

# GATHERround

EDUCATION NEWS FROM THE GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION  
THROUGHOUT HULL AND EAST RIDING

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## Welcome!

An independent commission's report published on 29<sup>th</sup> May says that Hull and the East Riding councils should look at forging closer working ties to help the region gain devolved powers from Whitehall, as is happening in agreements already in place between councils in and around Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield. Looks as though GATHER is ahead of the game; we've been working closely with both councils in supporting school governors for nearly two years!

Meanwhile, the new government has been in business for less than two months and already it's becoming clear that it intends to accelerate the changes we witnessed under the last administration. There is no doubt that the Conservatives, now that they are less constrained by a coalition partner, will give free rein to the pledges on education made in their manifesto. Read about what we see in our crystal ball in the article 'Brace yourselves!'

As reported the May edition of GATHERround, the East Riding is the lowest-funded authority for education in England. The government has at last recognised the unfairness of the current funding formula and has promised to take steps to address it. However, no additional funding has been pledged so it rather looks as though it's going to be a 'Robin Hood' approach - take from the richer authorities to give to the poorer ones. Sparks will fly!

We welcome any views or opinions on being a governor or on any matter to do with education in general. So...

E-mail us at: [info@ga-ther.org](mailto:info@ga-ther.org)

Post on the Forum at: [www.ga-ther.org](http://www.ga-ther.org)

Tweet us: [@ga\\_ther](https://twitter.com/ga_ther)

## 1. Brace yourselves!

It's going to be a bumpy ride. Education was not a high-profile topic for any party during the election campaign so now the Conservatives have been elected with a majority, what can we expect? We look at what was in the Queen's Speech at the State Opening of Parliament on 27<sup>th</sup> May and what it could mean for us as governors over the next five years. In her speech, the Queen said the following about the forthcoming education bill:

*“Legislation will be brought forward to improve schools and give every child the best start in life, with new powers to take over failing and coasting schools and create more academies.”*

Just one short sentence to cover all that the Conservative intend to do. Let's see what it might mean for us. Firstly, *‘to improve schools and give every child the best start in life’* will need careful thought and extra funding so what did the Conservative manifesto say about that? It promised that it will expand the number of academies and protect England's schools' budget in cash terms but per-pupil funding will not keep pace with inflation. The Institute for Fiscal Studies informed us in March that this could mean as much as a 12% cut in real terms over the next five years. Not the best of starts then.

Next up is *‘new powers to take over failing and coasting schools and create more academies.’* ‘Failing’ schools are presumably those deemed to be inadequate by Ofsted but the definition of ‘coasting’ schools has only just been made clear. You'll find much more on this on the GATHER Forum. As a blanket solution to under-performance, the Conservatives seem to believe that the creation of 500 new free schools and the forcing of about 1000 schools requiring improvement to become academies will sort things out. Less than a week after the election, the ironically-named St Michael's Free School in Camborne, Cornwall announced that it is to close this September just three years after it opened at a cost to the taxpayer of £4.5m. It was deemed to require improvement (was it coasting?) in 2014 but the reason given for closure is because it is ‘no longer viable’. Not the publicity the government wants if it is to create 500 more free schools. By the way, at £4.5m each, 500 new Free Schools will cost £2.5bn. We hope that's not coming out of the schools' budget.

Then there's the role of the new Regional Schools Commissioners (RSCs) who will be charged with overseeing this ‘takeover’ of failing and coasting schools. We now know that our RSC is Jennifer Bexon-Smith, Regional Schools Commissioner for East Midlands and the Humber. What isn't clear is whether her role will extend beyond creating new academies but it might be a good idea for all schools to contact her to find out what (if any) involvement we are likely to have with her.

