

GATHERround

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

IN THIS ISSUE:

1. AN IMPORTANT DIARY DATE
2. HAVE WE GOT A NEW BROOM?
3. CAN YOU BELIEVE IT?
4. SCHOOL PERFORMANCE IN MULTI-ACADEMY TRUSTS AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES
5. THE REAL SCHOOLS GUIDE
6. CAN YOU BELIEVE IT 2?
7. Ask GATHER
8. IS IT PAYDAY YET?
9. IN MY OPINION...
10. PISA: A TOWER OF STRENGTH OR LEANING TOWARDS MISLEADING?
11. AND FINALLY...

Welcome!

Happy new year! No, that one. The new academic year is under way and the news likely to affect us in our work are the new government, the new Prime Minister and the new Secretary of State for Education who will all inevitably put their own stamp on reforms. There's more on this in Section 2. The focus on governor recruitment based on individuals' skills rather than the appointment of willing volunteers is likely to continue and we'd be interested in hearing from any governors about how this is going. Have you managed to enlist the right mix of skills for your governing board? Do you think an offer of payment would attract more recruits? Read more about this in Section 8. Then there's the ongoing East Riding plea for better funding as the authority is still one of the worst-funded in the country for education provision. Academisation will continue to be an issue with about 70% of Hull schools now operating as academies while the East Riding currently has only around 12% that have so far chosen academy status. Will schools rated as inadequate still be forced to become academies? There's an interesting question about becoming a governor in a forced academy posed in Section 7 'Ask GATHER'.

If you would like to share your views on anything to do with governance, please register and visit our forum. There are plenty of views on dozens of topics on there and we welcome the full spectrum of opinion on developments in education.

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. An important diary date

We're opening with this item as we feel it's about an event that is now an important one in the governance calendar. It's the annual GATHER autumn seminar which is taking place at **Willerby Manor Hotel, Willerby, HU10 6ER** from **7.00 to 9.30 pm** on **Thursday 13th October**. The programme this year will feature our Regional Schools Commissioner, Jennifer Bexon-Smith who will be talking about her role. This could be very interesting as by then, her new boss (below) is likely to have made some pronouncements on education policy. There will be the opportunity to ask questions of senior officers in both our LAs and of course some time for networking. We will also be holding our AGM which will give you a chance to hear about our plans for the association. In order to cover costs, we have to charge for this event which is £10.00 per delegate for GATHER member schools and £15.00 per delegate for non-members. Further details will follow very soon.

2. Have we got a new broom?

Well we've definitely got a new Secretary of State for Education in Justine Greening (right) and now that the former architects of disaster in the education system, Morgan and Gove, have both been kicked into the long grass we must hope that Ms Greening will listen to all of us involved in the educational establishment without referring to us as the 'Blob' or calling us sexist - and act accordingly without having any strings pulled from behind the curtain. So here's what's already known about Justine Greening and education.



- She was born in Rotherham, and attended a comprehensive school in the town.
- She did not attend Oxford university unlike both of her predecessors; she studied economics at the University of Southampton.
- She is a big advocate of girls' education as shown in her role as international development secretary. Whilst in that job, she staged a Girls' Education Forum in a bid to bring global attention to the issue.
- As a former accountant, her work is about efficiency and effectiveness. She says she's only interested in 'what works'. One source has described her as a 'spreadsheet person' but hopefully this means that she will give due consideration to new ideas in education and not go hell for leather trying to implement half-baked initiatives like total academisation or constant fiddling with the curriculum and testing.

So what will her appointment mean for us in education? Firstly, her brief has expanded to include further and higher education as it did before 2010 when FE and HE were put into the remit of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. This will mean that the Education Secretary will have more people and more junior ministers to oversee in the Department for Education. One thing to watch will be the make-up of her team of junior ministers. Nick Gibb remains in post (more later) and he had plenty to say about academisation and testing during Morgan's reign - so much so that a headteacher asked Morgan if it was Nick Gibb who was really in charge - only to be told that was a sexist question. So what changes might we see? Prime Minister Theresa May has already said

that she favours the idea of new grammar schools (presumably ‘grammar academies’) so that’s likely to be something for Ms Greening to consider. The so-called ‘Gove reforms’ in education have more or less been put in place - which is not to say that they have been successful or fully implemented as demonstrated by Morgan’s U-turn on total academisation and the outcry about SATs tests and new curricula.

