

# GATHERround

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

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## Welcome!

We hope that you've enjoyed a restful summer and are returning to your governing duties with renewed relish for all the challenges, issues, rewards and occasionally difficult decisions that all come with the job. At the start of each academic year, it's a good idea for all governors to reflect on what happened in their schools last year and to make plans to build upon achievements during the forthcoming year.

One of our achievements that we'd like you to help us build upon is our online forum which is celebrating its first birthday. We've seen some interesting debates taking place on there but mostly by the same few contributors. Please join in. If your school is a GATHER member, it's free, anonymous and provides views and opinions on lots of topics to do with governance. Ofsted are very interested in how school governors work together to help support school improvement and what better way than to tell inspectors that you are part of a region-wide governors' network?

Talking of networking, it will soon be time for our autumn seminar which takes place each October. You can read much more about this in Section 2.

As always, we've come up with a range of topics in this issue for you consider. If you have thoughts or views on any of them, then please...

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)

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## 1. In memory of Jessica Lawson, Jane Disbrey and Diane Cuthbertson

The education world in our region has suffered three tragic events over the summer. In the first of these, 12 year-old Wolfreton School pupil Jessica Lawson lost her life during a July summer adventure holiday in Meymac, central France; governors may have seen reports in the national press. Our deepest sympathy goes to Jessica's parents and family and our commiserations to the headteacher, governors, staff, pupils and parents who are all having to try to come to terms with this terrible tragedy.

In early August we learned of the sudden death of Jane Disbrey, headteacher of Malet Lambert School in Hull. Jane was a well-respected headteacher who had been at the school since 2006, leading it to a 'good' Ofsted rating in 2012. She once told an Ofsted inspector that it was her job to 'make people shine' and this she did by taking a close interest not only in pupils' progress in school but in ensuring that they were well-prepared for the next stage in their lives. Jane worked with many organisations in the city, including the Connexions Service, the Education Business Partnership and Youth Enterprise which resulted in her school being awarded the Connexions Gold Standard for Information, Advice and Guidance in 2009. Our thoughts are with Jane's family at this very sad time and with the governors, staff, pupils and parents who have all paid glowing tributes to Jane's inspirational leadership.

The third tragedy was the loss of Diane Cuthbertson, a keen diver, who died while on a diving expedition in Bridlington Bay in mid-August. Diane was the owner and manager of the Tot Stop Early Years Centre in Driffield and in 2014 led the centre to a 'good' rating from Ofsted, the report stating that 'Children are happy and eager to attend this welcoming nursery.' Diane's husband said: "She contributed to the early education of children in Driffield for between 15 and 20 years first by running Tot Stop for the RAF then by taking it on as a private business. She has always welcomed challenges and tried her utmost to ensure that the children she took on had the best start in life." Although we did not work with Tot Stop as a GATHER member, it is clear that Diane provided a valuable service for pre-school children in Driffield and she will be sadly missed.

As the new term begins, we send our heartfelt condolences to all the families, friends and colleagues of these three people, each of whom brought so much to their respective communities.

## 2. Any Questions

GATHER will be hosting its second autumn governors' seminar at the Willerby Manor Hotel, Willerby on Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> October with a 7.00 for 7.30 start. Opening the event will be the GATHER AGM which everyone is welcome to attend although only governors from GATHER member schools will be able to nominate or vote for members of the Executive Council.

The main event this year will be in the format of BBC 'Question Time' with questions being put from the floor to a panel of educational experts. This comprises a primary school head, a secondary school head, a primary school governor and both education directors from their respective LAs. If you haven't yet registered to attend, you can download an application form from the Resources section of our website under 'Downloadable Resources', and reserve your place(s) by emailing it to us on [info@gather.org](mailto:info@gather.org). On the application form for the event is a space to pose a question for the

panel so give some thought to what you've been discussing in your governing body meetings, what's been concerning you of late and what you'd like to put to our in-house panel. We're hoping for some searching questions from governors and a lively debate! Please note that, as an organisation that has a very low annual membership subscription, we have to levy a small charge for this event of £5.00 per delegate for member schools (£7.00 for non-members).

