

# GATHERround

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

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## Welcome!

The turkey's long gone, the tinsel's been packed away for another year and any new year resolutions made are now being tested. We'd like to recommend a resolution that we hope you'll find easy to keep and that is to read your twice-termly GATHERround and perhaps contribute an article about the exciting things that are happening in your schools. This time of year is always a good one for governors to see their school at work and to review how plans made are coming to fruition, so don't delay - make that appointment to go and see where you can offer support or simply to get to know your school better.

As 2016 gets under way, you may recall that at our AGM last October, it was decided that in order to continue to support you as governors, GATHER needed to raise the annual subscription fee from £10.00 to £15.00 with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> January. Since we started out in 2013 we have increased the service we offer to member schools by providing two GATHERrounds per term, radically revising and constantly updating our website, setting up a governors' forum and we will soon be starting work on an updated *GATHER Guide for Governors*.

If you have any questions or concerns about anything to do with governance please contact us.

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. Multiplication's the name of the game

Here we go! On 3<sup>rd</sup> January, Nicky Morgan announced that every pupil in England is to be tested on their times tables before leaving primary school. This seems to be a case of 'What goes around comes around' as we're sure that many of our readers will recall being taught and tested on their times tables when they were at primary school and many primaries have never stopped teaching them. No-one can deny that instantly-recalled knowledge of multiplication is a very

My Times Tables		
2 times table	5 times table	10 times table
0 x 2 = 0	0 x 5 = 0	0 x 10 = 0
1 x 2 = 2	1 x 5 = 5	1 x 10 = 10
2 x 2 = 4	2 x 5 = 10	2 x 10 = 20
3 x 2 = 6	3 x 5 = 15	3 x 10 = 30
4 x 2 = 8	4 x 5 = 20	4 x 10 = 40
5 x 2 = 10	5 x 5 = 25	5 x 10 = 50
6 x 2 = 12	6 x 5 = 30	6 x 10 = 60
7 x 2 = 14	7 x 5 = 35	7 x 10 = 70
8 x 2 = 16	8 x 5 = 40	8 x 10 = 80
9 x 2 = 18	9 x 5 = 45	9 x 10 = 90
10 x 2 = 20	10 x 5 = 50	10 x 10 = 100
11 x 2 = 22	11 x 5 = 55	11 x 10 = 110
12 x 2 = 24	12 x 5 = 60	12 x 10 = 120

useful skill to be used throughout life and I can certainly remember this being tested at school either by the teacher barking out random multiples such as “nine times seven” or eight times six” whilst selecting a ‘victim’ to provide the answer or by endless recording in exercise books. This time around it’s the testing that’s moved into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and I think this has a slightly sinister connotation. Children are to be tested via an ‘on-screen check’ that will involve them completing multiplication challenges online against the clock, which will be scored instantly. Here’s the sinister bit. Teachers will also be judged by the results of the tests. Whoever is collating this information can have no knowledge of the children involved or of any circumstances that may affect results. There is no indication yet of what will happen to any Year 6 teacher whose class’s results fall below 100% but it wouldn’t surprise me if another very old system was brought back into use as punishment - that of the stocks and public humiliation!

These electronic tests will be piloted with about 3,000 pupils in 80 primary schools this summer, before being rolled out across the country in 2017. Watch out for them coming to a screen near you.

# 2. The internet and learning



All schools use the World Wide Web to enhance learning and what a wonderful teaching aid it is when pictures, videos and information on any topic under the sun can be instantly accessed. However, as with all inventions throughout history, there are inherent negative issues that arise the more the invention is used and developed. We’ve looked at some of these issues regarding use of the internet in past editions of GATHERround and one of the biggest potential issues currently is that of radicalisation. Secretary of State Nicky Morgan is now saying that schools in England must set online filters and monitor pupils' internet use under plans to protect them from radicalisation. She claims that some pupils have been able to access information at school about extremism.

Proposed reforms have been published for consultation, following several cases where school children have either travelled, or attempted to travel, to Syria. Measures include showing young people how to use the internet responsibly and making sure parents and teachers are able to keep youngsters safe from exploitation and radicalisation and will also address other issues such as cyberbullying and pornography. The vast majority of schools will already have systems in place to filter and monitor pupils' online activity, but

the new guidelines are designed to strengthen requirements to keep children safe and spot concerns quickly.

Do you know what your school does to ensure safe internet use? What is the policy on personal hand-held devices such as iPhones and iPads? Is children's use of these allowed in school? This really is developing into a minefield for schools to negotiate and it's very important that governors know and understand how this is being addressed in their school as it's likely that this will become an Ofsted 'hot topic'.

