

Meeting of the Association of Sandwell Governing Bodies (ASGB)

with Adrian Bailey MP on 13th September 2019 at 12.30pm in

Terry Duffy House, West Bromwich

Present:

Mrs E Benbow – Moorlands Primary and Co-Chair ASGB Executive

Ms Tanya Derham –SIPS Education Music

Miss Lynne Foster, Support Officer ASGB and Moat Farm Junior

Mrs Lynn Howard – Lyng Primary and Co-Chair ASGB Executive

Mrs J L'Herroux – Moat Farm Infant

Mr S Hussain – Ormiston Forge Academy and ASGB Executive

Mr B Patel – Great Bridge Primary and Vice Chair ASGB Executive

Mrs A Randhana – Galton Valley Primary and ASGB Executive

Informal Notes to be shared with ASGB members:

Mr Bailey invited attendees to introduce themselves and made reference to the discussion that took place in our last meeting with him on 21st June 2019.

He told governors that the Government seemed to have recognised the seriousness of the school funding situation and with a General Election probable, had started to promise more money for schools, but, Mr Bailey cautioned, there were no details. And of course, a General Election might well mean new Ministers.

Support for more school funding was supported by MP's from all sides and it was important that the momentum was maintained.

At this point, Tanya Derham, Assistant Head of Service, SIPS Music was invited to share the impact that the reduction in school funding had had on the teaching of music in schools.

For the benefit of Mr Bailey, Tanya explained that music was a specialised 'traded service' which meant that schools had to 'buy back' the service for their school from their budget.

Approximately 48 music teachers delivered music lessons across the borough, offering tuition on various instruments from recorders to trumpets. It was noted that, like schools, the SIPS Music had had incurred the same costs as schools with regard to teachers pay rises, pensions and NI rises.

Tanya advised that there had been 10% year on year reduction in schools using the music service, 30% lower than three years ago, resulting in fewer and fewer children learning music.

Head Teachers and governors, under pressure with reduced budgets, often felt that providing music instruction for a relatively small number of pupils was not viable.

Schools were now asking parents/carers to contribute to the cost (Tanya reported that this might be anything between £20 and £80 per term) but in a deprived area such as Sandwell, this was out of the question for many families.

Sharing her own personal experience, Tanya was passionate about sharing the gift of music with Sandwell's children. It was a serious concern that the service, which has a fantastic reputation, would decline, not because of the quality of the service but simply through lack of funding.

Mr Bailey referred to the Sandwell Youth Orchestra and picking up on this, Tanya observed that with less and less music lessons offered in school, fewer and fewer children would go on to reach such prestigious standards. She referred to her email (attached) which detailed the benefits of music education and the consequences of the decline.

It was increasingly difficult to get schools and governors to justify the cost of music provision despite them valuing the service.

Tanya shared some examples of how schools were trying to provide music by using staff, who might be able to play an instrument, but who were not qualified to teach music. Experience had also exposed how little instruction was available to NQT's as part of their training.

In an area such as Sandwell, many children would miss out on experiences and opportunities such as music, unless they were offered in schools.

Having listened to Tanya's presentation, Mr Bailey proposed that he raise 'Teaching Music in Schools' in an Adjournment Debate, drawing on the experiences in Sandwell. This would allow him time for a short speech in Parliament and give the Minister an opportunity to defend the Government.

Mr Bailey would need information in greater detail in order to quote local experience and 'pitch' for more money for music in schools.

A member suggested that schools that did use the Music service could provide their positive experiences/benefits.

Mrs Benbow asked if Mr Bailey might widen his Adjournment Debate to include other cultural experiences; referring to the Sandwell Cultural Education Partnership and stating that the Wednesbury Art Gallery for example, would fully support.

Mr Bailey responded that this might be too broad a debate and felt that it would be most effective to table the debate solely on music at this stage.

Referring back to discussions from the last meeting, Mr Bailey told governors that he had twice tabled a debate on computer science in schools and much lobbying had taken place but the issue had not yet been drawn. If Parliament was recalled, it might mean that there would be more time for debate.

The Government's Spending Review was briefly discussed and everyone agreed upon the importance of keeping up the pressure up on MP's and ensuring that school finance remains high on the Government's agenda.

The meeting concluded with Mr Bailey agreeing to contact Tanya direct for the information he would need to take things forward.

A further meeting was proposed in the New Year.

Our thanks to Mr Bailey MP and all those governors who attended.

Meeting closed at 1.05pm