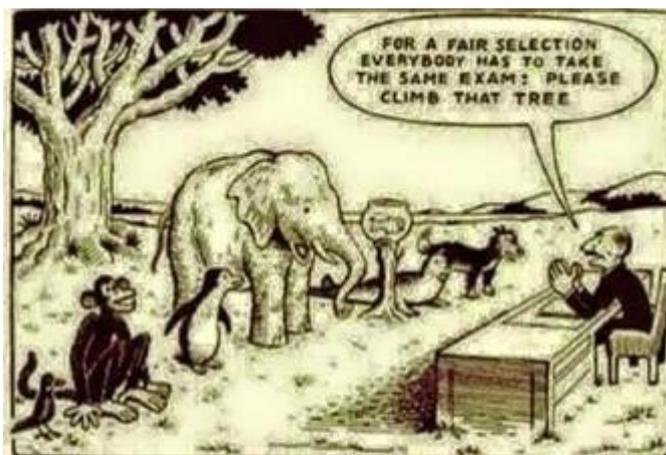


Who's got what job to make all this happen? Nicky Morgan (left) is re-installed as Education Secretary, having been in the job since last July and so is now responsible for delivering the plans Michael Gove set in train. Launching the Education and Adoption Bill on 3<sup>rd</sup> June, she came out fighting saying *“The bill will allow the best education experts to intervene from the first day we spot failure”* and *“It will sweep away the bureaucratic and legal loopholes previously exploited by those who put ideological objections above the best interests of children,”* she said. What's the betting that she will blame the RSCs when things don't go according to plan? Read more

about Ms Morgan's vision for the future in the NGA conference article below and have a look at our members' thoughts on life after the election on the GATHER Forum.

## 2. Re-sits for SATs?

Back in April David Cameron said that if the Conservatives won the election, they would put in place legislation to make all pupils who get poor results in their SATs at the end of Key Stage 2 take resits in Year 7. This means up to 100,000 pupils taking second tests in English and/or maths less than a year after 'failing' the first ones and whilst settling into the new environment of secondary school. The Conservatives argue that too often, pupils who have slipped behind never catch up. Among those who fail to make the grade at the age of 11, they say only 7% go on to get the benchmark measurement of five good GCSEs, including English and maths. The re-sit will be another standardised test in maths and English, marked by teachers rather than external examiners with pupils identified as having special needs exempted. There could be up to two retakes, in the spring and summer terms and the number of pupils who failed both of these would be published as part of the league table data. One thing's for sure. If I was in Year 7 and had 'failed' my SATs twice, I'd find any way I could to be out of there as fast as possible. I am still scarred by the shame I felt when I scored 3% in a Year 7 maths exam many years ago!



### Our Education System

**Everybody is a genius but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing it is stupid**

Talking of children feeling ashamed, in a similar vein all Year 1 pupils in maintained schools must take a phonics screening check and take the check again in Year 2 if they didn't meet the required standard in Year 1. There's a further check in Year 3 if they 'fail' again Year 2. What are we doing to our children by ferociously testing and retesting them?

## 3. NGA National Conference

On Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> June GATHER Chair Sue Gollop and Vice Chair Vince Barrett attended this conference in Manchester. The keynote speaker was Secretary of State for Education, Nicky Morgan and she trotted out the expected platitudes about how much better things had been over the past five years and looking to the future, how they will be better still. Here's a list of the main points of her speech with our commentary:

- *“Education is at the heart of this government's agenda.”* Rather surprising as Education was barely mentioned in the run-up to the election.
- *“We are entering a period of calm and stability.”* Very surprising given what follows.
- *“We are moving away from the stakeholder model of governance.”* Governing boards have only just re-constituted, largely on a stakeholder model. So much for stability then!

- *“We must recruit [governors] from a business background.”* No-one from our member schools has told us that they have business people queuing up to become governors.
- *“Financial management is a core role for governors.”* Correct - but it rather sounded as though she will be expecting governors to have control of the day-to-day management of school budgets.
- *“We need to restore the balance in school funding but we need to consult and plan very carefully to avoid turbulence. A new formula won’t be in place for 2016-17.”* Given that there is no new money in the education budget and well-funded areas will be expected to lose money to give to poorly-funded areas, ‘turbulence’ is too mild a word for what will follow. ‘Chaos’ might be more fitting. Sorting it out will take a very long time but we hope that a new and fairer funding formula will be in place by the end of this parliament in 2020.
- *“We are committed to keeping the Pupil Premium.”* Good news but will it be administered and distributed in the same way, using the same criteria? As it was a Lib Dem concept, things may change.
- *“With the new [in-house] Ofsted inspectors and in-house training, Ofsted inspections will become more consistent.”* No response was given to a question asked about the validity of the current inconsistent Ofsted inspections and it remains to be seen how the new OIs as they are to be called, will operate. Oh Aye! Can’t wait!