There are, however, many issues in the pipeline that do need to be managed; a new formula for fairer school funding - both the total amount made available and its distribution nationally; teacher recruitment and retention; regional differences in pupil attainment and progress; the role of the regional schools commissioners and the future of academisation. Quite enough for a new Secretary of State to be dealing with so a reasonable expectation would be for Ms Greening to concentrate on sorting out immediate issues and putting everything else on the back burner for a while to allow time for existing reforms to be tested, embedded and if necessary, thrown out. But this is politics and as was seen during the time of the previous two incumbents, they were both appointed to fervently execute the 2010 and 2015 Conservative mandates for education. We hope that such fervency will be moderated now and a period of calmer development of the education system will ensue. We shall see.

3. Can you believe it?

On 26th April, our Chair, Sue Gollop e-mailed her MP Sir Greg Knight to register her ‘profound opposition to the notion of forced academisation.’ This was well before the Brexit political earthquake so it was something of a surprise when she received from Sir Greg on 1st August what looks like a standard response that could have been written by David Cameron and Michael Gove as propaganda to support March’s badly-received White Paper *Educational Excellence Everywhere*, loudly espoused by Nicky Morgan. Since then of course, one of them has resigned and the other two have got the chop. This is what Sir Greg said:

“The Government is committed to ensuring every child has an excellent education which allows them to achieve their full potential. The reforms of the past 6 years have led to 1.4 million more children being taught in ‘good’ and ‘outstanding’ schools. Central to this improvement has been the academy programme.

The academy programme puts control of running schools in the hands of teachers and school leaders - the people who know best how to run their schools. That is why the Government is committed to every school becoming an academy. This system will allow us to tackle underperformance far more swiftly than in a local-authority-maintained system where many schools have been allowed to languish in failure for years. At the same time, it will allow our most successful and popular schools to expand their reach to even more children.

Since launching its proposals in the White Paper, Educational Excellence Everywhere, the Government has listened to feedback from MPs, teachers, school leaders and parents. It is clear from those conversations that the impact academies have in transforming young people’s life chances is widely accepted and that more and more schools are keen to embrace academy status.

As a result of these conversations, the Government has decided, while reaffirming its continued determination to see all schools becoming academies in the next 6 years, that

it is not necessary to bring legislation to bring about blanket conversion of all schools to achieve this goal. The Government will continue to require underperforming schools to convert to academy status where they can benefit from the support of a strong sponsor. It will also legislate so that all schools within a local authority area are converted if the local authority can no longer viably support the remaining schools, or where a local authority is consistently failing to meet a minimum performance threshold and is unable to bring about meaningful school improvement.

The Government will focus its efforts on those schools most at risk of failing young people, and encouraging ‘good’ and ‘outstanding’ schools to seize the opportunities of conversion, which will ensure the continued growth of the academy programme, empowering frontline heads and school leads, and transforming even more children’s education.”

Hmmm. Not sure where the statistics or the bold statements contained in this missive came from but some of them appear decidedly dodgy. Read on.

4. School Performance in Multi-Academy Trusts and Local Authorities

It would appear that Sir Greg is not aware just how small the total number of academies in England still is. There are 21,850 state-funded schools and of these, just 3,300 are run as free schools, free-standing academies or academies within the current 846 MATs. 18,550 are therefore still under the control of the 150 local authorities. How fortuitous then that on 8th July, the Education Policy Institute published the above report. Its research used two measures of effectiveness; how well a school has improved over time and its overall performance, taking into account the starting point of its pupils. The findings are quite startling. They say that academisation does not automatically raise standards and there are high levels of variability within both MATs and LAs. The report states:

- *At primary level, MATs are among both the best and worst performers. 12 of the top 30 school groups are MATS, while 9 of the worst 23 school groups are also MATs.*
- *At secondary level, 6 of the top 20 best performing school groups are MATs and 14 are LAs. However, 9 of the 20 worst performing school groups are also MATs and 11 are LAs, meaning that, at secondary level, MATs make up a disproportionate number of the lowest-performing school groups.*
- *25 LAs are significantly above average at KS4 against the improvement measures, meaning a school that moves from one of these high performing LAs to a low performing MAT would risk a significant decline in standards. The difference between the highest performing LA and the lowest performing large MAT is equivalent to just over 7 GCSE grades. Full academisation, especially when forced, could therefore risk damaging school outcomes.*