### 3. Academies - the cure for all ills?

The new government's controversial Education and Adoption Bill is currently passing through Parliament and once it becomes an Act, many more schools may be forced to become academies because current government thinking is that academies are key to improving educational outcomes across the board. Regional School Commissioners are now in place to help realise this national education agenda but where is the evidence to say that it's realistic? There is in fact published evidence to the contrary. On 15<sup>th</sup> June, the Local Government Association (LGA) and the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) published a joint research paper *Analysis of academy school performance in GCSEs 2014: final report* which found that:

- Although sponsored academies outperformed similar maintained schools in 2013, this was when 'equivalent qualifications' were included in results tables. The disparity disappeared in 2014 as the contribution of 'equivalent qualifications' to pupils' overall point scores was reduced considerably. This is consistent with previous research findings that sponsored academies made much more use of 'equivalent qualifications' compared to similar maintained schools (Worth, 2014; DfE, 2012b).
- There was no significant difference in 2014 GCSE outcomes between converter academies and similar maintained schools. There was no evidence of a trend towards academy performance increasing relative to similar maintained schools over time.
- It is still too early to judge the full impact of converter academy status on school performance because almost all converter academies have been open for three years or fewer but analysis of available data shows that there are unlikely to be significant long-term improved outcomes solely due to academy status.

You can download the full report from our website's [Resources](#) section.

Hard on the heels of the LGA/NFER report, the Sutton Trust report *Chain Effects 2015: the impact of academy chains on low-income students* was rather unhelpfully published on 24<sup>th</sup> July just as schools were breaking up for the summer. This report concluded that:

- There is a significant variation in outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, both between and within academy chains. Analysed against a range of measures, some chains have achieved positive outcomes for their disadvantaged students, demonstrating the transformational impact on life chances that can be made. However, a larger number of low-performing chains are achieving results that are not improving and may in fact be harming the prospects of their disadvantaged students.

- Overall, in comparison with the national figures for all secondary schools and academies ('mainstream schools'), the sponsored academies in this analysis have lower inspection grades and are twice as likely to be below the floor standard. In 2014, 44% of the academies in the analysis group were below the government's new 'coasting level' and 26 of the 34 chains that were analysed had one or more schools in this group.
- Since 2012, the academy chains in this study have reduced their use of 'equivalent qualifications' but their use in sponsored academies remained above the national average in 2014. On average, they still underperformed on the EBacc measure; nevertheless a few chains strongly outperformed other school types on the EBacc and several more had dramatically improved results against this measure. More than half the chains exceeded the national average figure for pupils making progress in English.
- When analysed against a range of Government indicators on attainment, a majority of the chains still underperform on the mainstream average on attainment for their disadvantaged pupils. As in 2012, while some of those below the average are continuing to improve, others are not.

In summary, the report makes the following recommendations:

1. The Department for Education (DfE) should expand its pool of school improvement providers beyond academy sponsors, including developing new school-led trusts and federations, particularly if it is to address the growing focus on coasting schools.
2. New chains should not be allowed to expand until they have a track record of success in bringing about improvement in their existing academies.
3. Since our last report, Ofsted has had its ability to inspect chains extended but these fall short of the formal powers they enjoy over academies individually and other education providers. Ofsted should be empowered to undertake formal inspections of academy chains.
4. Funding agreements for new sponsors should be shortened to five years from seven and the government should not renew funding agreements where improvement has not been demonstrated.
5. The DfE should include a measure of progress for disadvantaged pupils in their definition of coasting schools, to be applied to all school types.
6. Sponsor chains - especially those needing to improve - should seek out successful practice and reflect on what their own chain could learn from it, and encourage this outward-facing approach among practitioners at all levels within their academies.

You can read the full report [here](#)

Secretary of State Nicky Morgan doesn't appear to foresee any problems in imposing academy status on schools, possibly against the wishes of parents and governors, since

they will have any rights to object removed by the Education and Adoption Act. The plan appears to be to turn all schools into academies. Even if that happens, the standard 'bell curve' distribution of Ofsted grades would continue to apply and the same number of academies as all schools now would still be in the 'RI' or 'Inadequate' categories. On 15<sup>th</sup> August, David Cameron in a BBC interview threw his weight behind making all schools academies and you can see what he had to say [here](#).



It has been said that the longer-term goal of this academisation project is to ensure that local authorities are eventually stripped of all influence in the running of schools to be replaced by ever-expanding (uninspected and unregulated) academy chains. We have many academies in Hull and very few in the East Riding. What are your views on this?

