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LONG SERVICE AWARDS FOR BUCKINGHAMSHIRE GOVERNORS

Rafiq Raja, chairman of MPA is seated second from right. article on page 10

Welcome to the New School Year

At the time of writing we are coming to the end of a very good summer. The New School Term has just started and despite the hype local schools appear to have bucked the national trend of underperformance at GCSEs. However, it is difficult to fathom the true picture because each school uses its own statistics for painting a rosy picture. Nevertheless, it is more than likely that the level of GCSE passes in five subjects including Maths & English at grades A* to C by the Black & Minority Ethnic pupils will not have changed dramatically.

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Whilst the MPA applauds all schools which are trying to cope with the hand given to them by the selective system with positivity and determination to increase the 'value added' it is about time schools reviewed their own workings especially whether or not they have the same expectations for all their children. There is now a determination on part of the parent groups to seek the reasons, from schools and education authorities, for the continued underachievement by the BME pupils and whether the extra funds provided by the central government under the Pupil Premium are making a difference.

The MPA is aware that it is not something which can be addressed in a few years and yet when you look around the country you find that many schools have been moved from 'special measures' to being considered 'outstanding' by Ofsted and many inner city schools with substantial numbers of BME children have not only reached the national average for GCSE success but have even done better. So it is time the usual excuses were not so readily put forward to explain the gap in the levels of achievement of mainstream and BME, especially Pakistani origin, pupils.

The MPA has joined hands with the Parents Forum for Children of African & Caribbean Heritage to set up the Bucks Minority Education Concern, which has planned its Third Annual Conference for parents on the Theme of 'To inform & empower'. The event takes place on Saturday, 14 September 2013, at Cressex Community School at 12.45PM for 1PM. The conference has Monica Austin, Headteacher at Ashcroft High School, Luton, (a mixed comprehensive which she has led from special measures in January 2005 to being judged as outstanding by Ofsted in March 2011) as the Keynote speaker, with a panel of local head teachers, governors and BMEC activists will answer questions from parents in Q & A session. A group of young professionals will relate their experiences of education, which hopefully will motivate the audience. The conference has also received a number of nominations, from Wycombe schools, for some of their pupils to receive special recognition for their contribution to school life and these pupils will receive awards on the day. The MPA would like all its supporters to join some very active people, working for raising educational standards for all our children. Please see the back page for more information.

This year Ramadan came during the last few days of the summer term and with very hot days indeed. If the hot weather during the summer months continues then Ramadan 2014 will not only fall entirely in July, but will be hottest to date.

We also wish to offer our good wishes for Eid ul Adha, which will be celebrated towards the end of October.

The MPA vice chairman, Cllr Mohammed Shafique, MBE, completed a very successful year as Mayor of High Wycombe in May. His talents were recognised and he was appointed to lead the team organising the elections for the Mosque Management Committee, which his team successfully organised in early september; The MMC has been transformed by the elections. The MPA wishes the new team all the best for the future and thanks the outgoing team for all their efforts in the area of education.

The World of Education/Taleem Ki Duniya (TKD) is a tremendous opportunity to discuss local and national educational matters (and dissemination of knowledge about other issues relating to health, diet, employment, taxation, etc) for the benefit of the Urdu/Punjabi speaking listeners and their children, who are the future for all of us. See bottom of page 3, for more information.



Message from Steve Baker MP

Where possible, I continue to give support to a number of local community activities in the constituency, including visiting primary and secondary schools.

When I last visited Cressex School I joined its co-operative; the co-operative means the school's activities are underpinned by a philosophy of everyone working together to govern the school, maintain the buildings and support the staff and teaching programme. I am a great believer in any organisation where people work together on a voluntary basis for the wider good, and that is why I was delighted to join and play a part in the life of the life of the school.

I should like to end by sending my best wishes to everyone.

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Listen to 'The World of Education' - Taleem Ki Dunya Every Sunday, on High Wycombe's Awaaz Radio (107.4FM) between 10AM & 12 NOON.

