

GATHERround

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

IN THIS ISSUE:

1. EU COULDN'T MAKE IT UP
2. DANGER! FROSTY CONDITIONS AND U-TURNS ON THE ROAD AHEAD
3. A CHIEF INSPECTOR CALLS
4. IT'S SHOWTIME!
5. WHAT'S YOUR EXCUSE?
6. ASK GATHER
7. GATHER FORUM
8. GATHER COUNCIL
9. AND FINALLY...

Welcome!

Here's our last newsletter of the academic year and it comes at a very interesting time in British politics as we now know that we're going to leave the EU. We look in more detail at what might happen in education over the coming months in articles 1 and 2.

We hope you enjoy reading our newsletters which are intended to bring you news, views and occasional wit and repartee about what's happening in the world of education. Once it's sent out to our member schools, we have no control over where it ends up but we do know that it could be copied, forwarded, whatsapped or whatever to governors in schools that are not GATHER members. This in itself isn't a problem - the more readers we get the better - but if you do send it to colleagues in other schools please could we ask that you urge them to get their school to become a GATHER member so that they will receive their own copy. We are very much a 'shoestring' organisation that operates largely on the goodwill of the six Council members but we do have to meet costs of venue hire, travel and website maintenance. We think £15.00 per year is good value - especially as your school can recoup this by taking advantage of our concessionary members' rates at our seminars and conference. If you're reading this and you know your school isn't yet a member, simply visit www.ga-ther.org click on the 'Join GATHER' button, fill in a few details and we'll do the rest.

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1. EU couldn't make it up.

We think it's all over. It is now! For many months we've had to listen to the dire warnings of both the Brexiteers and the Remainers as they've slugged it out to win our vote. Not since the late Muhammad Ali's Rumble in the Jungle with George Foreman way back in 1974 have we witnessed such an acrimonious build-up to an event which has now ended in a result that makes about 48% of the population unhappy. We're on our way out. So what happens in the world of education now? Well probably not a lot in the near future although by the time you read this, there may well have been a cabinet reshuffle and it's anyone's guess who will be given which ministerial role. Read on to see what our crystal ball foretells.

2. Danger! Frosty conditions and U-turns on the road ahead

Before looking at what might happen with the post-brexite reshuffle, let's take a look at recent events in the tenure of the present incumbent Nicky Morgan.

As a demonstration of educationists' frustration and anger, at the NAHT conference on 30th April, Morgan faced a highly critical audience of headteachers who told her she wasn't listening to their professional concerns. She gave no concession to total academisation or testing plans - which would have been difficult as education minister Nick Gibb had appeared on many news bulletins leading up to the conference saying that more academisation and more challenging testing were the way forward. So much so that headteacher Simon Kidwell from Hartford Manor Primary School in Cheshire, asked Morgan: "Are you in charge of the department or is it Nick Gibb?" to which Morgan replied: "I am not going to dignify that sexist remark with a reply." Cue groans from delegates at such a ridiculous response. Not good coming from a minister who is also Minister for Women and Equalities.

"You turn if you want to. The lady's not for turning," said Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in 1980. Fast forward 36 years and the current Secretary of State for Education might just as well have said at 3.30 pm on 6th May, just as the local election results were dominating the news: "I'll turn if I want to. This lady's all for turning." And she did, throwing the forced academisation policy out of the window.

I never thought I'd say this but I feel rather sorry for Nicky Morgan. She's a lightweight politician given the job of Education Secretary in 2014 by David Cameron, anxious to quell rising anger in the profession following Michael Gove's four year tenure during which he referred to the education establishment as 'The Blob'. Morgan has clearly been driven from behind the scenes to pursue the Tory education dogma of total academisation and over-testing of children but all that's happened is that teachers are angrier than ever. Add into the mix the huge concern from primary schools about the difficult 2016 Reading SAT paper, the disastrous early publication of KS2 tests online on 10th May, not once but twice and you have a recipe for education disaster. Even Tory backbenchers began questioning aspects of education policy.

Morgan is clearly the 'fall-guy' who has been charged with giving out unpalatable and unworkable education policies but is unable to defend them robustly or articulately, based on any sound evidence. Now that the wheels appear to have come off the hugely unpopular forced academisation plan, people will start examining other aspects of her

brief tenure, find faults, blame her and she'll have to go. I think her days in the job may be numbered.

As for the post-brexit cabinet, now that David Cameron has publicly resigned with effect from October and may be forced out sooner, any new cabinet posts may be very short-lived until such time as we get a substantive prime minister. But who might that be? Boris Johnson? Theresa May? Michael Gove? Jeremy Hunt? Will Nicky Morgan keep her job? As I said above I think it's unlikely but it's difficult to predict who could replace her. Could it be Nick Gibb? Other candidates may be Edward Timpson, Liz Truss, Caroline Dinenage, Justine Greening with a rank outsider in the shape of John Whittingdale. While all this is going on, the Labour party is also in disarray as the Parliamentary Party seeks to oust Jeremy Corbyn.

Whatever happens, and there will have been developments by the time you're reading this, we're in for a bumpy ride until the dust settles. We could even be in for a snap general election which would throw all the balls up in the air. Exciting isn't it?

