

The Children's Commissioner for England visits Kirklees.

Monday 13 February 2006

The Children's Commissioner for England, Professor Al Aynsley-Green, came to Kirklees in February. He chose to visit Kirklees after hearing about the impressive work that has taken place with Madressahs and supplementary schools.

Professor Al Aynsley-Green was appointed as England's first Children's Commissioner in March 2005. The role aims to give a national voice to all children and young people, especially the disadvantaged and the vulnerable. Independent of government, the Commissioner's remit is to promote awareness of views and interests of children.

Professor Al Aynsley-Green was formally welcomed to Kirklees by Cllr Kath Pinnock, the Leader of the Council; Alison O'Sullivan, the Director of Children's Services; Simon Cale, Chief Executive of the National Children's Centre; and Tom Irwin who is leading on the Every Child Matters agenda for Kirklees.

Professor Aynsley-Green then went on to meet some young people involved in decision making in Kirklees, these included:

- A group of children who are part of the Dalton Tenants & Residents Association, and act as a grants panel. They were meeting to consider three new applications from other groups. Kids Count provides grants of up to £1,000 to groups of children to fund their own projects. Decisions about how funds should be allocated are made by children.
- A group of young people from Dewsbury who are all members of Dewsbury YOUTH 4EM. They have completed a 5 week training programme and are putting together an accreditation folder.
- A group of young people from Rawthorpe High School who are working with Kirklees to produce a Young People's version of the Children & Young People's Plan.

The Commissioner, along with a number of professionals who work with children; and members of the community, listened to an informative presentation about Madressahs and supplementary schools by Shakeel Hafez, Supplementary Schools Co-ordinator in Kirklees.



Alison O'Sullivan shared with the Commissioner some of the vision for a Children's Service in Kirklees and said, "In Kirklees we want to build services that can breakdown barriers and do things creatively. We are determined to find ways for professionals to join together at a local level. Our vision is to work in seven localities, extended schools and family centres will be key to making this happen."

Professor Al Aynsley-Green addressed the group by saying, "I am delighted to be in Kirklees. I hope this will be the start of a journey together to learn and seek advice. The job I have to do, in reflecting the views of young people, is a challenging one. I am here to listen to your advice about what a Children's Commissioner should do to make sure the voices of young people are heard. I would love to come back and visit a Madressah and have some open discussions about a programme of engagement across the whole of Kirklees".

Tom Irwin rounded off the day by thanking Professor Aynsley-Green for visiting Kirklees. Tom said, "we all welcome the Commissioner's commitment to return to Kirklees and look forward to working with him in the future".

Facts about Madressahs

- Madressah comes from Arabic and means place where lessons are taught
- They are set up to deliver Islamic education in order to preserve religious, cultural and linguistic identities of children aged 5 to 15
- They operate daily in the evenings between 4.30pm - 7.30pm and in some cases at weekends
- They are self-financed, voluntary and independent establishments
- They are managed, administered and coordinated by dedicated volunteers from the local community
- They want Muslim children to become model citizens whilst maintaining their religious and cultural heritage.

