



GATHER round



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

IN THIS ISSUE:

1. 'QUESTION TIME' SEMINAR
2. GATHER AGM
3. TESTING TIMES
4. ARE YOU FIT FOR PURPOSE?
5. A PERSONAL VIEW OF EDUCATION
6. ASK GATHER
7. STEM OR HAMPERED?
8. GOVERNORS' ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2016
9. GATHER MEMBERSHIP FEES

Season's Greetings

It's that time of year again - season of Christmas concerts, nativity plays and parties in your schools and we trust these are helping you to get into the festive spirit.

Here at GATHER, we've had another busy year meeting with local authority personnel and representing you, our member schools, on local steering groups and consultation panels. We've also been to conferences in other LAs and of course events put on by the NGA.

Thanks to GATHER Council member Lance Boanas, our website has expanded hugely and carries regularly updated news and highlights legislation of interest to you as governors. We have also welcomed some new forum contributors who provide lively debate on a wide range of topics. If you haven't visited our site lately, please do and to register to join the forum simply click on the 'Register for Forum' button on the front page, provide a few details and we'll do the rest.

We hope you enjoy your twice-termly editions of GATHERround. We try to provide a mix of local and national education issues and we're always on the lookout for stories from member schools about the amazing things they're doing. Please let us know if you have anything going on which may be of interest to other governors.

We wish you a restful Christmas and a happy New Year.

Have you any news or views?
E-mail them to us at: info@ga-ther.org

1. 'Question Time' seminar

On October 15th, we hosted the second annual GATHER seminar at the Willerby Manor Hotel. This year we ran it along the lines of BBC Question Time with questions being submitted from the audience to a panel of educationists. Panel members were Emma Hobbs, Headteacher of Bay Community Primary School, Bridlington; Sarah Smythe: Headteacher of Kelvin Hall Foundation Secondary School, Hull; Joe Buchan: Retired Headteacher and Governor at Brandesburton Primary School; Kevin Hall, East Riding LA Director of Children, Families and Schools and Mil Vasic, Director of Children, Young People and Family Services at Hull City Council. The questions put to the panel were:

- What changes have you made within your school that have had the greatest impact on pupil achievement?
- How would you describe the most productive and effective relationship between the headteacher and chair? Is there training for headteachers in developing an effective relationship?
- What was the percentage teacher and headteacher turnover locally in the past two years? Is this a cause for concern?
- Given the budgetary pressures due to low pupil funding and current demographics, what do the panel consider the activities in schools that governors should aim to protect at all costs?
- What do you think to the idea of limiting the number of terms that a Chair can serve as the Chair, and also to limiting the time any governor can be a governor of the same school?
- The government now appears to have an agenda to convert as many maintained schools as possible to academy status by 2020. Does the panel have a view on more schools working together to form local multi-academy trusts as has already happened in both Hull and the East Riding?

Space precludes a detailed report on the discussion that followed each of these questions but there were some interesting views and opinions expressed on each of them! We thank all the panel members for their valuable contribution and look forward to staging a similar event next year. You'll find a full participants' evaluation of this event on our website under 'Conference and Training news'.

2. GAtHER AGM

A very short GAtHER AGM took place immediately before the 'Question Time' seminar. There were 45 attendees present representing 26 schools, of which 23 were GAtHER members with voting rights. Minutes from the AGM 2014 were received and approved and there were no matters arising. Sue Gollop, GAtHER Chair, read out her report and Treasurer Mike Heslop-Mullens presented the annual accounts. There were no elections as the current members of the council are in the second year of their four-year term of office. There were no motions put forward by members and just one from Council Member Mike Heslop-Mullens that the annual GAtHER school membership fee be raised from £10.00 to £15.00. This was passed unanimously and will take effect from 1st January 2016. There's more on this in Section 9 of this edition.

There was no other business.

3. Testing Times

In the article *'Resits for SATs'* in GATHERround No 10, we raised the issue of Year 7 pupils having to re-take their SATs exams if they had failed to reach the required Level 4 in Maths and English at age 11. On 3rd November, Education Secretary Nicky Morgan announced that this will happen and it is to address the Conservatives' view that pupils who fail at primary level never catch up. As well as the 'baseline tests' when they start in Reception and the KS2 SATs, Morgan is looking at a tougher approach to tests at the age of seven. At present, these are teacher assessments, with schools sending their results to local authorities but a consultation will consider moving to gathering results at a national level with the possibility of external testing and the publication of results. The proposed overhaul of pupil testing doesn't end there. For secondary schools, Morgan has set a target of 90% pupils taking the traditional academic GCSE subjects of English, maths, history or geography, two sciences and a language. The 10% will allow exemptions to be made by headteachers for pupils with special needs or circumstances. At present, about 39% of pupils take all these subjects.