World of Education tries to inform the members of the Asian community in general and the Pakistani community in particular, about the importance of education with a particular emphasis on informing the 'hard to reach' community.

If you are interested in taking part in a future programme or have some topics or ideas about raising educational achievement levels then get in touch with Rafiq Raja: raja@awaazradio.com



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THE ACCOUNTING OFFICER AND THE NEW ACADEMIES FINANCIAL HANDBOOK - WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW?

The Headteacher or Principal clearly has the most important role in the running of a school, but in an academy the role of the Headteacher is more important than ever.

This is because the academy's funding agreement (FA) with the Department for Education requires the Headteacher to take on the role of Accounting Officer.

The new Academies Financial Handbook was published in September 2012, and at 28 pages is considerably shorter than the old 2006 version and far easier to digest. It is vital that Headteachers read and understand the implications of the Financial Handbook, indeed we would recommend that it is read by all governors, or certainly key individuals such as the Chair of Governors and Chair of Finance.

The Handbook can be downloaded from:
<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/>

What responsibilities does the Accounting Officer have?

The Accounting Officer has ultimate responsibility for all day-to-day financial matters, and is responsible to the governing body for ensuring propriety, as well as efficient and effective use of available resources.

Whilst in practice many, if not all, of these responsibilities will be delegated, for example by appointing a Director of Finance or School Business Manager, the overall responsibility lies with the Headteacher. The Headteacher therefore needs to be comfortable that the person to which matters are delegated is suitably experienced, trained and resourced, and should work closely with them to ensure that appropriate systems and controls are in place, and operated effectively.

The essence of the Accounting Officer's role is a personal responsibility for:

- the propriety and regularity of the public finances for which they are answerable;
- the keeping of proper accounts;
- prudent and economical administration;
- the avoidance of waste and extravagance;
- ensuring value for money;
- the day to day running of the school including organisation, staffing and management; and
- the efficient and effective use of all the resources in their charge.

The new Financial Handbook expands on these and the responsibilities set out in the funding agreement, stating that the Accounting Officer must:

- take personal responsibility (which must not be delegated) for assuring the board that there is compliance with the Handbook, the FA and all relevant aspects of company and charitable law;
- be able to assure Parliament and the public of high standards of probity in the management of public funds;
- advise the board of trustees in writing if, at any time, in his or her opinion, any action or policy under consideration by the governing body is incompatible with the terms of the Handbook or FA;
- advise the board in writing if the board appears to be failing to act where required to do so by the terms and conditions of the Handbook or FA;

- consider the reasons the board gives for its decision where the board of trustees is minded to proceed, despite the advice of the Accounting Officer and if the Accounting Officer still considers that the action proposed by the board is in breach of the Handbook or FA, the Accounting Officer must advise in writing the EFA's accounting officer of the position.

In 2011/12 the Accounting Officer had to sign a formal declaration within the annual financial statements that he or she had met their personal responsibilities, and that, amongst other things, there were no instances of irregularity or improper use of funds.

The importance of value for money in 2012/13

The requirements for the Accounting Officer declaration for 2012/13 will be different and more involved. Full details will be available from the EFA later in the year - probably in their annual Accounts Direction for 2012/13 which is expected no later than 31 May - but we understand that the Accounting Officer will be required to complete a signed annex to the Accounting Officer's statement including a short statement explaining how the academy has secured value for money.

Since this value for money statement will form part of the annual accounts it must be sent to the EFA, and be published as part of the accounts on the academy's website.

Value for money received a lot of public attention in the Autumn of 2012 when a BBC television programme highlighted that a number of schools had been the victim of a large-scale leasing rip off, leaving several schools out of pocket by tens of thousands of pounds. Fortunately a High Street bank wrote off millions of pounds in debts as an act of goodwill to some of these schools, but nevertheless a number of Headteachers lost their jobs as a result of the scandal.