Read more about the proposals [here](#). The results of the consultation and the DfE's response will be published in the spring.

### 3. Is there a shortage of teachers or not?

As the new term gets underway, the ongoing row between Ofsted and the Department for Education about teacher shortages rumbles on. Sir Michael Wilshaw (right) claims that teacher shortage is a serious problem, especially in "isolated, coastal and disadvantaged areas" (that's our area in a nutshell by the way). The DfE completely denies that there is a problem and says that "the number and quality of teachers in our classrooms is at an all-time high". This clear disagreement is potentially a timebomb for the government, with opposition ministers ready to use Wilshaw's comments to accuse the government of denying the crisis while at the same time trying to hide evidence of recruitment problems.



A report on the subject by the House of Commons education select committee is expected in the next few weeks. Look out for it and let us know if you are having any difficulty in either recruiting or retaining high quality teachers.

### 4. Are you fit for purpose?

In the third and final article of a series that has been addressing the above question, Sue Gollop turns her attention to the corporate responsibility we all hold as governors for continuously improving our schools.

I'm going to start with the issues that Ofsted has identified in under-performing governing boards. These include:

1. governors not ambitious about expectations
2. lack of a 'critical friend' approach
3. over reliance on information from the headteacher
4. lack of systematic visits to school
5. lack of engagement with school development planning
6. limited role in monitoring, and none of it 'independent'
7. limited understanding of data and school quality

I'll talk about each of these in turn.

1. Low expectations can become ingrained in the psyche of a school and, if allowed to go unchecked, become 'the truth' as everyone connected to the school - whether it be parents, staff or governors - believes it to be. You may have heard the expression "Well what can you expect given where we are located, the type of kids we've got, the lack of jobs in the area ..." etc, etc, etc. Perhaps even worse than this is the belief

that all is well in a school that outwardly appears to be very effective but in terms of performance is not. Have you heard this one? “We’re a successful school because we have the support of our parents, we always get good exam results and most of our children continue into the sixth form...etc. etc. etc.” Both of these beliefs come from taking things for granted and accepting them because ‘everybody says so.’ Governors need to dig a little deeper than opinions such as these because there is always more that can be done to continuously improve any school. Is the curriculum offer designed around pupils’ needs? What progress is made by pupils in the time between entering your school and leaving it? Is there an awareness of the difference between ‘attainment’ ‘progress’ and ‘achievement’? Is help and support accurately provided to those pupils that most need it? The message here is to never take anything for granted. Look, listen and question.

2. Sometimes governors are fearful of appearing to be critical in case they are seen to be questioning the expertise of the expert - i.e. the headteacher. This is not about governors ‘ganging up’ and dismissing things out of hand but questioning things they perhaps don’t understand and offering help and advice if they have a ‘day job’ or life experiences that may help to make things run more smoothly. The role of a headteacher can be a lonely one and most will welcome a governor or governors that they can turn to as a critical friend when they need advice or support over a particular issue.
3. ‘The Head told us that so it must be right,’ is another commonly held view amongst governors. It’s true that Headteachers are trained and experienced educationalists but just because they are appointed to the post doesn’t mean they suddenly know everything about everything. There will be some areas of their responsibility that they need to share and they can do this via the written report they are required to produce for every full governing board meeting. This report should be circulated before the meeting and certainly not during it so that governors can see what’s been happening and prepare any questions in advance.
4. It’s essential that you have in place a system for visits by governors so that it’s not simply a case of ‘I was just passing so I thought I’d pop in.’ Appointments need to be made and you should have an idea of what you would like to see and find out. Governors have an important monitoring role to play and well-planned visits are crucial to this, so your visit may be informed through a need to understand more about a particular aspect - for instance special educational needs, a curriculum subject or finance. Some schools link their governor visits to particular classes or departments. To help with all this, it’s useful to have a working knowledge of your school’s ‘direction of travel’. There should be a school policy for governor visits and a standard visit form so that observations and thoughts may be recorded.
5. All schools have a Development or Improvement plan and it’s important that there is governor representation in the writing of this. It should cover key aspects of your school’s work and contain information about how particular issues are to be addressed. It is very important that all governors are familiar with the content of their school’s Plan because this is a key document for Ofsted when they visit and they will have an expectation that any governors they meet will be able to answer questions they may pose about what’s in it. Be prepared!