You can read a summary of Ms Morgan’s speech on the NGA website [here](#)

#### 4. Who’s wearing the trousers?



Acceptable?

On 15<sup>th</sup> May, a huge national media storm was whipped up about the governors at Bridlington School agreeing to a uniform policy that required trousers to be worn by all pupils. Why this story should attract so much attention is something of a mystery given that there are already 63 secondary schools in England that have a trousers-only uniform policy, the nearest to Bridlington, as far as we know, being Withernsea High School where plain black tailored trousers are insisted upon. However, it does seem to have opened up a national debate on what’s suitable wear for young women at secondary school.



Not Acceptable?

Whatever the thinking behind what constitutes acceptable sartorial style in schools, uniform is a very British tradition; no other European country insists on any particular outfit being worn at school. Here, children as young as four can be seen attired in their school’s uniform and the expectation is that, as they move through their education, they will continue to sport the clothing stipulated by each of the schools they attend. Why have school uniform at all? There are two distinct factions on this. Advocates say that a uniform displays pride in the school and does not discriminate between rich and poor. It guarantees a smart appearance, unhampered by passing fashion trends and ensures that young people understand the need to be appropriately dressed for particular roles, in this case that of school pupil. There is also a line of thought that says pupils are less likely to misbehave on their way to and from school if they are instantly recognisable as a pupil at

a particular school. Opponents say that uniform is nothing at all to do with a school's principal functions of teaching and learning and that valuable time can be wasted in enforcing uniform rules. It's also argued that many schools insist on parents purchasing school uniforms from a particular supplier, often at a cost far exceeding that of similar suitable clothing items available elsewhere. Does your school have a uniform and a policy to go with it?

## 5. The GAtHER Forum

As reported in previous editions of GAtHERround, we have over sixty registered members of our online forum but only two regular contributors apart from GAtHER Council members. We suspect this may be because real names were attached to posts and this could be putting people off expressing views and opinions or seeking advice on an issue in their school. That has now changed and if you wish, you can adopt any nickname you like to ensure complete anonymity. You should have received an e-mail from us about this but if not, here's how to do it:

1. Go to the GAtHER website homepage [www.ga-ther.org](http://www.ga-ther.org) and log in via the "Forum Log-in" button using the username and password you were issued with.
2. At the top right you'll see "Howdy (Your Name)". Click on this and select "Edit my Profile".
3. Scroll down and delete whatever's in the "First Name" and "Last Name" boxes.
4. In the "Nickname (required)" box, type in any name you like but make it something that no one can identify you by.
5. Click on the arrow next to the "Display name publicly as" and you will see the username you use to log in with and the nickname you've just typed in the box above.
6. Select the nickname.
7. If you'd like to add an avatar (picture), scroll down to the bottom of the page and upload whatever you like from the pictures folders on your computer.
8. Finally, click on the "Update Profile" button and all should be well.

To test your new profile on the forum, go to the forum page and click on the thread entitled "Testing". In the blank box at the bottom of the page, type a short sentence and click "Submit" at the bottom right of the page. Whatever you've typed will appear as the last posting in the thread with your anonymous nickname. Any problems, just email us at [info@ga-ther.org](mailto:info@ga-ther.org)

## 6. In My Opinion...

Now that the examination season is over for another year, Vince Barrett looks at the annual media frenzy that fuels our national preoccupation with exam results.

