

GATHERround

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

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Welcome!

Spring is almost upon us and at this time of year we begin to feel better about the world around us, looking forward to lots of sunshine and long light evenings. And so it is with the world of education. There are some high profile people in government who keep telling us that things are so much better in the spring of this Conservative term than they were in the wintry pre-coalition days of 2009. Is this so? Some of the governor posts on our forum suggest otherwise and there are some interesting discussions on there that pull no punches when it comes to current government educational policy. If you haven't registered yet, do so today and feel free to join in. It's all completely anonymous so no-one's going to be called to account for their opinions.

We at GATHER encourage governors to express their views about the way their schools are expected to operate and in this, our newsletter, we also occasionally sound off about things that are happening. We've been a bit disappointed, therefore, to hear that a few of our readers think some of our articles are 'too opinionated' and that we should stick to just recording facts without expressing any bias for or against legislation and policy. Sorry but there are other publications where you can just get the facts and if you feel strongly about something - good or bad - and are prepared to share your views, write an article about it and we'll put it in GATHERround. In the meantime read on and enjoy!

E-mail us at: info@ga-ther.org

Post on the Forum at: www.ga-ther.org

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

1. League Tables 2015

Vince Barrett takes a look at 2015 test and exam outcomes in our area.

Love 'em or loathe 'em, they're what schools' quality is generally judged upon by inspectors and parents - and teachers and governors too, especially when their school's results are better than their neighbour's! But how much do these statistics really tell us about how well our schools are performing? The 2015 Key Stage 2 results were published in December and on the face of it, the outcomes from both our areas is encouraging. In Hull, 81% of Year 6 pupils achieved a Level 4+ in reading, writing and maths and in the East Riding, 82% of Year 6 pupils achieved Level 4+ in reading, writing and maths. The national average is 80% Level 4+ and the average for the Yorkshire and Humber region came out at 72%. We say well done to our primary schools.

At Key Stage 4 the 'gold standard' of 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C was achieved by 46.7% of Hull students at the end of year 11 while in the East Riding the figure was 56.3%. These figures are set against a national average of 53.8% and the leading Yorkshire authority, York, came out top in the region with 64%.

Now all sorts of inferences can be drawn from these figures but it must be borne in mind that there are so many variables that make national year-on-year end-of-key-stage comparisons a bit dodgy to say the least. Ofsted are aware of this and that's why the progress of children from the time they join you to the time they leave is now being monitored much more closely. We'll be looking at the tools for this - new levels of attainment and Progress 8 - in future editions of GATHERround. Meanwhile, take a look at the new Inspection Dashboard which you will find included in your School's RaiseOnline data. It focuses on progress measures and disadvantaged pupils. However you measure progress, though, children are not tins of beans and one year group may be made up of very different children to the one before; children in urban areas have different life experiences and aspirations to rural children; some areas are able to attract the best teachers and others are not; some years are very bad for hay fever sufferers at exam times and there are occasions when natural disasters disturb schooling such as the recent drastic flooding we've seen throughout Yorkshire. The list of variables must be almost endless and yet as a nation we tut-tut at schools whose performance appears to fall without bothering to look at the reasons why and there can be many reasons why.

As an example of statistical interfering, last year the government decreed that only the first GCSE exam outcome by a pupil could be recorded in the table. Any subsequent entries could not be included. As a consequence, most schools stopped multiple GCSE entries straight away, thus putting the image of the school before the needs of their pupils. However, some schools believe that entering pupils for examinations early is good training under real exam conditions. Those pupils that achieve A*-C at their first attempt can then presumably take new subjects and those that don't will be better prepared for when they take the exam again. Statistics that are not now available would probably show that grades achieved at the second attempt are much improved and, had they been recorded, would put those schools that allow pupils more than one stab at an exam higher up the league table. It's a bit like saying "I had to take my driving test twice before I passed it but my driving instructor can only count me as a failure." Ridiculous! There's

a famous saying attributed to Victorian Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli: "There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics" How true.

There's still more on statistical evidence. In an Ofsted report published in February, Nick Hudson, Ofsted's regional director for the North East, Yorkshire and Humber, said Hull City Council needs to do more to improve standards despite the recent KS2 successes listed above. He said:

"Council leaders and elected members have been too slow to recognise their responsibility in leading and driving the ambition for school improvement. As a result, the pace of improvement has not been fast enough. While we recognise there have been improvements in early years and primary schools, more needs to be done to improve outcomes for secondary education and the post-16 sector."

Those of you who attended our 'Question Time' seminar last October heard Mil Vasic, Hull's Director of Children, Young People and Family Services setting out the steps that are being taken to improve Hull's position in the league tables which has been at or near the bottom for many years. Even Ofsted had to admit that improvements have been made in the short time Mr Vasic has been in post (2014) when they said:

"The director and the interim city manager for education and skills [Graham Talbot] have provided a much-needed sense of urgency in the drive for improvement,"

However, bringing about improvement cannot be not the sole responsibility of individuals in Hull City Council. Mil Vasic responds by saying:

"Our priority remains to raise educational attainment by working with families and with all of our schools, colleges and academies and, in particular, to raise the aspirations of our young people and the value placed on a good education."

