

SCHOOLS FORUM

The Schools Forum met on 3rd December.

An item on Schools Budget – Medium Term Financial Strategy 2008/11 was deferred to the next meeting in January.

A report on the impact of the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) on educational outcomes was presented and discussed. The recommendation was for a revision of the funding formula. Inevitably, any changes to a formula mean that while some schools gain, others may lose.

A report gave an update on the progress on delivering the extended entitlement to free early years learning places to three and four year olds and the impact of the Single Formula Funding. Contributions were received from a number of Forum members. It is obvious that issues remain to be resolved in this area and the consultation is ongoing. A further progress report will be given at the next Forum meeting.

Other items included 14 to 16 Diploma Funding and a Review of Designated Specialist Provision (DSP).

Roy Moore

Chair, Schools Forum

AGM NOTICE

THE AGM OF THE ASSOCIATION
OF GREENWICH GOVERNORS
WILL TAKE PLACE ON
15TH MAY, 2010
DURING THE GOVERNOR'S
CONFERENCE
TAKING PLACE THAT DAY.

Children's Centres are part of the Government's Sure Start programme, and the Head of Rachel McMillan Nursery School and Children's Centre has written about them for Voice.

Sure Start as an organisation sets out to increase the availability of childcare for all children, improve health and emotional development for young children, and support parents as parents in their aspiration towards employment. They have been focused where they are most needed i.e. in disadvantaged areas.

The goal of Children's Centres is to bring together a range of services for all families with children under 5, and their parents. The core services include such things as full day care and early learning; support and information for parents with children with additional needs; Jobcentre Plus; information and advice on local childcare, activities and support; parenting advice, Speech and Language Therapy.

Rachel McMillan Children's Centre is a safe, secure and welcoming place for children; their artwork adorns the walls, there are posters and leaflets easily on hand for adults, covering numerous relevant subjects and it's a great place for Mums, Dads, Grandparents and carers to meet, play, learn, share their parenting experiences and find support, information and advice.

In addition to the core services, at Rachel McMillan there are services to meet local needs, including baby massage, a Baby Club, coffee mornings, playgroup, music and movement sessions, and first aid courses for parents. Parents have been inspired to seek further education in a range of subjects from First Aid to NVQ courses.

Dianne Howard

Community Worker,

Rachel McMillan Nursery School and Children's Centre

CHILDREN'S CENTRES - WHAT ARE THEY?



SAFER RECRUITMENT - RESPONSIBILITIES OF GOVERNING BODIES

On 17th December 2003, Ian Huntley was given two life sentences following the murders of school friends Jessica Chapman and Holy Wells in Soham.

In November 2001 Ian Huntley had successfully applied for a job as a caretaker at Soham College. His employer

was unaware that he had come into contact with Humberside police and social services in relation to eleven incidents, nine of which involved allegations of a sexual nature. These included sexual offences against girls aged sixteen, fifteen, thirteen and eleven. Ian Huntley was neither convicted nor cautioned in relation to any of these incidents.

The Bichard Inquiry Report, published in 2004, highlighted "errors, omissions, failures and shortcomings" involving several agencies and made thirty-one recommendations for action.

Recommendation 16 states that "head teachers and school governors should receive training on how to ensure that interviews to appoint staff reflect the importance of safeguarding children."

Recommendation 17 states that "from a date to be agreed, no interview panel to appoint staff working in schools should be convened without at least one member being properly trained."

As part of a consultation exercise regarding the School Staffing (Consolidation) (England) Regulations 2009, the government has proposed that a new statutory provision be included to make the above Bichard recommendations mandatory from 1st January 2010.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families has, in conjunction with the National College for School Leadership, has developed an approved training workshop to:

- give participants an awareness and understanding of offender behaviour;
- identify the key features of staff recruitment that help deter or prevent the appointment of unsuitable people;
- consider policies and practices that minimise opportunities for abuse or ensure its prompt reporting; help participants begin to review their own and their organisation's policies and practices with a view to making them 'safer'.