The report’s Policy Recommendations are:

1. *The Government should not pursue full academisation as a policy objective, instead the objective should be for pupils to be in a good school, regardless of whether that is a high performing MAT or LA.*

- 2. Government policy should be explicit about the intervention strategy it is pursuing for underperforming MATs, which should be consistent with intervention on LAs. The approach should not favour LAs or MATs, but rather target underperformance in any school.*
- 3. The Government should consider allowing high performing LAs to become Academy Trusts, or avoid entirely forced academisation of higher performing LAs.*
- 4. Resource and policy focus should be dedicated to understanding what drives high performance in MATs, developing new high quality Trusts and ensuring that those that are currently the lowest performing can learn from the best.*

Well what a surprise. The report says in essence that some schools have benefited from becoming academies while others have not and while some MATs are of high quality, clearly others are not. Equally, of the large number of schools that have stayed under LA control, some continue to flourish while others do not. It goes on to say that it matters not who oversees a school as long as it provides a good standard of education. I think we could all have seen this coming and it makes the claims made in Sir Greg's response look rather contrived to say the least. Have a look at the full report [here](#).

5. The Real Schools Guide 2016

Yet more statistical evidence to call into question Sir Greg's claims of academy supremacy has just been published. 'The Real Schools Guide' is an annual analysis of secondary schools' and academies' performance which appears to be published nationally by the local newspaper serving each area of England. In our case it's the Hull and East Riding Daily Mail which on 9th August published the results for all Hull and East Riding secondaries. Scores are given for:

Attainment, based on pupils' GCSE performance in 2015 compared with 2014 and 2010 outcomes to measure whether a school is improving year-on-year. Attainment is worth 30% of the total score.

Teaching, based on how well all pupils do in relation to expectation and whether the school is closing the gender gap. It also looks at how big the pupil/teacher ratio is in comparison to the national average, as well as teachers' average salaries. Teaching is worth 40% of the total score.

Attendance, based on absence rate of sessions missed as well as levels of unauthorised and persistent absence. Attendance is worth 15% of the total score.

Outcomes, based on a comparison to national averages, of the number of pupils continuing in recognised education or training after Year 11 and those who are not registered as having moved on to a positive destination. Outcomes are worth 15% of the total score.

Once the total score is awarded, each school is ranked in a list of the total number of state-funded secondary schools and academies in England (3,109). Unsurprisingly, this research does not appear to be endorsed by the DfE but the website's worth a visit because clicking on each school/academy gives a breakdown of how their scores were arrived at.

It all looks a bit rough and ready but the results are interesting. Top of the tree in our area is a Hull academy, ranked at 257/3109. At the bottom is another Hull academy ranked at 3105/3109. Top place in the East Riding goes to an academy at 268/3109 while trailing in last place is another academy placed at 2723/3109.

What were the names of the best and worst? You'll have to visit the site to find out and you can see how your own institution fared. Go to www.hulldailymail.co.uk/schoolratings

6. Can you believe it 2?

Information released in July revealed that the DfE spent £952,602 on developing the spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPAG) test for seven-year-olds, only to have to abandon the entire project just before pupils were due to sit it after the paper was leaked online. A government spokesman (for it is always he who tries to make up excuses for cock-ups) said *“The KS1 grammar, punctuation and spelling test breach was clearly regrettable, and a root and branch review is underway to ensure it doesn't happen again. Schools were still free to administer the test this year, and to use it to help pupils master essential skills.”* This is SPAGBOL of the highest order. First of all, nearly a million pounds was completely wasted; secondly, the test proved to be pitched far too high anyway for most KS1 children; thirdly KS1 teachers have been competently assessing pupils' spelling and grammar understanding for many years without a SPAG test and fourthly if such a monumental blunder and waste of money was made by an LA or a school, there would have been hell to pay. “Regrettable” wouldn't cut it. Meanwhile, Nick Gibb, the Schools Minister under Morgan who was in post when this solecism occurred has been made Minister for School Standards in the new government. Victor Meldrew would have said ‘I don't believe it.’ Neither do we.

7. Ask GATHER

Here's an interesting question regarding academies and governance.