This strategy does seem to be bearing fruit but it is set against a background of well over 50% of Hull's schools now having academy status. Forgive me if I've got this wrong but the present government has said quite clearly that it wants to allow schools to operate free from local authority control. Academies need have nothing to do with the authority in which they are located unless they choose to purchase services from them. Can anyone tell me how this works?

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

2. Schools' News

Many Hull schools benefited greatly from the last Labour Government's 'Building Schools for the Future' (BSF) initiative which saw most Hull schools refurbished, rebuilt or both. Unfortunately, the incoming coalition Government of 2010 scrapped BSF before the East Riding was awarded any funding and so consequently schools in the East Riding have had to struggle on in old and very often unsuitable accommodation. That's now beginning to change with a new funding stream becoming available called the 'Priority Schools Building Programme'. A number of secondaries in the East Riding have moved or are about to move into brand new buildings. Wolfreton School in Willerby will become a single site school when it moves into a £22m brand new building on Carr Lane; work is also underway to make Hessle High School a single site school with a £19m redevelopment of its upper school site in Heads Lane and Withernsea High School's 1950s buildings are mostly being

demolished to make way for a 13m refurbishment and rebuild of its Hull Road campus. More building work has been taking place at Goole High School to provide a new teaching block and further refurbishment of the original building.

All this is good news for schools in the East Riding but there is still a way to go to ensure that all its schools are up to 21st century standards. Has your school had any rebuilding or re-modelling recently or does anyone still have buckets in corridors every time it rains? Let us know.

In other news, GATHER has always prided itself on the partnership we have with our two local authorities and the member schools that we have within them. It seems that this partnership idea is spreading. Following the tragic death last August of Jane Disbrey the Head of Hull's Malet Lambert School, the Executive Head of East Riding's South Hunsley Academy, Chris Abbott, was appointed as interim Head to oversee the maintenance of the school while a new Head was appointed. That appointment has now been made and Patrick Sprakes, who was previously an associate head at the school is now Head of School. We wish him well. The story doesn't end there, however, because Malet Lambert - which is an academy - will now be run by a brand new multi-academy trust called the Education Alliance and comprising Malet Lambert, the new Hunsley Primary school due to open in new premises in Brough and South Hunsley Academy. A Hull school and two East Riding schools working in close partnership? Unheard of since the abolition of Humberside in 1996! We welcome this new Alliance and look forward to reporting on the success of the venture.

3. The thin end of the wedge?

A national academy chain is planning to scrap local governing bodies for the 23 schools in its control. The E-ACT academy group says it will have a single central governing board covering all schools in the group with new 'academy ambassadorial advisory bodies' at local level, chaired by someone appointed by the academy chain and providing functions such as 'interface with the community' but they will no longer be involved in areas such as hiring senior staff or monitoring budgets and standards. These advisory bodies will replace the long-standing local stakeholder governance model that has parental and community representatives, charged with holding their schools to account.

The response to this proposal has been predictable. The Department for Education says it is up to academy chains to decide how they want to administer their schools while the National Union of Teachers says removing local representatives is "undemocratic and sets a dangerous precedent".

As governors who give freely of our time to support the work of our local schools, this comes as something of a smack in the face. We are a strong advocate of the stakeholder model of governance because we feel that people with knowledge and understanding of how their community works are best placed to advise and support senior leaders in schools. Not only that but we have an independence from any organisation that may coerce us in any particular direction. We are free to question the policies of local authorities, the DfE and Ofsted and even if at times we are not happy with some of the things we are asked to do, we can't easily be sacked from our position as governors. Not so these new advisory bodies which will no doubt be acting at the behest of the central board, whether they are volunteers or not.

At a time when more and more schools are becoming academies, do you think the days of schools governors as we know them are numbered? Read more about this story [here](#) and let us know your views either on the forum or by email.

4. Lunch break

Back in the spring of 2014, we included in GATHERround Issue 2 an article entitled 'There's no such thing as a free lunch.' In that article we raised the question of how a hot lunch could be provided free to all four to seven year olds from September 2014 when the cost was going to be in the region of £600m. At the time both David Cameron and Nick Clegg said how important it was to ensure that all KS1 pupils received a hot nutritious midday meal and that this was a major government policy initiative. Grants were made available to smaller schools to help with setup costs for two years and these will cease this July.

Needless to say, many small schools have come to depend on this subsidy in order to provide free meals to all their KS1 children and some headteachers are now saying that they will have to take money from their dedicated school grant budgets if they are to continue without the subsidy.



Last year, the Small Schools Task Force could see this coming and recommended an 'ongoing small schools subsidy' for schools serving fewer than 100 meals a day but the DfE has said: *"We have always been clear that this funding was always intended to be temporary to help small schools to put their meals service on a more sustainable footing"*. The National Association of Head Teachers' general secretary, Russell Hobby, said schools should not be *"forced to choose between their legal duty to provide a hot meal and their main focus of providing a high standard of education"* and Henry Dimbleby, co-writer of the School Food Plan in 2014 described the end of the grant as *"sad, misguided and completely avoidable"*.