This workshop can be completed online – see www.ncsl.org.uk

The workshop has also been delivered locally in Greenwich since June 2007 and further courses are planned for 04/03/2010 and 15/06/2010. Each workshop consists of four modules delivered during a full day's training, from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. Each workshop includes an assessment and participants are therefore required to attend for the full day.

To apply, please contact Jackie Jones at:
The Professional Development Centre,
Eltham Green School, Middle Park Avenue, SE9 5EQ.
Email: jjones.greenwich@lgfl.net or telephone 0208 331 3164.

Tom Owens
Child Protection Co-ordinator (Schools), Greenwich Council

A VALUE FOR MONEY GUIDE FOR SCHOOL GOVERNORS FREE FROM THE AUDIT COMMISSION

In June the Audit Commission published a report about value for money in schools. One of the conclusions of the Commission was that insufficient attention was paid to economy and efficiency in schools and that as a result the Commission could not be sure that the taxpayer was receiving value for money. Following the report the Audit Commission issued separate guidance for local authorities, headteachers and school governors.

The guidance for governors, *Valuable lessons improving economy and efficiency in schools*, was published in July 2009 and is available to download from the Audit Commission's website via this link:

<http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/AuditCommissionReports/NationalStudies/valuablelessons-governors-guide-30jun2009.pdf>



USEFUL INFORMATION

If you have a question about being a governor your first port of call is of course always Governor Services. But if you still can't find the answer, or need advice you can't get locally – try Governorline, 08000 722 181, open 9am-10pm weekdays, 11am-4pm weekends. It's free!

The National Governors Association, the National Association of Head Teachers, and the National Association of School and College Leaders have agreed a document on 'What governing bodies can expect from school leaders and what school leaders can expect from governing bodies.' The document can be downloaded at <http://www.nga.org.uk/uploadfiles/documents/GovernorsandHeadsfinal08.pdf>

There's a new governors' discussion forum on the internet - www.ukgovernors.org.uk

NATIONAL GOVERNORS ASSOCIATION LEGAL SERVICES

(This article is a precis of information on the NGA website)

Governing Bodies, says the NGA, need legal protection, because there are a whole series of situations where legal action could be taken against a school, and in many cases the Governing Body is the legal authority that has to defend the claim.

Most schools will have insurance through their local authority; this will cover the costs for routine claims against a school. Some, but not all, local authorities offer governing bodies access to legal advice. The NGA believes that there are gaps in the local authority support system, and has practical case study evidence to prove the point. Schools with their own insurance arrangements should be better protected, but policies often have exclusion clauses and excess limits. Insurers will also often prefer to pay out on a small claim, even if the school might wish to challenge a claim.

Governors may find it difficult to imagine facing the need to have an expensive conversation with a lawyer, but the fact is that the need for proper legal support is not uncommon. The reality of the situation at present is that Governing Bodies feel powerless when faced with an intransigent local authority or an employee's legal representative. Far too many governing bodies throw in the towel even when they have a good case, and far too many governors resign from the governing body after conceding in a situation where they felt they were in the right.

Examples

In one case a parent was making very public complaints against teachers. The school had written evidence to demonstrate that the allegations were false, and the governors wished to issue a press release defending their staff and denying the allegations. The local authority instructed the Headteacher and governing body not to contact the press. Without independent legal advice the Governors had little choice but to concede. Subsequent legal advice indicated that the local authority was acting beyond its powers.

In another case a Governing Body appointed a new Headteacher only too discover that, within months, the new head was behaving in an arrogant and dismissive way towards governors and failing to follow proper procedures in terms of finance and staffing. The governors wished to initiate disciplinary procedures but were consistently advised against this course of action by the local authority. Subsequently governors discovered that their failure to take early disciplinary action against the Head counted against them in an employment tribunal hearing.

A pupil claimed to have been hurt whilst moving through the school. His parents made a claim against the school. The family had been in dispute with the school in the past and teachers believed that the claim was invented. The local authority's insurers recommended a payout because the sum claimed was less than £2000. Governors believe that the payout would damage discipline and generate more claims; a stiff letter from a solicitor could, they believe, have 'seen off' the claim, but the local authority would not offer legal support to the school.

In the following types of case the NGA feels that the Governing Body would need access to independent legal advice.