I am considering applying to be a school governor. There are vacancies at my local secondary school but it's currently in special measures. I have no idea what this means so I'd appreciate an explanation. Is there any difference in being a governor for a school in special measures compared to a school judged to be good or outstanding? Will there be any additional expectations of me? As a newcomer to school governance, would it be too demanding or could it be an opportunity to get stuck in and help to change things for the better?

'Special Measures' is the category that schools are placed in following an Ofsted inspection that finds them not to be delivering an acceptable level of education in one or more key areas and/or appearing to lack the leadership capacity necessary to secure improvements. Following an inspection that places a school in special measures, a number of things happen. Firstly, if the school is a Local Authority maintained school, it has to become an academy within an established multi-academy trust (MAT). If it's an academy already, it is the MAT's responsibility to put in place the necessary actions to sort out the identified problems, either by drafting in key people from other academies in the MAT or buying in specialist help. In the case of LA schools, a potential MAT will be selected by the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) and once this has been decided, the incoming MAT directors will undertake a process of 'due diligence' to be sure that the school they

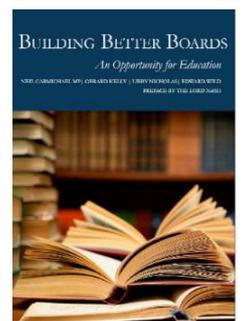
are taking on is viable, there are no hidden debts and transfer of buildings and land is agreed with the LA. This can take some time and during this period, the school still needs to be governed. In many cases, the existing governing body is dissolved and an interim executive board (IEB) is installed, charged with starting to turn the fortunes of the school around. In some, however, the existing governing body remains in place to do this but is likely to be made up of new governors because it is inevitable that many of the 'old guard' will resign. This is possibly the reason your school is seeking new members. However, whether an IEB or existing GB is in place, this will only be until the school becomes a full academy member of the MAT when a new Local Governing Board (LGB) will be appointed by the MAT. All existing governors may apply if they wish but the new LGB will be constituted on the skills and experience required by the trustees of the MAT.

Ofsted's expectation of robust and effective governance in a school in special measures is greater than a school with a good or outstanding judgement and all schools in special measures must have an action plan to work to in order to address the areas that Ofsted defined as inadequate. This will be drawn up by both the outgoing LA and the incoming MAT and the GB's concentration will be focused on fulfilling the actions required by the plan. This will mean the formation of a small GB Action Plan Monitoring Group which will meet very regularly with senior leaders and Ofsted inspectors when they do their monitoring visits. These meetings will need to be during the working day so if you are able to go in to school during the day, this will strengthen your application.

It is inevitable that being on a GB in a failing school will be more stressful than schools in better categories but this is not just about the Ofsted judgement, it's also about what you can bring to the GB. If you have any experience of finance, education, human or physical resources, team building or management of an organisation, your skills will be very useful. If you don't have particular skill relevant to governance but are enthusiastic, willing to learn, like a challenge and have the time and the interest, then give it a go. Good luck!

8. Is it payday yet?

On the subject of robust and effective governance, late last year a document entitled '*Building Better Boards: An Opportunity for Education*' was published. It was co-authored by MP Neil Carmichael, Chair of the Commons Education Select Committee and it recommends that school governors should be paid which, it's claimed, would improve the quality and diversity of governing boards. It states that the time commitment for governors has increased in recent years and that schools should look at ways of compensating board members for their time:



“In a challenging economic environment, the creation of payment for positions currently unpaid may appear to be unwise. However, we believe that schools should consider whether, in common with registered housing providers, NHS trusts and other public bodies, some form of payment may be appropriate to reflect the contribution made by governors and their commitment in terms of time.”

Not an unreasonable suggestion that will have crossed many a governor's mind from time to time. So why hasn't this report received higher profile attention? It's because the whole notion of paying school governors to do their job is fraught with difficulties. Where

would the funding come from? Who would set the pay scales? Who would hold the contract of employment? To expect schools to find the money from their DSG allocation is a non-starter; LAs and MATs do not have the funds and to expect DfE to suddenly find the required millions is laughable. It's not only a question of the cash. How would governors be hired and fired? How would their work be appraised? Most importantly of all, would they be able to keep their impartiality once they are 'employees'? Paying governors would also create additional work for schools or LAs or MATs or DfE as formal contracts would have to be put in place, along with a process of performance management.