In 2011/12 auditors to academy schools had to provide a limited assurance opinion on regularity to the school and the EFA, but in 2012/13 a more involved reasonable assurance opinion will be required. This will require more work for the

auditors, and more questions of the Accounting Officer!

The Audit Committee and the risks to internal control

Multi-academy trusts (MATs) must now have a dedicated Audit Committee, whose duties would include reviewing the risks to internal financial control, and agreeing a programme of work that will address these risks. The programme of work may be managed by the academy in the way deemed most appropriate to its individual circumstances.

Although single academies are not required to have an Audit Committee, they are required to have a committee which fulfils the functions of an Audit Committee (for example, the Finance Committee can take on this role).

How has the Responsible Officer role changed for 2012/13?

The 'old' Responsible Officer role provided an independent oversight of the academy's financial affairs and assurance over the internal controls. One of the changes introduced in the new Handbook is an alteration to the Responsible Officer role.

Whilst an academy may decide that a governor acting as a Responsible Officer may be the best way of managing the risks, there is more flexibility now, with a range of options available. The strict requirement for quarterly monitoring visits has also been replaced by a more flexible programme.

One option available is an internal audit type function, and this can be outsourced to a professional firm, and this is a role UHY Hacker Young fulfils for a number of their academy clients. Alternatively, UHY Hacker Young can support a Responsible Officer by performing some detailed checking on his or her behalf.

Managing surplus GAG

The old Financial Handbook contained a clause restricting the amount of General Annual Grant (GAG) that could be carried forward from one year to the next to 12% of the total GAG payable in the year just ended.

The new Handbook has removed this restriction; or at least potentially has. The restrictions on carry forward have been removed to allow academies to build up reserves, for example towards long term capital projects, but academies need to be clear whether there is anything in their funding agreement that would overrule the general revision. Early converter academies in particular would need to be careful, and in such instances the clause in the funding agreement would need to be amended by agreement between the academy and the DfE.

Some academies should also be careful where their funding agreement contains a clause permitting the Secretary of State to specify a restriction by notice in writing at the beginning of a financial year. We would recommend that academies with funding agreements containing this clause seek clarification from the EFA as to whether or not the academy is affected by the new rules.

Other points to watch in the Financial Handbook

Certain non-routine transactions need particular care, and Accounting Officers should ensure that they follow the correct procedures when dealing with the following:

Staff severance payments and compensation payments

These should be justified and based on a legal assessment of the chances of the academy winning a tribunal. If the legal assessment

suggests a better than even chance of winning there is no basis for settling the case. The level of any settlement must be properly justified after giving consideration to the likely tribunal award.

Liabilities and write offs

Academies must obtain Secretary of State approval before entering into guarantees or writing off debts over certain thresholds. Full details are provided in the Handbook but the limit for a single transaction is the lower of 1% of total annual income or £45,000.

Asset sales, leases and tenancy agreements

Academies must obtain approval from the Secretary of State, via the EFA, before entering into any freehold sales or purchases, or before granting or taking up certain leasehold or tenancy agreements.

It should be borne in mind that any payments of the nature of the above examples will be disclosed in the accounts from 2012/13 onwards. Aggregate figures for each category will need to be disclosed, as well as a separate disclosure for each transaction above £5,000.

THE NEXT STEP

We are working closely with a growing number of academy schools, and can assist Headteachers and governors in facing the challenges of good governance. We are able to provide training sessions to governors, a full internal audit function, or assistance to Responsible Officers.

