Athletic football club. During the conference we ran a workshop on 'keeping safe' and were able to tell governors about how we 'police' the schools in Greenwich. For those governor's that were not able to attend the conference, here is a quick run down on the Greenwich safer school partnership.

In 2002 the Prime Minister's Street Crime Action Team proposed a pilot initiative to help reduce crime and antisocial behaviour in and around schools. This initiative - the Safer School Partnerships (SSP) - entailed the introduction of 100 police officers to be based in schools in 34 Local Education Authorities facing the 'toughest challenges'. These LEAs fell within ten police 'crime hot-spot' areas that were identified as having a high incidence of youth offending, truancy and antisocial behaviour.

Greenwich did not fall within the 34 chosen education authorities, however it was decided that we would as a borough commit three police officers to work alongside three secondary schools. Initially it proved difficult to persuade any of the schools to have a full time officer, but Blackheath Bluecoat, Eltham Green and Eltham Hill schools agreed to have an officer.

Within a short period of time crime in the close vicinity of the schools dropped by 15% and the scheme was deemed to be a huge success.

The officer's worked with school staff and students to challenge criminal behaviour, promote attendance, and support students in the transition from primary to secondary education. The officers also took part in preventative work with those young people at risk of offending. The presence of officers in schools also provided support to school staff in dealing with a range of other issues in school, whilst also promoting positive relationships with young people.

Due to the success of the scheme the team was increased to six officers. The officers work in schools across the borough and now have more than one school to support.

In addition to the six secondary school officers I have one officer, PC Susan Clark who supports all of the Primary schools, however it is likely that in the near future the ward based safer neighbourhood teams will assume responsibility for the primary schools. Over the past 12 months Sue has been visiting the primary schools and giving presentations, mainly to year five and six students on personal safety. Despite writing to every Primary school only about 75% have taken up Sue's offer.

On a daily basis the school beat officers carry out patrols in the borough's schools and the areas where young people are likely to feel unsafe. Earlier this year my team spent three weeks policing the area around Kidbrooke railway station to combat a robbery problem. During this period the robbery problem stopped and a school governor I met at the conference had seen the team patrolling and had wondered what we were doing. The main problems that we encounter in our schools are minor assaults, thefts of mobile phones and iPods, criminal damage and anti social behaviour.

From a governor's point of view I would encourage you to try and get to know the officer's that work with your schools. If anyone would like any further information or details on which officer covers a particular school, please give me a call (020 8284 5493)

Chris Ellinson - Sergeant

Quote:
Learning is something students do, NOT something done to students. - Alfie Kohn

CLUSTER GROUPS CHAIRS' MEETINGS – A BEGINNING

Greenwich schools have now been organised into clusters to facilitate co-operative working, and the AGG wants to facilitate Chairs in the clusters meeting together to share challenges, experiences, ideas, and good practice. At the moment plans are being made for an initial meeting of West Greenwich cluster, where there has been a lot of interest.

In addition, secondary chairs have met together several times, and it has proved a good way of getting to know one another and sharing common concerns and solutions.

We'd like to roll out cluster group chairs' meetings to all clusters that are interested. If you think the chairs in your cluster might want to meet together, and you would be willing to organise an initial meeting but would like some support/suggestions about doing so, contact Ann Jefferson, 8305 0491, annjefferson@hotmail.co.uk

SHOULD CHILDREN BE LEFT OUT IF IT'S NOT THEIR FAULT?

An interesting question was raised at the AGG AGM in the spring – should children be excluded from school outings because of things that are the responsibility of their parents/families, e.g. coming late or wearing the wrong uniform or clothing?

The answer is – your school should have policy on school outings, and it should address this issue. However, you need to make sure that whatever it says is not discriminatory in any way.

It is certainly legal to exclude children from outings under the circumstances given above, but governors might want to ask if it is reasonable, especially for primary school children. You might also want to consider the effect on a child who isn't allowed to go on an outing because of something they have no control over.

Margery Nzerem

SHOULD PARENTS BE ASKED TO CONTRIBUTE TO A SCHOOL FUND?

There's been an interesting discussion recently from governors across the country about whether schools should ask parents to contribute to a school fund. It all began with a question – does your school ask for parental contributions? If so, how much? What is they used for? Who controls the fund?

The discussion quickly widened, and more searching questions were asked and points

made. Some pointed out the difficulty of ensuring that contributing is truly voluntary, as no matter what a school says, parents may feel awkward about not contributing. Others pointed out that there are parents who are may contribute even if they really can't afford to. One governor said 'I've known many parents, who, in spite of real poverty, WILL AND DO make contributions, however hard the struggle, because they do want to be fully involved with their school and don't want to be seen as 'slacking' or letting their children down. But should we be asking them to? Conversely I know more affluent parents who refuse to pay up me are detached from their school, some plain mean, some uncaring, but some would argue – justifiably - that they have already paid for education!'

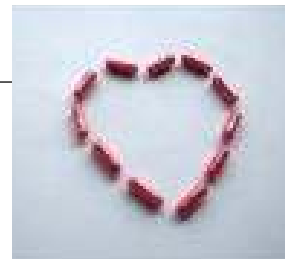
Other governors questioned whether contributions should ever be asked, since this goes against the principle of free state education.

It was an important discussion, but it was taking place across the country – a similar discussion here in Greenwich would be even more interesting and more relevant. So we'd really like to know your views! E-mail them to margery@nzerem.com, or send them to Margery Nzerem at 20 Beaconsfield Rd, SE3 7LZ, and we'll print them in the next issue of Voice.

SUPPORT OFFERED FOR NEW CHAIRS

If you are a new Chair and would like some support from an experienced Chair, contact Margery Nzerem, margery@nzerem.com, 8858-3544. The AGG has a list of experienced Chairs who would be glad to talk to you.

MANAGING MEDICINES IN SCHOOLS



There is no legal duty that requires schools or settings to administer medicines, but it is something which parents may ask schools to do, and a number of schools are developing roles for support staff that build the administration of medicines into their core job description.. If you need guidance, DfES Circular 239/05 'Managing medicines in Schools and Early Years settings' would be useful.

It sets out a clear framework within which local authorities, local health trusts, schools and early years settings can work together to develop policies to ensure that children requiring medicines receive appropriate support. It explains the roles and responsibilities of employers, parents and carers, governing bodies and management groups, head teachers and heads of settings, teachers and other staff and of local health services.

The full document can be downloaded from the DfES website

(from the newsletter of the National Association of Governors)



EXPERIENCED CHAIRS – COULD YOU SUPPORT A NEW CHAIR?

The AGG has a list of experienced Chairs who are happy to offer support to new Chairs, but we are seeking to add more names to the list. If you are an experienced Chair who would be willing to help a new Chair, contact Margery Nzerem, margery@nzerem.com, 8858-3544.