Morgan also announced the creation of a **National Teaching Service**. 1500 high-achieving, so-called 'elite' teachers will be recruited over five years to be deployed to schools in areas with weak results to turn their fortunes around. Speaking to BBC Newsnight on 2nd November, Morgan said she believed the scheme could help transform failing schools. *"Even one new teacher coming in from outside, bringing new ideas, bringing new experience, offering collaboration, it does make a big difference,"* she said. Coastal towns have been specifically identified as weak areas so look out schools in Bridlington, Hornsea and Withernsea. An army of elite superteachers could be heading your way soon.

There is so much we could say about these new measures but we will leave that to you. Either go to The GATHER forum and post your views in the discussion group *Testing Times* or email them to us for inclusion in an edition of GATHERround.

4. Are you fit for purpose?

In the second of a series of articles on effective governance, GATHER Chair Sue Gollop looks at the way in which school leaders and governors should work together.

I am going base this topic around things all governors need to beware of in their relationship with the senior leaders of their schools. Firstly, beware of collusion between the Head and the Chair (the inner circle). This is not uncommon and is particularly prevalent in long-standing and comfortable set-ups where the school is widely perceived to be OK - with good pupils, good attainment (I did not say progress) and not too much hassle. The Head is likely to have been around for some time, as will the Chair and most of the governors. Here there may be a relaxed, familiar working routine ("We've always done things this way") so it is highly unlikely that there will be regular checks and balances, challenges or questions presented by governors.

Secondly, beware of distractions from the core strategic business of governing. Too often, strategic and day-to-day management issues are confused which can be a source of irritation and sometimes serious dissent between governors and school leaders. Too many governors are happy to stay in the comfort zone of their involvement in day-to-day

operations, the nice things about schools in which they can be of help. Hearing children read, attending assemblies and concerts, playing Father Christmas, organising the jumble sale, going on school visits - countless other wonderful activities can keep governors busy under the cover of 'Being a Governor' and out of the hair of the headteacher. Of course all these things are valuable and enable governors to get to know their school but they are NOT governance. Governance is about being strategic, asking questions and making decisions that lay the foundations for the Head to get on with the day-to-day business of running the school which is their job.

The Head should of course, always be the lead professional but the Chair should be seen as his or her strategic equal. As Ofsted noted in its annual report 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, what needs to be done? Firstly, a clear school management structure needs to be established so that everyone - leaders, including governors - know what their responsibilities are and what's expected of them. The DfE notes in its guide on School Governance Roles (2013-14) that although the role of the Chair is nowhere described in legislation, it is a school leadership role. The NGA quotes Sir John Harvey, who writes about the relationship between a non-executive Chair of the Board and a CEO (aka the Head):

'It is only when you become aware of the range, scope and incredible responsibility of the job that you realise there is an almost limitless opportunity to be ineffective'

It is important that all governors, as soon as they are elected or appointed to the role, are given a thorough induction so that they are aware the expectations of them in contributing to the strategic development of the school.

Finally, beware the cover-up. When you look at reports of failing schools, so often we read 'Governors didn't know...' or 'The Head did not keep governors properly informed...' This one-way 'over reliance on information from the headteacher' is cited by Ofsted in many failing schools' reports.

The most recent NGA Guidance opens with a letter from Lord Nash saying:

'Empowered governing bodies need transparent data on the performance and finances of the schools they govern.' I cannot over-emphasise the importance of the open exchange of information between day-to-day leaders and governors.

If there is one bit of training that really empowers governors, it is to enable them to get to grips with RaiseOnline. Not only does this tell you what is happening on the inside, but the constant comparisons with national data tell you what it's like out there and where your school stands in the way that it provides a service to its children and their parents and guardians.

In conclusion then:

BEWARE COLLUSION, KEEP STRATEGIC AND DON'T HIDE REALITY

5. A Personal View of Education

Joe Buchan, retired headteacher and now a school governor takes a look at education today and offers some suggestions about the changes he would like to see in the future.