If you would like to receive specific advice tailored to your needs, please contact Colin Wright at c.wright@uhy-uk.com, Matthew Anderson at m.anderson@uhy-uk.com or Gregory Chong at g.chong@uhy-uk.com, or call them on +44 (0)20 7216 4600. Alternatively, read more about us on our website at academy-schools.uhy-uk.com

Further guidance is available from the following publications:

The Department for Education – Buying Goods or Services:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/procurement>

Tips for successful leasing:

<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/p/tips%20for%20successful%20leasing.pdf>

Charities and charity trustees - an introduction for school governors:

http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/Library/intro_for_school_governors.pdf

Charity Commission - The Essential Trustee:

<http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/Library/guidance/cc3text.pdf>

The official opening of Cressex School

Dr Katy Simmons, chairman of governors at Cressex Community School, welcomed friends to the official opening last year and used the following words:

We started to work towards a new school ten years ago. At that time, the group of governors and Local Authority officers called our project 'Blue Skies High School'. We called it that because it was a vision of something that needed to happen. But it was a long way away.

Our purpose was clear. The need was clear. We needed a safe, comfortable place to learn, to raise achievement, to give students and staff a sense of pride in their school and a place that would INVITE the community to join us, where people would want to come.

What wasn't clear was how it would happen. How would we get the money? The words of American writer and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson summed up how we went about our task: 'Do not go where the path may lead, instead, go where there is no path and leave a trail'.

For 5 years, we sought new paths that would lead us to our new school - and a number of people, both national and local, joined us on our path, sometimes for a short time, sometimes for longer. They included Lord Adonis, Ed Balls, The Bishop of Buckingham, Lord and Lady Carrington, the Congregation of St Birinus and St John's church, Paul Goodman MP, Michael Hattrell (architect), The Imams from the Wycombe Mosques, David Miliband and the Muslim Parents Association. All these people left a clear footprint on the path to the new school. We thank them.

In the end, it was the national 'Building Schools for the Future' project that gave us the school. BSF was a national initiative that aimed to renew or replace all secondary schools. Buckinghamshire, along with a number of other local authorities, was not due to get any schools until 2015. However, thanks to strenuous lobbying, the then government gave each of these Authorities ONE school, on account.

In Buckinghamshire, that chosen school was Cressex. They called us 'a pathfinder school'. At that point, we were joined by Hampshire Architects Department, the Properties team from Bucks LA, BAM construction company. These were the people whose skills turned our vision into a reality. We thank them.

SO - I hope you'll see from this short history that this isn't just a building. It embodies the aspirations, work and skills of many people over a long period of time. From time to time we had setbacks and what seemed like impossible hurdles to surmount. What kept us going?

Underlying all the hard work were values, the things we thought were important, Equality, Solidarity, Social responsibility and Caring for others. All those values that led us, 2010, to become Buckinghamshire's first Cooperative Trust, with our local partners Dr Challoner's Grammar School, Wycombe Abbey School, Bucks New University, the LA and the Cooperative College. Though the story has moved on, the values remain. We wanted a school that would invite you in. We have that now. We now invite you to be part of the next chapter in our story. The best is yet to come and we look forward to you being part of our future.

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HIGHCREST ACADEMY'S NEW ADMISSIONS POLICY

There were fears among the local community that the effect of Highcrest Academy's new admissions policy would be that local children who lived close to Highcrest would lose out on places to children who lived further away; secondly, that children who scored higher in Highcrest's banding test would have a higher chance of getting a place at the school, because more children in the top bands would choose to go to grammar schools.

So what are the likely effects of the 'bandings' policy. The following article was written before the summer break after Highcrest had published their admissions data for this year and it painted a very worrying picture, confirming the fears about local children losing out.