So we are likely to remain a voluntary service. However, all schools should have a governing board budget heading in order to ensure all governors are able to perform what is required of them and it's perfectly legitimate to claim reasonable reimbursement of expenses incurred in fulfilling your role. The payment of such expenses is important in ensuring equality of opportunity for all members of the community to serve as governors and claims may be made for childcare or dependent relative care (provided by registered carers) in order to attend meetings; travel mileage or bus fares to attend governor training events held beyond the school; printing costs of emailed/downloaded documents. We went into this in much more detail in GATHERround Issue 6, November 2014 which is available on our website under 'Resources'. The report *Building Better Boards: An Opportunity for Education* isn't available for download but you can read more about it [here](#). What are your views on the payment of governors? Let us know.

9. In My Opinion...

Vince Barrett looks back at Team GB's success in the Olympic Games and ponders over what our education system could do to be of a gold standard.

Huge congratulations to all our Rio Olympian athletes who have returned with a magnificent 27 gold, 23 silver and 17 bronze medals, ranking Great Britain 2nd in the world. All great achievements but is there anything in the preparation of these young men and women for such sporting glory that we could learn from to ensure our schools assist all young people to achieve success in life? I think there is.

Putting to one side the funding arrangements for sport and education (that's an issue for discussion on another day), all athletes will have been trained by experts in their field (their 'teachers') through a tailored programme (the 'curriculum') with encouragement and support (their 'tutors') to foster their ambition to be the best. Not difficult to see the analogy with good education. But what if double gold winning cyclist Laura Trott had been forced to undertake the training regime of boxing gold winner Nicola Adams and vice versa? I doubt that either would have been as successful.

Why then does our education system insist that all our children's attainment between the ages of 7 and 16 is measured and recorded in academic subjects? This is great for those who find these subjects fascinating or easy but not so good for those that don't. Surely we should be nurturing and celebrating children's talents as they grow, whether they be in sport, music, the arts, practical subjects or academia instead of concentrating on and measuring a very narrow range of academic achievement. In 1944, Education Minister 'Rab' Butler recognised this and came up with a system of grammar, technical and secondary modern schools but this was to last fewer than 20 years because grammars became labelled as 'elitist' and secondary moderns 'sinks'. Technical schools did enjoy

some success in preparing young people (admittedly mostly boys) to progress on to ‘time served’ apprenticeships in many trades, supported by ‘training boards’ in most vocational areas. Comprehensive education was deemed to be the way forward from 1962 until another rather feeble attempt to provide for nurturing specific skills was made with the creation of ‘specialist schools’ in 1997. They lasted 13 years and as far as I know did little to change the educational landscape before Michael Gove’s attempts to move it back to the 1930s.

The time has come to look very carefully at how we educate ‘the whole child’ so that each values what they are good at in order to help them move on to achieve success in life. Is your school already doing all it can? We’d love some case studies to feature in GATHERround.

10. PISA: A tower of strength or leaning towards misleading?

Talking of the success or otherwise of our current education system, the OECD publishes the results of its triennial Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test. The last available statistics are for the 2012 test with the 2015 results due in December. The test is designed to assess a broad range of knowledge and skills (not just academic) in 15 year-old students in 70 countries and in 2012, the UK was ranked 26th, below the other European countries (not just EU!) of Switzerland, Liechtenstein, the Netherlands, France, Estonia, Slovenia, Finland, Denmark, Belgium, Germany, Poland, Austria and Ireland. We’ll have to wait and see whether we did any better in 2015.

The results are interesting but a leading academic has called into question their validity. Sir David Spiegelhalter is a British statistician and Professor in the Statistical Laboratory at the University of Cambridge. He says of the PISA test:

‘A question that is easy for children brought up in one culture may not be as easy for those brought up in another. Assuming the difficulty is the same for all students around the whole world is a mistake.’

Are you a governor in a school that has put forward students to be tested in this way? We’d love to hear from one that has. Have a look at the PISA Test [here](#).

11. And finally...

Apologies for all the statistical stuff in this edition but we do feel that we should draw your attention to research that’s being done to either affirm or deny the government’s rhetoric. We’ll be back with the Christmas edition at the beginning of December. Have a good term!