

GATHERround

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

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Welcome!

Easter is always a good time for potentially controversial government decisions to be announced in the hope that teachers and governors are all taking a well-earned break. This year's been no exception. On 12th April Education Secretary Justine Greening announced that 131 new Free Schools are to be opened nationally, creating about 69000 pupil places. On the very same day, the results of a survey by the Sutton Trust were released, stating that due to budget cuts, 49% of primary schools and 57% of secondaries have cut back on teaching assistants, while 18% of primaries and 54% of secondaries have reduced teaching staff. Presumably, the TAs and teachers made redundant in these schools will be re-employed all over the country in the 131 free schools, so demonstrating that Conservative education policy helps social mobility. Or is that too simplistic?

Ms Greening then said she wants all schools in England, including grammar schools, to do more to help "ordinary working families". What are they then? Well it seems that they are defined as not the poorest but having "modest incomes" and likely to live in suburbs and coastal towns away from London. That sounds like a lot of families here in our part of the world but it's an established fact that the majority of selective school places go to the more affluent families who can afford to pay for private tutors to coach their children to pass entrance exams, no matter where they live. Meanwhile the DfE keeps telling everyone that the level of spending on education has never been higher.

We can't make sense of it all either!

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1. Conference 2017 - what you said

We hosted our 9th Annual Governors' Conference in collaboration with East Riding and Hull City Councils on 25th March at Bishop Burton College which was bathed in warm spring sunshine all day. We were slightly down on numbers this year with 85 governors and guests attending but from the evaluation forms returned, we can safely say the event was another success. Starting with the venue, it was universally agreed that Bishop Burton is an excellent setting providing good facilities, helpful staff and lovely lunches. The theme for the day, 'Making the Ordinary Extraordinary' looked at how attention to detail and doing the little things thoroughly can have a massive positive impact on the performance of a school.

Our keynote speaker this year was John Tomsett (right), headteacher of Huntington School and noted national education commentator. John's keynote speech was entitled 'It's all about washing your hands properly' - a reference to medical professions where failure to carry out that small task thoroughly can have potentially devastating consequences. This concept equally applies to successfully educating children and young people and John identified a number of activities which, if done well, will collectively contribute to improved progress, achievement and attainment. He identified the importance of:



- Collection, analysis and use of data relating to individual pupils and groups
- Unerring focus on the quality of teaching
- Frequent monitoring of progress
- Addressing the reasons for poor attendance
- Identification of barriers to learning
- Using collected evidence to decide which strategies are likely to be most effective in overcoming identified barriers to learning

Issues to be addressed may vary from school to school but the essence of John's message was very clear: don't try to make big changes intended to sort everything out at once. Work towards big solutions by taking small steps and if any of those steps should prove ineffective, step back and go in another direction. Common sense perhaps but sometimes



Audience engagement

we strive to make everything in our schools work perfectly all the time. That's highly unlikely so we should celebrate the times when small steps do make a difference. A lot of small celebrations are better than waiting for the big one that may never happen. You will find a copy of John's presentation [here](#).

John Tomsett was rated 99% 'good' or 'very good'. Delegates found him to be 'committed', 'thought-provoking', 'enthusiastic' and 'inspirational'. An example comment was 'Wish he could be Secretary of State for Education.' There aren't many better recommendations than that!

This year we had a 'Question Time' session with some challenging issues presented by governors. Our panel of experts rose to the challenges and there were some interesting debates on a wide range of topics including academisation, clerking and funding. Our

thanks go to panel members John Tomsett, Brian Stillings and Gillian Allcroft, ably presided over by our very own ‘Dimbleby’, Sue Gollop. This proved to be a popular feature of the conference and we will be looking at repeating it next year.



Keep those questions coming!

As for the workshops, all four of them received a majority of ‘good’ or ‘very good’ ratings from delegates attending. Particularly popular was ‘Improving Governance in challenging times’ presented by Gillian Allcroft, NGA Deputy Chief Executive and a copy of her presentation can be found [here](#). We thank all our workshop leaders for their hard work in preparing and presenting their sessions.