The analysis of the key data is based entirely on data provided by Highcrest Academy on 20 May 2013 and it represents the early rounds of offers made by the school. It is likely that since then there will have been some minor changes with children moving or deciding to take places elsewhere. With or without these changes, the data represents a set of outcomes allowed for by Highcrest's new admissions policy. The data shows that:

- In Band A, 18 children who live more than a mile away from Highcrest have been given places. In Bands C and D, 37 children who live less than a mile away from Highcrest were not offered places.
- 25 children, all of whom live less than three-quarters of a mile away from Highcrest, were not offered places who would have been allocated places if purely distance criteria (with no banding) had been used for non-priority admissions.
- Because so many children in Band A chose to go to grammar schools, the children left in the top band had a 100% chance of being offered a place at Highcrest. By contrast, in Band C, 50 children were not offered a place and in Band D, 55 children were not offered a place.
- Taking all applicants in each band, a child in Band D was 60 times more likely to be refused a place than a child in Band A:
 - 0 children in Band A were refused a place
 - 43% of children in Band B were refused a place
 - 55% of children in Band C were refused a place
 - 60% of children in Band D were refused a place
- Highcrest did not allocate 25% of children to each band as their admissions policy requires. 92 children were placed in Band D, 91 children were placed in Band C, 88 children were placed in Band B and 81 children were placed in Band A. This was the result of multiple children receiving a score that sat at the grade boundary – an outcome which the school did not seem to have prepared for. This meant that before any admissions criteria were applied, children in Band A already had a higher chance of being offered a place.
- But a different configuration which still kept all children with the same score together could have been used and would have been a closer fit to the 25% per band requirement, as it would have resulted in a smaller gap between the smallest and biggest bands and the largest deviation from the 25% requirement would have been 1.42% rather than 1.99%.
- If this configuration had been used, 4 children in Band D who were refused places would have been offered places, 1 child in Band C who was refused a place would have been offered a place and 5 children in Band B who were refused places would have been offered places. These children all lived significantly closer to the school than the children in Band A who were ultimately offered places in their stead.

It is sincerely hoped that Highcrest will now do everything they can to make the new admissions policy fairer. One simple step they can take which would ensure that chances are spread more evenly across all bands, would be to time their banding test to take place after children have received offers of grammar school places. Given the changes that are being made to the 11+ timetable, this should be entirely possible and would demonstrate Highcrest's commitment to protecting the interests of the local children they are supposed to serve.

Something for seniors to do to keep those "ageing" grey cells active!

- 1 Johnny 's mother had three children. The first child was named April. The second child was named May. ...*What was the third child 's name?*
- 2 There is a clerk at the butcher shop, he is five feet ten inches tall and he wears size 10 trainers....*What does he weigh?*
- 3 Before Mt. Everest was discovered, ...*what was the highest mountain in the world?*
- 4 How much dirt is there in a hole ...*that measures two feet by three feet by four feet?*
- 5 What word in the English Language ...*is always spelled incorrectly?*
- 6 Billy was born on December 28th, yet his birthday is always in the summer.*How is this possible?*
- 7 In California , you cannot take a picture of a man with a wooden leg. ...*Why not?*
- 8 If you were running a race, ...*and you passed the person in 2nd place, what place would you be in now?*
- 9 Which is correct to say,... *"The yolk of the egg are white" or "The yolk of the egg is white"?*
- 10 If a farmer has 5 haystacks in one field and 4 haystacks in the other field, ...*how many haystacks would he have if he combined them all in another field?*

Answers on page 10

Specialist advice for academies

Whether you are thinking of converting to academy school status or have already done so, we can help you with the complex array of issues you will need to deal with from best value audit and accounts preparation to fundraising and VAT issues. We will provide you with an independent opinion on your financial situation and recommend any necessary adjustments or improvements to your controls and processes for future years.

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If you would like to discuss your school's requirements, please contact **Gregory Chong**

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LONG SERVICE AWARDS FOR BUCKINGHAMSHIRE GOVERNORS

The Governor Long Service Awards were held at the Green Park Training and Conference Centre, Aston Clinton on the evening of 5 December 2012, to recognise the long service and achievement of Buckinghamshire school governors.

All governors are volunteers and those with over twelve years' service were invited to this bi-annual event, with over 139 governors reaching or surpassing the twelve-year milestone. Many exceed this with Rafiq Raja, Highworth Combined School, High Wycombe and chairman of the Muslim Parents Association having been a school governor for 28 years, Hilary Evans, St Peter's Combined School, Burnham, reaching 32 years but there was Dr Colin Campbell of Waddesdon CE School, Aylesbury, who has notched up 50 years service as a Governor.