#### 4. Are you fit for purpose?

Our esteemed Chair, Sue Gollop has a huge range of knowledge and experience of school governance and runs training sessions for governors on a regular basis. For the first time, GATHERround is taking one of her training topics and presenting it as a series over a number of forthcoming editions. Sue addresses the question: '**Does your school have the the governing board it deserves?**' and here she looks at the relationship between Chair and Head.

In my professional capacity, I worked with well over 100 governing boards in Hertfordshire and Islington and I inspected many as an Ofsted inspector. I have also worked with many more on a voluntary basis since retirement through my involvement as both a primary and secondary school governor and, of course, with GATHER.

One thing has become absolutely clear to me over all that time and that is that the role of governors has changed out of all recognition from a cosy group of volunteers supporting their local schools and left to get on with it as they saw fit to a fundamental component of the leadership and management of schools with a responsibility for the strategic development and direction of their schools. Have you noticed a shift in the way your board operates or have things stayed much the same in terms of how information is received and decisions are made?



There are many guides and handbooks about how to be a good governor and a good governing board (have you read your school's copy of the GATHER Guide for Governors?) but very little on the foundations that need to be set to get there in the first place so I'm starting with the roles of two very important people - the Chair and the Head. The relationship between these two people is perhaps the most complex and least well-defined and is a fascinating area of study. Ofsted says that most heads invest a lot of time in building this relationship although they say little about the nature/the essence of a truly *productive* relationship. I see such a relationship as one of a series of checks and balances between the two people, like a set of scales kept in balance through a mutual

trust which relies on the strength of and tension in the partnership. It can therefore never be founded purely on one aspect such as friendship. Friendship can suggest collusion; a sort of preservation system against marauding outside forces. I have seen this operate where the Head and the Chair forget their accountability roles and move into cosily working together solely to preserve outside perceptions; the school is seen as good, children's attainment levels (not necessarily progress) are good and the status quo must be maintained. Secondly, it can't be based on any inequality of role or standing where one partner assumes control and assures everyone that all is well all the time because they know exactly what they are doing and isn't everything hunky-dory? Both of these unbalanced relationships I like to call 'living in the jam factory' and both extremes may have worked reasonably well in the past but are now much more likely to end in disaster because at some point the wasps - aka Ofsted - are going to invade the factory and sample the jam, wanting to know what the leadership really looks like - and reporting on it. Ofsted noted in its annual report for 2012-2013 in identifying key characteristics of failing schools; 'governing bodies failed to challenge a well-established incumbent headteacher until it was too late'.

So the first thing for governing boards to address is the relationship their Chair and Head have and they can do this by asking a few simple questions:

- Do we feel that we are all sufficiently well-informed about key issues so we can ask challenging questions of Chair and/or Head?
- Do any of us as governors feel excluded from decision-making because this 'power pair' holds the reins?
- Are committees chaired by governors other than the Chair of Governors?
- Do we feel we all really know our school's strengths and weakness or is this information kept from the full governing body?

I leave you with the NGA's view on this:

*"A strong and visible working relationship between the headteacher and chair creates a culture which recognises that the school leadership team includes all school and governor leaders and encourages openness, support and challenge throughout the school."*

Next time I'll be looking at what all governors should expect from school leaders and what they can do to prepare before those Ofsted wasps fly in to sample the jam.

## 5. Ask GAtHER

*I am a parent governor in a primary academy and a member of the curriculum committee. We have regular committee meetings in which children's books and work are scrutinised and we also go on learning walks to look at displays and classrooms. We feed back to the full governing board with our findings which often seem critical, largely based on the head's views of what we have seen. Demanding targets for improvement are usually made, the last one of which was that teachers should be double-marking all work, i.e. teacher writes a comment, the child responds and the teacher then writes something else to 'lead learning'. I feel uncomfortable with this as I feel it is time consuming and, frankly, not always achievable. How can I raise this as an issue with fellow governors?*

Here are the main points you should make to your fellow members of the curriculum committee. Firstly, the role of governors is not to scrutinise the work of teachers in order

to pass judgement. Governors may sometimes sit in on lessons and look at children's work but that should be done in the role of 'critical friend' or as a way of learning more about the school but certainly not as an inspector. Secondly, double-marking is a practice successfully carried out in many primary schools but it is time-consuming and needs to be carefully managed so as not to overload teachers. You need to point out that these are operational matters and as such, should be overseen by senior leaders. You should assure yourselves as a committee that your headteacher is not using you to bring in initiatives using the excuse that they 'are insisted upon by governors'. Your role as a governing board is to ensure that whatever initiatives are 'insisted upon' by anyone are evaluated in terms of effectiveness, are not added to initiatives already in place and do not adversely affect a healthy work/life balance for teaching staff.