The school presentation after lunch was by children and staff from North Ferriby Primary School who sang a terrific repertoire of songs, prompting the evaluation comments ‘Stunning singing’ and ‘Choir super and uplifting’.



Singing their hearts out!

North Ferriby Primary School pupils certainly did themselves proud and we thank the staff, head and governors for providing us with such a powerful reminder of why we choose to serve as governors.

It was good to see that many people felt they were taking something away from the conference that they could put into action in their schools, such as discussing with heads new strategies for learning and paying more attention to getting the small things right. You can see an analysis of the conference evaluations [here](#).

The views expressed by conference delegates each year give us the impression that governors value the event and we are pleased that we have successfully delivered nine of them. We are, however, now facing something of a crisis. We feel passionately that it’s important for governors to have access to an independent governors’ association to provide information and to comment on the continuous government changes to education that governors have to implement in our schools and academies. The first problem we have is that we are down to just five volunteer Council members to administer the membership systems, respond to email and telephone enquiries, issue invoices and receipts, attend conferences and local authority events, produce the newsletters, keep the website and forum current and arrange seminars and the annual conference. The second problem we have is that we are losing governing board members as schools turn

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into academies and their MAT Trustees make the decision that their constituent academies won't subscribe to us. Our only income is the £15.00 annual subscription per governing board that we charge to cover meeting venue costs, materials and travelling expenses so we only have to lose a few member schools and we start to run at a loss. The conference breaks even at best and so all this raises the question of whether we will be able to run a tenth conference next year. We have had some interest from governors in joining our Council and if you are one of those, we thank you. The third problem we have is that we know this newsletter is forwarded by GATHER member governors to non-member school and academy governors, thus also depriving us of £15.00 per school. Please can we ask that you don't send it to non-members but that you encourage them to join us and then they will get the newsletter direct as well as the massive discount that we offer members for attending the conference. We'll keep you posted on our plans for the future.

2. A Holiday Change

Earlier in the year, the Head and governors at St Andrew's C of E Primary School in Sutton Park, Hull took the decision to reduce the Easter holiday from two weeks to just one, giving the time back in May to make the spring Bank holiday half term break two weeks long. This is on a trial basis for this year but if parental and teacher feedback is positive, it will become a permanent arrangement. The thinking behind this change is that the first half of the summer term is a very important time for Year 6 pupils and every day's teaching counts in the run-up to SATs but other possible benefits have been identified. Attendance figures could be boosted because parents wishing to take their children on holiday in May will be able to take advantage of cheaper fares during the extra week and teachers will enjoy an extended break in what is always a very long and hectic term. There may be some possible issues with the change - the most obvious being where parents of a child in the school have an older child in a secondary school that is not changing their holidays leading to possible childcare problems.

Taking the wider view, governors and senior leaders in other Hull primary schools will be looking at the effects of this change and may wish to do the same themselves but could face barriers in doing so. Here's why. St Andrew's has been judged as 'outstanding' four times. It's also Voluntary Aided and still a maintained school with its own governing board able to make decisions that they deem to be right for their school. Most other Hull primaries are academies and part of a MAT so they have local governing boards answerable to a board of trustees. A change like this would have to be sanctioned by trustees and presumably applied to all the MAT's academies. Have I got this wrong or do MAT local governing boards still have the autonomy to make decisions such as this that just affect their own academy? Please do let us know.

3. Engaging with parents

Vince Barrett reports on a national initiative that has its roots in our area:

I've worked in education in the Humber region for over 35 years and so feel that I know a lot of people who have been influential in making changes over that time. One such person is Alan Cowley who I met in the 1980s when he was a teacher at Longcroft School in Beverley and we were both part of the drive to develop vocational education in schools (see also Section 4). Alan has moved on to developing strategies for engaging parents in

the education of their children and here he talks about what his company *Engagement in Education (EiE)* has been doing to develop this important aspect of schools' work.

“The terms ‘parental engagement’ and ‘parental involvement’ are terms that all of us who work in schools have used for many years. Research shows that they are frequently seen as interchangeable labels to describe ‘the stuff we do with parents’ - and therein lies the problem.