3. A Chief Inspector calls

As Nicky Morgan's door looks like closing, another one opens and in comes Amanda Spielman (right) who will be taking over from Sir Michael Wilshaw as Ofsted's chief inspector when his term ends in December. This has caused controversy in that Ms Spielman has no direct teaching or school management experience. She is a chartered accountant whose expertise principally lies in data analysis and high-level finance and investment strategy. She does, however, have some understanding of education through her roles as chair of Ofqual since 2011; she is an adviser to the ARK academy chain which she co-founded and she has an MA in comparative education from the Institute of Education. Opinion on her appointment is sharply divided:



"I know that she is the right person to deliver the education white paper's commitment to continue to improve the quality and consistency of Ofsted's inspections, ensuring that it plays a central role in realising our vision of educational excellence everywhere."

Nicky Morgan, Secretary of State for Education

"It is a sad indictment of this government's attitude to education that they place such little value on the experience of teachers and head teachers, that they would not consider such a background necessary for the chief inspector's role."

Kevin Courtney, NUT acting General Secretary

"We are sure that Amanda's broad experience in education and business will help her to oversee a remit which extends widely beyond schools, and we look forward to working with her,"

Malcom Trobe, ASCL interim General Secretary

"We offer our congratulations to Amanda Spielman. This will be a new era for Ofsted and we look forward to working with her in the future and helping her to gain an understanding of colleges and a sector that she has not worked closely with in the past."

Martin Doel, AoC Chief Executive

“Nicky Morgan will doubtlessly be relieved to have a less troublesome chief inspector than Sir Michael Wilshaw who, although he got many things wrong, was unafraid to challenge the government’s policy when he thought it was wrong whereas Amanda Spielman’s record is of agreeing with and implementing the government’s policy, and we expect Nicky Morgan wants more of the same.”

Mary Bousted, ATL General Secretary

What are we as governors to make of all this? It could be argued that her appointment was approved because, as a key player in the setting up of a large academy chain, she will have a self-interest in the success of the government’s academisation policy and so could be soft on the inspection of chains. On the other hand, her business background and expertise in data analysis could bring a fresh and impartial view to inspection - a move away from her predecessor’s constant but fearless haranguing of government ministers, local authorities, academy chains and headteachers about the state of education today compared to when he was a self-proclaimed superhead.

Only time will tell. We have to give Amanda a chance to prove her worth. We at GATHER will be watching and listening!

4. It’s Showtime!

This is a very local issue but one that may be applicable to schools throughout our area. Every July for over 100 years the town of Driffield has held an annual one-day agricultural show which was originally for farmers to display the fruits of their labours over the year, to compete for best animal or produce and take the chance to have a good old chinwag together. Over the years, this has become a whole-community event with local organisations running stalls and displays of all sorts of livestock including family pets, amazing vegetables and confectionery to put Bake



A sunny Driffield Show day

Off to shame. There are lots of educational stands that look at issues such as sustainability, the environment and the weather and local colleges are also there to discuss courses on offer. The timing of the show has always been in the third week of July, usually before schools close for the summer so that straight after, farmers can get busy with harvest time. Local schools have become very much a part of the show as children’s art, craft, cookery and literary works are submitted and displayed with prizes to be won.

Not surprisingly it was long ago accepted that families would want to attend together and so local schools made arrangements in order that parents and pupils wishing to attend could do so with their blessing, providing the parents had contacted the school to say their child(ren) would be attending with them. All good so far. But then in 2013, the Secretary of State at the time, Michael Gove, introduced a law that said parents would be fined for wilfully keeping their children out of schools and Ofsted would be looking closely at the number of unauthorised absences. This resulted in schools

stopping permission to visit the show which meant that children who had submitted work or a family pet could not attend the judging during the day. There was disappointment that children could not be with Grandma to see whether her Victoria sponge was the best or that Grandad's marrow was indeed the world's finest though inevitably, some parents paid no regard to Gove's rule and took their children anyway. This year, the Driffield and Wolds Partnership of Headteachers, with the backing of the Local Authority, has agreed that the show is part of the local promotion of Modern British Values and so an exception can be made and attendance will be authorised.

Good news for ardent Driffield Show visitors but potentially this decision could be seen by parents elsewhere to open the door to leave of absence to attend similar events such as the Great Yorkshire Show which takes place in Harrogate from 12th to 14th July.

The question for governors beyond the Driffield area is this. Would you sanction an absence policy that stated children could go to a local show providing that parents signed to say they were responsible for their supervision?

5. What's your excuse?

Talking of absence and as we approach the summer holidays, here's a light-hearted look at other reasons parents give for their offsprings' absence from school. Earlier in the year, Simon Morgan, a parent from Penarth, took his family on a last minute holiday that meant son James would miss two school days. He was not surprised when he received a text from the school asking him to explain James' absence so he replied with a picture of the pair in front of Dubai's luxurious hotel, the Burj Al Arab (right).



"When I got the message I decided to send the picture because I think a picture tells a thousand words," said Simon. "I think from the photo it was quite apparent where he was."