Examinations have become a seasonal sensation largely due to the increasing politicisation of education with successive governments boasting about how things are so much better with them in charge; exam results are higher, many more children are attending good and outstanding schools; never before have parents been so happy with their children's education and blah, blah, blah. As a consequence, schools are constantly forced to do things to try to boost exam results, largely so that politicians of the day can continue to brag. All sorts of tricks have been tried to artificially enhance outcomes. One

of these I'll call 'official cramming' before exams. This is intensive revision time for pupils outside normal teaching hours in both primary and secondary schools. The school day can start as early as 7.30 am and finish as late as 6.00 pm with breaks and lunchtimes also being used as 'catch-up' sessions. To illustrate this, some schools are welcoming breakfast television crews in to portray children, all smartly turned out in school uniform pretending to be studying hard in a live broadcast, usually before 8.00 am in order to show how committed they are to their pupils' education and achieving the best possible exam results. In another wheeze, some schools that have received a favourable Ofsted comment in a report will go to the expense of having a huge banner printed to hang on their gates highlighting a particular comment such as "Teaching and learning are outstanding." I've not seen one yet that goes on to say "but leadership and management require improvement." Both comments could of course appear in the same report! I don't blame schools. The pursuit of examination success is now paramount.

In another stunt, at least two primary schools have sent letters to their Year 6 pupils informing them that there is more to life than their SATs results. Last year it was Barrowford Primary School in Lancashire and this year it's Buckton Vale Primary School in Stalybridge. This has caused outrage in some quarters because it appears these letters are American plagiarisms which critics say have no place in our education system, most notably 'Loose Women' panellist Janet Street Porter in the broadcast of 12<sup>th</sup> May who dismissed the letters as 'bilge', saying that schools have only one purpose - to train children to pass exams. Read Barrowford Primary's missive [here](#) and Buckton Vale Primary's [here](#) What do you think? Are messages like these inspirational or bilge? Let us know.

Meanwhile, look out for the next bout of exam hysteria when results are published in August and nervous students are seen on television opening their envelopes and photographs of them leaping in the air in celebration of their twelve A\* GCSEs or whatever other wonderful exam grades they've achieved appear in the press. Very well done to them I say but do we really need the annual media hype?



## 7. Ask GATHER

Here is this edition's governing issue which we know has arisen in a number of schools. Please remember that the advice we offer is based on the facts we have been given but as governors, you will need to consider any actions you may take as a result of our advice in the context of your own school.

*"We have a strong Chair who has been in post for 10 years. She does a very good job and at our last Ofsted inspection, Leadership and Management were judged to be 'Good with some outstanding features'. At the autumn term full GB meetings each year, we vote on who is going to hold what post and who is going to serve on the various committees. No-one puts their name forward for the position of Chair in case it appears disloyal to the current Chair who has been very effective and we don't want her to think we don't appreciate all she has done.*

*The problem is that there is now a governor who is saying that they would like to put their name forward for election as Chair. I think he would be good and bring some new ideas and so do many of my colleagues. It will soon be September and time for us to vote. How do we go about dealing with this without upsetting the apple cart?"*

Let's look at all the positives in this story:

- You have a very proactive governing board
- You have had an efficient Chair for the past 10 years
- Members presumably put themselves up for election to roles of responsibility other than the Chair
- You have a governor who it is thought would bring new ideas and be a worthy successor

If, as you say, your Chair is 'strong' she will be aware governors are involved, interested and willingly volunteer to do things. She may well recognise that she has served for a long time and know there are people who could take over from her as Chair but has anyone discussed this with her? Probably not because we suspect your annual 're-election' may consist of no more than the Chair leaving the room while governors are asked "Is everyone happy for Ms X to continue as Chair?" followed by unanimous approval for fear of 'upsetting the apple cart'. Ms X is then invited back in to be congratulated on her re-election.

Our suggestion is this. Your Vice-Chair should arrange to meet with the Chair before the autumn term meeting to raise the issue of a governor expressing a wish to stand as Chair. This should be broached in the context of all that she has done as Chair and planning ahead for building on this and of your governing board continuing to work as a team rather than making a takeover bid. Your Chair should welcome the fact that people are interested enough to volunteer for the role and be willing to plan for her succession. If, however, she feels that she is being hounded out and that this is a plot to remove her, then it's probably time for a change anyway!

In the longer term and in order to make a change of Chair less of a trial, it's a good idea to carry out an annual Governor Skills Audit. From this, the GB can develop a Governor Succession Plan. This should cover all the roles of governors and provide the opportunity for governors to perform different roles and acquire new skills over a period of time - leading to standing as Chair in due course for those who wish to undertake this role.