Suddenly it seems, the government does not consider a free hot meal for all as important as it did in 2014. We could all see what was going to happen and sure enough, it has. The whole project should have been properly thought through and costed, not introduced quickly as a political gimmick. Schools and their children should not be used as political pawns in this way.

Are you a governor in a small school having to find cash to continue serving free lunches for all KS1 pupils? What have you come up with? Please let us know.

5. No room at the school

It's been reported that as many as 90,000 11-year old pupils nationally may not be offered a place at the secondary school of their parents' first choice this September. This comes as no surprise as more than 60% of secondary schools nationally are now academies or free schools that can set their own admission policies and can close their doors once they are 'full'. Another problem is that once schools are labelled as 'inadequate' or 'requires improvement' parents don't want their children to go there so don't choose them. However, local authorities still have a statutory responsibility to ensure a school place

for all children living within their boundaries which has led to a rather bizarre situation in some areas where the Local Government Association wants councils to be given the power to be able to open new maintained schools themselves and/or to require academies to expand as needed to make up for any shortfall in pupil places.

We haven't heard of such problems with secondary school places in our region and an article in the Guardian on 2nd March said that the East Riding achieved the most 'first choice' places in the country - 96.4% compared with Birmingham, one of the lowest, at 69.2%.

Has your governing board received any appeals from parents unhappy with the school allocated to them? Let us know if you have. It would make a good 'Ask GATHER' topic! Talking of which...

6. Ask GATHER

I am a Parent Governor at my son's primary school. The school was inspected recently and I was interviewed by an inspector as a part of the process. I gave my honest views about the school and looked forward to receiving the feedback and draft report in due course. I've now been told by the Head and the Chair of Governors that the Lead Inspector told them that the feedback and draft report are confidential until the report is published and they cannot share the outcome with anyone. Is this correct?

Ofsted states that any governor available at the time of the inspection feedback may attend the session where it is given but it does also state that both the feedback and the draft report are confidential until the report is published. This means, however, that they are confidential to all members of the governing board as a whole, not just to those at the feedback. This is so that any disputed facts in either the feedback or the draft report are resolved before the final report goes public.

However, we have heard of occasions where the Chair of Governors and/or the Head have misinterpreted the standard end-of-inspection briefing about this confidentiality. Whether that is ever a deliberate misunderstanding we can't say but instances like the one you describe do seem to be more common where the Ofsted judgement has been Requires Improvement or Special Measures and the Head and Chair try to keep it secret while they prepare a statement to release to governors, staff and parents the minute the final report is released.

To try to keep people, especially governors, 'in the dark' about any issues that the school is facing is counter-productive and will hinder the speedy formation of action plans to put things right.

7. The GATHER website and Forum

Have you visited our website lately or indeed at all? If not, go and take a look at it because it's full of constantly updated information about government policy affecting us as governors, links to any major speeches made by ministers or civil servants and news of governor training opportunities. The jewel in the crown is the forum where many topics are discussed and governors' views aired. We could do with a few more contributors to ensure balance of opinion so don't delay, register today. You'll need your school's GATHER

membership number to do this - your Business Manager should be able to give you this. If not just email and ask us.

8. Premier League leadership talent

According to the Guardian on 3rd March, Sir Michael Wilshaw seems to be taking on Lord Sugar's approach when it comes to finding outstanding headteachers. His plan is to set up a system so that young teachers can be talent-spotted early in their careers and then encouraged to seek promotion into leadership positions that he's calling "apprentice head" positions. He proposes regional directors (or talent spotters) for the National College who would "in conversations with headteachers and executive heads and regional commissioners and local authorities - identify at an early stage, after a few years of teaching, that person has got what it takes to eventually become a leader,"

Sir Michael claims that we must as a country ensure we've got enough good teachers and enough good headteachers and that once we have both, evenly distributed across the country, we will have a better system."

He was asked by Lucy Frazer, the Conservative MP for South East Cambridgeshire if effective school leaders could be recruited from among business leaders.

"They could come from outside but I've not met one yet," Sir Michael said. *"I've not heard of the chief executive of the local plumbing firm coming in and becoming a good headteacher."*

Could a high-flying business executive take on the running of a school or academy? Do good teachers necessarily make good Heads? Could a poor teacher develop the skills to be a good Head? Could a teacher show their skills in a school and be so good that the governors eventually appoint him or her as headteacher of that same school? So many questions but is this really the way forward?

9. And finally...

You may have noticed that there are no articles in this newsletter about the good things that governors are doing to help and support their schools in achieving excellence. That's because no-one has told us about them! We really would like to be able to report on the positive things that are happening in our schools but we depend on you as governors to make sure we know about them. Please do send us any stories or links to local press articles about what you and/or your school is doing to provide an excellent standard of education. We'd like to make this a regular feature because there's no better way of developing our work as governors than to learn about what's happening in other governors' schools.

You will have received a reminder letter from our Chair Sue Gollop, containing details of our annual conference being held this year on Saturday 19th March. We still have a few places left so if you'd like to attend, simply email us via your school with your name and we'll do the rest.