

**Summary Notes from the Meeting of the  
Association of Sandwell Governing Bodies (ASGB)  
held at 6.15pm on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2019 at  
Guardian House, West Bromwich**

**Welcome and Apologies**

Mr Patel, Chair of ASGB, welcomed guests and members to the meeting and thanked them for attending. Apologies and declarations of interest were noted. Mr Patel observed that the number of members in attendance was disappointing.

**Richard Oakes, Manager, Sandwell Residential Education Service**

Mr Oakes' presentation is attached. Additional comments are recorded in the notes sections clearly identified as 'ASGB NOTES'.

Mr Oakes was more than willing to speak with/visit any school or attend any governing body meeting to discuss the needs and benefits of using the excellent facilities that Sandwell's Residential Centres offered.

In response to a question raised after he had left the meeting, Mr Oakes subsequently clarified:

*'Regarding Special Schools: the Centres work with the Meadows, the Orchard, Shenstone, and the PRU's. Some of the programmes are day visits; others are residential using, for example, the cottage at Edgmond Hall. As with all groups, the starting point is a discussion with school staff about the intended purpose of a visit, and of course the practical issues around accessibility, safety, staffing etc. Groups tend to be small, and we'd be careful not to offer something we wouldn't be confident providing – but we're always keen to talk to see what we can do'.*

The Chair affirmed his support for Sandwell's Centres, which he and other colleagues believed were a valuable resource for Sandwell Schools.

**Update from Craig Felton, Director Governance SIPS**

Mr Felton advised that school governance was quiet at the moment, there had been no recent updates to the handbook, nor regulatory changes.

A new complaints policy had been launched however.

The Chairs' training and the Clerks' training via NGA was progressing and was well attended.

SIPS Education now supported over 250 schools in seven or eight Local Authorities.

There was little movement towards converting to academy status in Sandwell but this was not the case elsewhere. The emphasis was on growing MATS.

Inspections under the new Ofsted framework were not so focused on data and this had been evidenced during the inspections that had taken place recently.

In response to a question, Mr Felton confirmed that there had been changes in Cabinet linked to the 20/30 vision, these included changes to the role titles.

**David Lowbridge-Ellis, Joint Lead on the DfE Commission in the West Midlands – Workload in Schools**

At the end of his presentation, Mr Lowbridge-Ellis invited questions which he answered as follows:

- Marking in primary schools should be appropriate for the year group and subject, for example Ryders Hayes Teaching School didn't mark at all. Teachers' made notes during the lesson, picking up on what was working and what needed to be covered again or in a different way while the lesson was

taking place. Members were invited to contact the school to see this way of working in action.

- At his secondary school, the amount of time spent marking had been cut by 75%, resulting in feedback becoming more timely and effective. Mr Lowbridge-Ellis referred members to the handout 'Practical Tools: Example of a whole school approach to wellbeing' that included 47 examples for schools to consider to reduce workload.
- Schools needed to tackle the main issues such as data, planning and marking rather than to offer peripheral 'add-ons' that didn't address the core problem such as offering recreational events.
- Marking always came out on top of all surveys, as the task that took up most of a teacher's time.
- Reading and dealing with emails came next, especially for the leadership team. At his school, there had been an agreement that no staff member was expected to open an email outside of school.
- Data came third in the survey.
- Surveys indicated that teachers actually enjoyed planning lessons although planning did take up a lot of their time.

**Opportunity for members to share their own thoughts/good practice with regard to the previous agenda item.**

The Chair thanks Mr Lowbridge-Ellis for his presentation and invited members to share their own thoughts and good practice. The following comments were made:

- A member observed that workloads in general were increasing and in schools, this usually meant better standards but the price paid was in teachers' time – there was no simple answer.
- It was a governor's responsibility to be mindful about the wellbeing and mental health of teachers; teachers supported pupils but who supported them? Governors should ask the question 'what have we put in place to support our teachers?'
- Sickness, absenteeism and turnover might all be considered indicators of the level of morale and engagement in school. These were measures of which governors should be aware and that should not be ignored.
- A member questioned how progress/attainment could be measured and feedback could be provided if no marking took place. 'Live feedback' was a difficult concept to understand – how would parents for example, be updated with their child's progress and how would poor teaching be identified?
- The Chair commented that the culture in schools was changing, becoming more pro-active; senior leaders were more accountable and governors provided more challenge.
- Another member agreed that schools had changed; the curriculum, workloads and accountabilities, thus there was a need for schools to have a wellbeing policy that looked after all staff members.
- Mr Lowbridge-Ellis had mentioned that in his school, all communication with parents was conducted through the pastoral team, teachers did not speak directly to parents. Members discussed how this would work, in particular, in special schools where contact with parents and carers was especially important.
- Turning to the subject of data, again, governors found it difficult to appreciate how only having three data drops would work in practice, suggesting that

without regular data, the SLT would need to spend a great deal of time in the classroom observing.

### **Minutes of the Meetings held 10<sup>th</sup> April 2019**

Minutes were agreed and there were no matters arising not already on the agenda.

### **Updates from Executive Committee**

- All four local MP's had now responded to ASGB's letters regarding the financial situation in schools and indicated that they would be pleased to meet with governors. As it was likely that meetings would need to take place on a Friday, the support clerk was asked to try and establish some convenient dates to put forward to the MP's.
- Mr Hussain had been a judge for the recent NGA National Governance Awards and was very pleased to advise that the overall winner was a Birmingham school, James Brindley Academy which had been successful in overcoming some huge challenges, taking the school from 'Requires Improvement' to 'Good' in just two years. Another Midlands school had also been recognised for setting up its own college to provide a pathway to post 16 students when no other avenue met their specific needs.

### **Open Forum/Any Other Business**

- We were very pleased to welcome two new governors to the meeting who had been introduced to their schools through 'Governors for Schools'. As governor recruitment was an issue for many schools, we will be following up on this to share with members. It would be interesting to know if other schools had used this service or similar, or how they have recruited governors with the skills needed. Please get in touch and share your experience and advice.

### **Next Meeting Date**

Next meeting will be held on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2019. Please note your diaries. The meeting will include an update from Chris Ward, Director Education, Skills and Employment. It was also suggested that we invite a speaker to talk about the new Ofsted framework, ideally, a governor who had already been through the process.