- Disputes with the local authority - such as negligent advice from SIPs or advisors, school closure claims, issues around building work and planning consent, special needs advice.
- Employment law cases - grievance, performance management disputes, capability, wrongful or constructive dismissal.
- Human rights cases - uniform, religious observance, admissions.
- Special needs cases - particularly around provision, admissions, and exclusions.
- Admissions and exclusions - particularly where the school is the admissions authority

Because of all of this, the NGA is now offering a scheme to its members to provide legal support. It is working with the respected midlands legal firm Anthony Collins to offer an independent service. NGA professional staff will offer initial advice, supported by senior lawyers at Anthony Collins; at this stage contact will be managed by NGA professional staff.

If further support is necessary the NGA may, with the support of Anthony Collins, initiate correspondence on a governing body's behalf. This might include letters to third parties, responses to correspondence, or direct representation in meetings with third parties.

All the above is offered at no cost to NGA members.

If there is a need or further advice and support the NGA may recommend direct representation by Anthony Collins on competitive rates of payment negotiated by the NGA. If a NGA member followed that option the governing body or association would have the benefit of a fully briefed legal team and NGA professional staff would continue to offer liaison and support.

Governing bodies can join the NGA for £60 a year.

Contact NGA HQ: Tel 0121 643 5787, Email governorhq@nga.org.uk internet <http://www.nga.org.uk/join.aspx>

REVIEW OF THE PRIMARY CURRICULUM

The Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum was conducted by Sir Jim Rose over the year 2008, in response to a remit from the Secretary of State, Ed Balls.

The number of subjects and the amount of prescription was making it difficult for schools to be flexible and this can affect pupils who are struggling to keep up or those who require more challenging tasks. The remit was to reduce prescription and make the curriculum more flexible.

An Interim Report was published in December 2008, which drew a wide range of responses, and these, together with visits to schools, consultation conferences, evidence of international best practice and meetings with expert groups have been used to form the recommendations of the review. The final report was published on the 30th of April 2009.

The central questions for the review have been: what should the curriculum contain and how should the content and teaching of it change to foster children's different and developing abilities during the primary years.

The touchstone of an excellent curriculum is that it instils in children a love of learning for its own sake. So primary children must not only learn what to study but they must also learn how to study. This will enable them to become confident, self-disciplined individuals capable of engaging in a lifelong process of learning.

Primary Children's zest for learning is unrivalled and, as elsewhere, high-quality teaching in the primary years is crucial to children's success. The Cambridge Primary Review (April 2009) states 'A curriculum is only as good as those who teach it' and Mc Kinsey and Company in its 2007 report on the world's best-performing school systems, said that 'The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers.' Pedagogy and curriculum content should both be considered and the Review has attempted to do this.

The design of the curriculum has to be underpinned by an understanding of three distinct but interlocking ways in which children learn and develop between the ages of 5 and 11 – physical, intellectual, emotional, social, cultural, moral and spiritual.

A well-planned, vibrant curriculum recognises that primary children relish learning independently and co-operatively; they love to be challenged and engaged in practical activities; they delight in understanding more about the world; and they readily emphasise with others through working together and through experiences in the arts, literature, religious education and much else.

Teachers have told the Review that there is so much prescribed content in the current curriculum that they do not have time to teach it in depth. The Rose Reviews acknowledges that making the primary curriculum more manageable will bring important benefits for children.

Doona Studdard
Senior Consultant - Primary

For those who missed yesterday's lesson, you can visit my blog and download the notes and the video show. And remember, no posting of irrelevant, spam and abusive comments please.



BONUSES & HONORARIA - DON'T DO IT!!

It seems that some schools are still giving a bonus or an honoraria payment to headteachers or teachers for high performance. I would draw all governors attention to page 147 of the 'School

Teachers Pay and Conditions Document 2009 and Guidance on School Teachers Pay and Conditions'.

An unwieldy title for an unwieldy document but it does contain the legal powers for payments to teachers, this includes headteachers, it says:

'The document does not provide for the payment of bonuses or so-called honoraria in any circumstances' and yes it is in bold in the document. Payments not specifically authorised by this document may lead to those authorising the payments being liable.

Jim Draper