Mike Appleyard, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, gave an introductory speech, followed by Martin Tett, Leader of Buckinghamshire County Council, who presented the long-service awards. Sue Imbriano, Director of Children's Services wound up the evening with a closing speech.

Many schools had two, three or four governors fulfilling twelve years' service, with Chartridge Combined School, Chesham and St Nicolas' CE Combined School, Taplow, each having a grand total of five governors reaching the 12 year milestone.

The important work undertaken by governing bodies in schools is recognised by a dedicated Governor Support Team within Buckinghamshire County Council. This team can advise new and existing governors on a range of matters. Anyone who is interested in becoming a governor can contact the team on 01296 383335.

Here are the Answers to the quiz on page 9..

1 Johnny of course 2 Meat 3 Mt. Everest; it just wasn't discovered yet 4 There is no dirt in a hole. 5 Incorrectly 6 Billy lives in the Southern Hemisphere 7 You can't take pictures with a wooden leg. You need a camera to take pictures. 8 You would be in 2nd. Well, you passed the person in second place, not first. 9 Neither, the yolk of the egg is yellow 10 One. If he combines all of his haystacks, they all become one big one.

Bucks Minority Education concern organise their third annual conference

Parental involvement in the education of their children is very important as this forms part of the building blocks for their future and the future peace of mind of the parents. Parents of African, Caribbean, Pakistani and other heritage have been brought up on the value of education and being in an environment where one feels unsure as to what is expected; we as parents have left the education of our children at the school gates until such a time when one is asked to enter through the gates to the Headteacher's office to be informed of the child's misbehaviour.

Bucks Minority Education Concern (BMEC) has sought to make parents aware of the need to actively participate in schools, to become a friend of the school by helping out at lunch times, reading to the children, helping out by going into your child's school to share your culture with the school. BMEC has actively encouraged parents to become school governors so that parents can learn about how the schools function and how they can help.

The third annual Parents conference organised by the BMEC is to be held on Saturday, 14 September 2013 at Cressex Community School, where Monica Austin, Headteacher at Ashcroft High School, a mixed comprehensive in Luton. Monica is credited with having taken the school out of special measures in 2005 to be awarded outstanding by Ofsted in March 2011 is billed as the keynote speaker.

There are a number of other head teachers (Sharon Cromie from Wycombe High, Roz Burch from Widmer End Primary School and Mark Mayne from Sir William Ramsay School and Elaine Skinner Deputy Head at St Michael's Catholic School) who will share their own experience of involving parents into the education of their children and offer some practical advice to parents. Some heads will join other governors and BMEC members to take part in a Q & A session, so that the parents can get answers to some basic questions. A number of young BME professionals will also address the conference with the hope that they can motivate and inspire the audience and school pupils. Awards will also be given to a number of school pupils who have been nominated by their schools for special recognition for their particular contribution to their schools.

The event is free with free refreshments. The BMEC Chairman, John Bajina, is very hopeful of organising a relevant and worthwhile event for all concerned in education and especially for those who are working to close the gap in the levels of educational achievement between the mainstream and BME school pupils in Buckinghamshire and is asking for all parents interested in the education of their children to come and join hands with others who are trying to make a difference.

The conference will start at 1PM sharp and is expected to be concluded by 5PM. All parents, grandparents and young people are therefore, asked to attend.

Please see the last page for conference details.

Do you have something to write about?

If you wish to write about something then please e-mail your contribution as soon as possible. Articles should be or about 500 words; however, if there is something of a more serious nature then please limit it to one page of this Newsletter and e-mail it as soon as possible.



Parents Forum for Children
of African & Caribbean Heritage
IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO RAISE A CHILD



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BMEC – Bucks Minority Education Concern

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