## 6. Of Primary Concern

92% of parents in Hull and 95.6% of parents in the East Riding secured places for their children in their infant, junior or primary school of first choice to start this September. From these statistics, it would appear that the allocation of school places is not a huge issue here but are the numbers of children in primary school classes rising? In its 2014 report *Education at a Glance*, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) says the average UK primary school class size is now 26 pupils. This is higher than the international average of 21 and above levels seen in countries such as Estonia, Greece, Luxembourg and Slovakia. There are currently 4.5 million pupils in England's primary schools, an increase of 93,600 on the same point in 2014.



So, how does class size impact on children's education? Executive headteacher of the three schools in the Wolds Federation and education commentator Steve Woodhouse, has had this to say on primary school numbers:

*"I remember teaching 38 children in a Grimsby primary school and struggling to have enough time with the children. Marking their work was often the first opportunity I had to spot any misconceptions, far too late to have a conversation with the child. In a smaller group, I would have been able to address the issue at the time and move learning forward more quickly."*

Across our part of the world, it would appear that primary class sizes will inevitably increase. Projected pupil numbers show an upward trend and many of our suburbs, towns and villages have sizeable housing developments either planned or in progress which will inevitably put a strain on existing schools' provision. Are you a governor in a primary school affected by burgeoning pupil numbers? What plans do you have in place for accommodating them? Do let us know.

## 7. Fines for failure

Here's an interesting proposal if you're a secondary school governor. The think-tank Policy Exchange proposes in a report published on 25<sup>th</sup> August that secondary schools where pupils have failed to achieve at least C grades in GCSE English and maths should

pay a financial penalty of about £500 per pupil which would then be used to support them in retaking exams in these subjects in further education colleges. Report author Natasha Porter said: "It is unfair for some schools to pass the buck to FE colleges who are already facing extreme funding pressures to fix a problem they have not caused themselves."

Will your school be able to afford to 'allow' any pupil to fail their English or maths GCSE?

Read the Policy Exchange report [here](#).

## 8. NQTs: Not Quite Trained and Needing Quality Transition?

At this time every year, many of our schools welcome newly qualified teachers (NQTs). Do you as governors know what in-school support is made available to them as they start their careers? It's a mistake to believe that the word 'qualified' in their title equates to 'fully ready for whatever the job may throw at them.' It is very important for them to be eased into their new role and it's a good idea to assign an experienced mentor in school to support them when things go wrong (they will) and to help with things like curriculum planning and class control. We have heard of schools that unload unpopular class groups or whole-school activities on to NQTs mainly because no-one else wants them but veiled with the excuse 'throwing them in at the deep end is the best way to learn the craft of teaching.' It isn't and where this happens, young teachers are likely to become disillusioned and leave to find a job in another industry. Governors can have a key role in the support of new teachers, simply by taking an interest in their progress, listening to their concerns and helping to address any issues they may reveal.

A teacher who has just completed their NQT year recounts the experiences during that first year and how they feel about returning for their second year. It's recommended reading and may make you think about how your school treats new entrants to the profession. Read the Guardian article [here](#)

## 9. And finally...

As you resume your voluntary duty as a school governor, we hope that the role provides you with information, food for thought and challenges in working to make your school the best. Being a member of GATHER provides some of this and if you've read this far, we also hope that we've provided you with some news about what's been happening over the summer. There is, however, one very important thing to remember and it is that being a governor is a big responsibility that takes time, energy and commitment. If you are also in full time employment, it's sometimes difficult to do all that's demanded of you but did you know your employer is legally obliged to allow you 'reasonable time' off to do your work as a governor? The NGA reports that 40% of governors in employment get no time off work to undertake school governance. What is defined as 'reasonable time' has in the past been left to employers and employees to negotiate but as more jobs become suited to allow flexibility for voluntary activity, this figure suggests that a significant number of governors do not receive their lawful entitlement. Of those who do receive time off, more than one quarter have to take it all as unpaid leave.

We'll be back in December with the Christmas edition of GATHERround. Doesn't time fly!