Here are a few more perhaps less exotic reasons for children's absence:

"Please excuse Jennifer for missing school yesterday. We forgot to pick up the Sunday paper off the doormat and when we found it on Monday, we thought it was Sunday."

"I'm sorry Jason has been off for the past two days. He had a cold and could not breed very well."

"Britney has not been in school for three days because her father's away and I needed her to help me out while I was in bed under the doctor."

"Toby was not in school for two days last week because his grandad who lives a long way away is very poorly. I thought we'd better pay a visit before it's too late."

Tragi-comical though these excuses may be and while there is little doubt that Simon Morgan qualifies to receive a £60.00 fine for his son's absence, what about all the others? Are they exceptional circumstances? Are they genuine excuses? The absence policy is a difficult one to get right in order to address all the circumstances, including attending local shows, that may result in a child's absence. What does your policy say?

6. Ask GAtHER

“I am a parent governor at a small school. I recently observed something on my most recent visit which I felt needed to be brought to the attention of the headteacher and the governors, which I did in my Record of Visits. At the subsequent governors’ meeting I was taken to task for bringing up managerial issues, which would appear to be beyond my remit as a governor. We are due an inspection in the not-to-distant future; and I felt it was important that the concern was brought to light sooner rather than later. Please could you tell me what we should do as governors if we come across an issue which needs to be highlighted?”

The first thing to say is that governors have a strategic responsibility for the running of their school rather than an operational one - which falls to the senior leaders employed at the school. The distinction between the two is often confusing but briefly means that governors determine policies and procedures, oversee the budget and define the direction they want the school to take. Senior leaders make sure that such procedures are followed, money is spent correctly and the school is constantly developing. Governors should be welcome to visit the school to observe its day to day life and to inform them about the effects of the strategic decisions they have made. However, governors are not inspectors and are not there to pass judgement on what they have observed.

Having said that, if you have witnessed something that you feel needs to be drawn to the attention of the headteacher and/or the chair of governors, you are right to pass this on. Your school clearly has a visits recording form which should enable governors to record what they have observed, what they have learnt and anything they want to ask. It’s important that any issue you have observed is raised initially as a question in order for you to learn rather than posed as a challenge which usually results in a Head being defensive. Any discussion about what’s recorded on visit forms should take place outside full governing body meetings, unless many governors are recording the same concern in which case the Chair may refer it to the relevant committee for consideration or add it as an agenda item at the next full governing body meeting. If you have followed these protocols, you should not have been ‘taken to task’ in a full governing body meeting. However when these protocols are not observed and non-agenda issues are aired by governors in full governing body meetings then the Head may well feel that governors are encroaching on operational matters without giving him or her a chance to respond.

As we don’t know what it is that you have observed, the above procedure should apply to any day-to-day operational issues but if what you have seen may have child protection or safeguarding consequences, you should immediately inform the Head, the Chair and the person in the school with safeguarding responsibility and allow them to decide a course of action.

7. GAtHER Forum

Academisation has been mentioned a number of times in this issue and it’s a subject that raises questions, uncertainty and sometimes blood pressure! Nowhere is this better demonstrated than on the GAtHER forum where a lively discussion on the subject is currently happening. If you haven’t done so already, visit the forum at www.ga-ther.org

and have your say. You'll need to register but that's easy if you're a governor in a member school and if you're not, join us!

8. GAtHER Council

As we reach the end of another academic year, we thought it might be useful to remind you of who's who at GAtHER. Our Council members are:

Sue Gollop, Chair and governor at New Pasture Lane Primary and Bridlington School

Vince Barrett, Vice Chair and governor at Driffield School

Janet Slater, Secretary and ex-governor at Wolfreton School

Mike Heslop-Mullens, Treasurer and governor at Bridlington School

Lance Boanas, Website and forum manager and governor at Wolfreton School

Richard Marsden, Hull schools' rep and governor at Biggin Hill Primary

Lisa Devine, Associate member and School Governance and LA Ofsted Development Officer with East Riding Council

Maria Bannister, Associate member and School Effectiveness Officer (Governance) with Hull City Council.

We meet once or twice a term and between us, we arrange our annual conference and seminars, help with governor training, attend national conferences, provide a constantly-updated website packed full of useful information and bring you this, our twice-termly GAtHERround newsletter.

We'd love to welcome new members so if you can spare one or two evenings a term and help with the things we already offer, or better still add to the things that we offer, drop us an email.

10. And finally...

Just before we all break up for a well-earned summer sojourn and as relief from all the political stuff that's going on, here's a song from 1972 that expressed a view very popular with young people at the time:

School's Out: Alice Cooper

No more pencils

No more books

No more teacher's dirty looks

School's out for summer

School's out forever

School's been blown to pieces

This was an anarchic piece by Alice Cooper - a man with a woman's name and who wore strange clothes - politely suggesting that once schools closed for the summer, they might as well be completely destroyed by an explosive device so that young people would never have to go back. Modern-day governors should discuss what action would be taken if such a threat as this were to be received by the school and have a policy for dealing with unprovoked aggression. See the rather weird Mr Cooper and his friends in action [here](#)

Happy holidays! We'll be back in September.