I believe that the aim of all schools has always been to ‘grow’ good learners and effective citizens of the future. In achieving this, there is one aspect of education that could be said to have improved since I started teaching in 1971 and that is that there is now no place for weak teachers to hide. There were some teachers who did not work as hard as they should nor develop their skills as they should. However, whilst it is good that the weak ones can now be weeded out, the system that has been introduced to do this has been detrimental to developing inspired and inspirational teachers. What we should have done long ago as a profession is set our own standards for high quality teaching that supported teachers in their work and helped them to succeed and be innovative in their approach to teaching and learning. What we have now is a mechanistic data-driven system that cultivates a climate of anxiety resulting in the reluctance of heads and teachers in some schools to take chances with the learning experiences they provide.

Rather than encouraging the growth of good learners and effective citizens, some aspects of today’s education are damaging to healthy development. A DfE spokesman has said that every child must have a robust academic education. This is not suitable for every child. Please do not misunderstand me; I am not an enemy of progress. I want real progress but what we now have in place an analogue curriculum for a digital age. The curriculum needs to be looked at from scratch. Questions need to be asked about what core learning, skills, qualities and knowledge are needed to thrive in the 21st century. Leading the way in such research are Bill Lucas, Professor of Learning at the University of Winchester and Guy Claxton, Emeritus Professor of the Learning Sciences, also at the University of Winchester in their book [Educating Ruby](#)



There needs to be parity of esteem for differing educational paths. Currently the political view seems to be that academic success is everything. It is damaging to pupils who are not academically-inclined to be forced to strive for something they are unlikely to be able to achieve whilst at the same time, those who are academically able can be subject to enormous pressure to achieve exceptionally high grades. All teachers’ work should be to encourage and extend learning, not driven by the need for their school to be an exam result factory. It is no wonder that some children become more cynical the longer they are at school.

I am convinced it would be better to remove education from the political arena altogether. I acknowledge reading about this in [‘Thinking Allowed on Schooling’](#) by Mick Waters which is well worth a look. He suggests a National Council for Education with members elected both from within and outside the education profession and representing all factions with a commitment to education. This Council would have responsibility for defining and developing education provision, securing an appropriate level of funding from the Treasury and overseeing its delivery. I envisage such a system engaging all learners and allowing them to develop at a pace to meet their individual needs. What I have said here is not new but I hope the majority of people would agree with much of it. What do you think about the future of education?

6. Ask GATHER

I am a recently-appointed Chair of Governors in a maintained primary school and I have received a complaint from a parent against the headteacher. Our governing board has a formal complaints procedure in place to guide me in dealing with this complaint but I would like to deal with it in a more informal way. Our clerk has asked me for the complaint letter so that he can start building a pack for the appeal committee once the complaint has been formally heard but I don't want to go down that path at this stage because I am keen to build a strong and trusting Head/Chair relationship. The clerk is now accusing me of ignoring the official procedures. If I choose to deal with the complaint in my own way, what can the clerk do to make me comply with our official complaint procedure?

This can prove to be a difficult issue because Section 29 of the Education Act 1996 places a duty on schools to have a complaints policy and procedure in place that must be published. The role of a clerk is to offer professional advice, which in this case is to follow the policy to the letter but the clerk alone cannot insist on this because a decision to circumvent any written procedure is one for the whole of the governing board to consider. However, DfE guidelines do recommend "*An effective complaints procedure will encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible*" so if your complaints procedure doesn't allow for that, then perhaps it needs reviewing.

Secondly, the way in which complaints are dealt with depends very much on the nature of each complaint. If a parent is complaining that their child has, in their opinion, been told off too forcefully by the head for running in a corridor, then to invoke the whole formal procedure would be rather a waste of everyone's time. If the complaint is about alleged gross misconduct of some sort, then it is only right that this is investigated formally from the start.

Without knowing the nature of this particular complaint, we advise that you as Chair make the decision about whether it can be dealt with 'in your own way' and then inform the governors of the complaint and your decision. If your informal mediation is successful then everyone should be happy. If it isn't, then the parent can insist upon moving to a formal hearing without having been disadvantaged. You need to bear in mind that if your informal mediation is unsuccessful you cannot serve on the governors' complaints panel at the formal stage.

Have you got a question for us? Don't be shy - Ask GATHER!

7. STEM or HAMPERED?

We're probably all familiar with the acronym STEM for Science, Technology Engineering and Maths subjects in schools but how many of us know about the other subjects which can be grouped under the acronym HAMPERED. This stands for Humanities, Arts, Music, Physical Education, Religious Education and Design. Both groups form the basis of a debate that's been going on for as long as state education itself and that is "Are some subjects more suited to boys than girls and vice-versa?" Now Nicky Morgan has entered the fray by warning that post-16 students who focus exclusively on creative subjects risk restricting their future career paths. Disciplines such as the sciences and maths open

more doors for pupils than arts and humanities, the subjects traditionally favoured by academic all-rounders, according to the Secretary of State. She says that too many young people are still making GCSE and A-level choices at school that can hold them back for the rest of their lives. Also according to Mrs Morgan, just a decade ago pupils were being told to take maths and sciences only if they wanted a specific skilled career such as a doctor, pharmacist or engineer.