6. We've said it many times. All governors have a part to play in the monitoring of what goes on in their schools. There is, however, a fine line between understanding what's going on and playing at being an inspector. Governors are not inspectors and should not undertake that role. So how can you monitor something without inspecting it? In the paragraph above about visiting your school I pointed out the value of having a focus or a fact-finding mission for your visits. You should choose a broad aspect of your school's work to monitor which might be something like 'The impact of the Pupil Premium on learning'. Gathering evidence for this can include observation of teachers at work but you must always have the teacher's permission before you observe and you must not use your observations to form judgements of teaching ability. That is not your job. Whatever evidence you gain of the topic you are researching should be fed back without identifying individuals and concentrating solely on providing an illustration of, in this case, how the PP funding is spent and what benefits (or otherwise) it has brought. This would be seen as independent monitoring by Ofsted.
7. And finally, the dreaded question of data and what it means. It is most important that governors understand the data relating to their school and do not just accept the Head's interpretation of it. Training in RaiseOnline and the Data Dashboard should be available for governors constantly and regularly as the data contained within them can throw up some interesting and important questions for governors to ask but they cannot ask the important questions if they know nothing of their importance. By helping and encouraging each other to raise questions from presented data, everyone will gain a much better understanding of how their school is performing and how it compares to other schools. Governors should have ready access to past OfSTED reports, the School Data Dashboard and RaiseOnline.

## 5. Ask GATHER

*I'm a governor in a large primary school of around 500 pupils. The school was graded as good a couple of years ago and we are heading in the right direction for outstanding. The finance committee is made up of five members but in the past few meetings two have pulled at the last minute which leaves the governor chair of finance, the head and me which means we are still quorate (3 required). These two seem to be using such opportunities to push items through because they vote together. It all seems very rehearsed. I wouldn't call them aggressive but they work together and I feel they are being quietly confrontational towards me. They also email the School Business Manager directly asking if certain things have been actioned without copying me in. I don't feel I'm involved in the decision-making at all and am worried that as a committee we may make a mistake that is picked up by other governors.*

If as you say, your school is on the way to outstanding, your finances must be managed well or Ofsted would have had something to say about that. Very often, the School Business Manager or Bursar is a co-opted member of the Finance Committee for it is they who will present budget spreadsheets and outline spending priorities. You don't say whether this is the case, nor do you say what these two are 'pushing through' by voting together but it's unlikely that they will be large items of expenditure because these would need FGB approval; nor do you say whether they are things that you always disagree with. It is not so unusual for Chairs of Finance committees to email Business Managers direct on matters that have already been agreed in principle in committee and it's important

that the Head and SBM have a close working relationship where the latter keeps the former informed as required but of course, as a member of the committee, you should be copied in to emails. There are two questions you need to ask at your next meeting. Firstly, why aren't you copied in to emails regarding finance and are the two absent members also not copied in? If the two members keep on missing meetings, your next question should be why are they still members? As for your worry that fellow governors will blame you for committee decisions made, they should be aware of what is being spent on what as it will be contained in the Head's report that you all receive regularly. Use this in FGB meetings to explain (politely!) to fellow governors how decisions were reached.

Do you have a concern about any aspect of school governance? Let us know and we'll do our best to provide an answer. Anonymity guaranteed!

## 6. Have a look at this

I'm providing a link [here](#) to 'The Governor' dated 2<sup>nd</sup> January. This is an excellent independent governors' newsletter written by David Marriott, who has wide experience of governance and is a published author of many guides on what makes a good governor. This month, he is addressing the relationship between the DfE and Academies and the prominence that seems to be given to extolling the virtues of academisation whilst not celebrating the successes of maintained schools. Rather than try to distil what David says in his headline article, I thought it better that you read his own words and we'd be very interested to hear whether you think his commentary on this is valid.

## 7. And finally...

A bit of new year light-hearted entertainment. There have been many songs written about school life over the years. Here's a governors' perspective on the words of one of them, written over 50 years ago. Has much changed in that time?

### **Be True to your School: Beach Boys 1963**

When some loud braggart tries to put me down  
And says his school is great  
I tell him right away  
"Now what's the matter buddy  
Ain't you heard of my school?  
It's number one in the state"

The sentiments expressed by these American boys all those years ago provide a parallel in England today where schools hang large banners outside their school gates when they get a good or outstanding Ofsted judgement, telling all that they are 'number one in the state'. However, this can encourage envy and competition between schools and Brian Wilson who wrote the song might simply have been boasting to pupils from other schools that his school was the best in his opinion which may have been open to debate. Governors need to be aware of school rivalry and have a policy for dealing with inter-school warfare. See some modern all-American primary pupils being true to their school [here](#).

**\*Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> March is the date of our annual conference. More details out soon!**