## **8. A Date for your Diary**

This year's GATHER autumn seminar will be held at the Willerby Manor Hotel on Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> October at 7.00 pm. We are having to make a small charge for attendance which will be £5.00 per governor for GATHER member schools and £7.00 for non-members. Both the LA Directors of Education will be joining us and the format will be very similar to BBC Question Time in that a panel will respond to prepared questions put by the audience. Joining the two Directors on the panel will be a secondary school headteacher, a primary school headteacher and a primary school governor. Acting as David Dimbleby and keeping the peace will be our very own Chair, Sue Gollop. An e-mail about this has been sent to

schools from us already, with an application form for places in the audience and for posing questions to the Panel, so track this down if you haven't seen it. The event will be preceded by our AGM which we will keep brief but we will be raising some important issues on which you can vote so please do make the effort to attend. If you intend to take part, the completed application form will need to be e-mailed back to us by **Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> September** and papers for both meetings will be sent to you well before the event.

## 9. GAtHER Membership

Ever since GAtHER was formed in 2013, our subscription fee has been held at £10.00 per annum per school. We think this represents marvellous value in that you receive six copies of GAtHERround per year, get concessionary rates for our seminars and conference and access to our online forum. We intend to ask members at our AGM in October if we can increase this to £15.00 in order to cover our costs. The good news is that we have been in talks with the National Governors' Association (NGA) and they are prepared to offer a reduced membership rate to schools that are GAtHER members. If you are an NGA member school, this is what the combined GAtHER/NGA fee structure would look like:

The standard £77.00 NGA fee would be reduced to £69.00 and if the GAtHER fee becomes £15.00, this results in a total of £84.00. That's a saving of £3.00 on previous years for dual membership. The saving is even greater for NGA Gold member schools because the fee of £260.00 would be reduced to £225.00 and with a GAtHER fee of £15.00 makes a total of £240.00 compared to the previous £270.00 for dual membership.

You should have received an e-mail with a very short questionnaire to give your views on this. Further details will be available at our AGM on 15<sup>th</sup> October.

## 10. Going for a Song

It's time to put all the impending demands to be made of us on the back burner for a while. Summer holidays are looming so here's a little game you can play while you soak up the sun on a Barbados beach or paraglide from a Bridlington cliff top. Whatever you will be doing, you can play this game either on your own or in the company of others (who are preferably governors!) Since the singles charts began in 1952, there have been many songs in them about school life. See if you can remember any, google their lyrics and then decide whether as governors you would want to write a policy to address the situations they describe. To get you started, here's a song about school from my own early days of teaching and my thoughts about what governors of today should do:

### **Another Brick in the Wall: Pink Floyd 1979**

We don't need no education  
We don't need no thought control  
No dark sarcasm in the classroom  
Teachers leave them kids alone  
Hey teachers! Leave them kids alone!  
All in all you're just another brick in the wall  
All in all you're just another brick in the wall.

This song was written amid the 'anarchy' promoted during the punk era and informed the young people of 1979 that they didn't need to learn anything at school or have teachers

telling them what to do. Faced with the situation in the song today, governors should have in place a policy to ensure that extreme views such as these do not radicalise their students and they should ensure that the ethos and curriculum of the school are such that young people want to attend and not feel like ‘just another brick in the wall’. Ironically, the writers of the lyrics of this song clearly did need some education as evidenced by their repeated double negatives and use of ‘them’ as a demonstrative pronoun instead of ‘those’ so you might want to take a look at your English curriculum while you’re at it. You can hear Pink Floyd espousing their rather negative views [here](#).

This song has a GATHER connection in that the chorus was performed by pupils from Islington Green Secondary School which is now The City of London Academy, Islington. Our Chair Sue Gollop was a headteacher, adviser and inspector in Islington before she retired to sunny Bridlington and remembers royalties from the song finally being paid to the school’s performers in 2004. We hope the pupils that participated, who will now be in their forties and fifties, have gone on to live full and fruitful lives. Can you come up with any other songs about school that might present governors with a problem? Tell us about them!

We’ll be back in September. Have a great summer.