This is in fact nonsense as in 2005 there was a statutory independent and impartial careers service as an element of all Connexions Services in England and every secondary school was allocated at least one professionally-trained careers adviser who would not have lasted long if they were giving the guidance described by Mrs Morgan. Since 2010, when Connexions was scrapped by Michael Gove, schools have been able to do what they wish with the provision of careers information, advice and guidance and there is no doubt that in many, the quality has diminished quite dramatically.

Figures now show that only 19 per cent of girls who gained an A* in GCSE physics in 2011 went on to study the subject at A-level. For boys, the figure was just under 50%. Is this a surprise? No it isn't. Mrs Morgan observes:

"We must make sure that teenage girls don't feel, and certainly are not told, that certain subjects are the preserve of men."

Do something about it then and make sure that proper informed and expert advice and guidance is given in the best interests of each student.

8. Governors' Annual Conference 2015

The eighth joint GATHER/Local Authorities Governors' conference is scheduled to take place on **Saturday 19th March 2016** at Bishop Burton College. The theme of the conference is 'Partners in Leadership?' which will focus on the very important part we should play as governors in working closely with school management teams in leading strategic planning.

This year we are presenting two keynote speakers. Belita Scott HMI is the National Lead Inspector for Governance. Her role is to focus on governance in schools and colleges, especially the characteristics of effective governance in different contexts. We are sure she will provide us with much food for thought as we consider our responsibilities in helping to lead our schools. Our second speaker is an extremely well-respected educationalist by the name of David Cameron. No not that one; this David - or the 'Real David Cameron' as he is known - has a unique view of the educational landscape and has established himself as one of the leading voices in the UK and internationally. He is regarded as an inspirational and entertaining presenter and a highly engaging and effective facilitator. He has worked in every sector from early years to Further Education across the UK and has been in demand particularly for his work on creativity, curriculum and learning right across the world. David has played a key role in England through his role as Chair of the York Education Partnership, a highly praised initiative aimed at ensuring continuing co-operation and collaboration between all schools and local authority in the city. He has worked in senior positions in three local authorities and has served as President of the Association of Directors of Education. David has been a key

figure in national developments in Scotland, being closely involved in the development of Curriculum for Excellence, reviewing arrangements for funding schools and advising Skills Development Scotland on how they should position themselves as a new organisation supporting learners, employers and education providers. David has also been closely involved in the development of policy and practice in supporting Looked After Children through the “We can and must do better” initiative and has chaired the working group on ‘Outdoor Learning - Outdoor Connections’. One of his current interests is in creativity and creative learning. David is a speaker not to be missed.

Conference workshops are still to be confirmed and as always, we will invite a school to provide a presentation of their work. There will be the customary networking opportunities for governors to share experiences.

Due to increased conference costs, we have had to raise our fees slightly which will be £60.00 per delegate for GATHER member schools and £75.00 per delegate for non-members. Yet another benefit of GATHER membership! You will receive more information about the conference and how to apply for places in the next GATHERround early in the new year.

9. GATHER Membership fees

We thank all our member schools, of which we now have over 120, for it is your membership that allows us to keep our website up to date and put on events such as the ‘Question Time’ seminar which we report on in this issue. We’ve kept the school membership subscription to **£10.00** per year per school for the last two years but rising costs have meant that we’re now spending more than we earn. Consequently, we asked schools present at our AGM if we could increase our fee to **£15.00** and this was unanimously agreed, taking effect from 1st January 2016.

Subscriptions continue to run from the date your school joined GATHER so if your school was a December joiner, the new fee won’t apply until December 2016. We hope you will renew your GATHER membership when it becomes due. We feel that six GATHERrounds per year, a constantly updated website with a huge amount of information and members’ forum, a subsidised autumn seminar and spring conference still represents excellent value for money.

Be with you again next term folks. Enjoy the festivities!

***STOP PRESS.** The Chancellor’s Spending Review of 25th November contained quite a lot to do with education but other, more high profile Review elements, made the news. Of particular interest to us here was the announcement of a new funding formula for schools in 2017. Nationally, there will be winners and losers when the detail of this is announced but in our area, particularly in the East Riding, we are more likely to be winners. See a summary of education Spending Review headlines [here](#).