“Over the last 5 years or so, a wealth of highly respected academic research from around the world has pin-pointed the exact nature of the sort of parental activity that has a positive impact on pupil achievement and attainment which The Sutton Trust Toolkit estimates as having the potential to add the equivalent of 3 months’ additional achievement per pupil per year which Professor John Hattie has famously described as the same as adding 2 or 3 additional years to a child’s education.*

“The message from this is clear. We need to focus on facilitating parents to have regular, positive conversations with their children about school. Regardless of every social aspect, whether it’s class, family structure, income, ethnicity or parental experience of education; where parents have regular positive conversations about school with their children, their children do better.

It’s not the length of the conversation that’s important and it doesn’t have to be related to curriculum content, it’s the fact that parents are showing an active and positive interest that Carr and Hussey (1999) describe as ‘intrinsic motivation’ which gives added impetus to the child.

“The problem we have is that schools are not, by and large, set up to provide the information to extend these parent-child conversations beyond the usual ‘What have you done at school today?’ Answer: ‘Nothing’.

“A little over 6 years ago, having already established the world’s most frequently visited website on parental engagement, Alan and Delia Cowley formed a company called Engagement in Education (EiE) and set themselves the task of finding the solution to this issue. Drawing on their combined experience of more than 50 years in teaching and school leadership, they set themselves the task of finding a meaningful, manageable and sustainable way that would enable schools to increase positive parental engagement without increasing teacher workload.

“We have devised Free Flow Info (ffi), praised by educationalists, politicians and academics for the simplicity of its common-sense methodology. Free Flow Info has been adopted by primary and secondary schools around the country and several local authorities are negotiating implementation on behalf of their maintained schools.”

* EiE use the term ‘parental’ to describe a role rather than a relationship so that carers are included within this definition. Free Flow Info enables pupils to benefit from the engagement and positive feedback of up to 5 family members or their supporters

Further information can be found at www.engagementineducation.co.uk and www.freeflowinfo.co.uk provides specific facts, figures and feedback from users. Alan and Delia would welcome any interest by governors in this project. Have a look at what they do and please contact them if you feel they can help you increase parental involvement in your school.

4. Fitting students to a ‘T’

In his budget speech on 8th March, Chancellor Philip Hammond announced that £500m a year will be allocated to developing a new ‘T-Level’ examination to put technical education on an equal footing with academic study. I think we’ve been here before. See how many of these school vocational programmes you can remember. You may have been a student on one yourself!

- City & Guilds 365 Vocational Programme 1980-1984
- Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education (CPVE) 1985-1990
- Diploma of Vocational Education (DOVE) 1990-1995
- Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) 1986-1996
- General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) 1991-1998
- 14-19 Diploma 2007-2013

Each of these initiatives was generously funded by the government of the day to boost perception and provide ‘parity of esteem’ for vocational qualifications but each ended in failure. So why are these new ‘T’ Levels going to be any different? Well firstly, the government knows that the UK is now near the bottom of the international league table for technical education. In 2015, the UK average output per hour was 35% less than Germany and 30% less than the United States. Something’s got to be done to address these issues - especially as the lack of skills amongst the workforce has long been cited by employers as a major concern and, although the future of manufacturing and employment in technical occupations following Brexit in 2019 is uncertain, there may well be increased demand for technical skills.

Secondly, the current system for technical education is confusing, with traditional FE colleges now providing technical and vocational courses to 14 year-olds alongside the new 14-19 Studio Schools and 14-19 University Technical Colleges (UTCs), between them currently offering around 13,000 qualifications. ‘T’ Levels will be available in just 15 technical areas which will include catering and hospitality, construction, social care, engineering and manufacturing, amongst others.

Will it work this time? That will depend very much on whether the long-standing British view that academic education is the way to go can be changed and that parents of high-flying young people can be convinced that a ‘T’ Level is equal in currency to an ‘A’ Level for their offspring. It’s not going to happen overnight.

5. Engineering success

Talking of technical education, Beverley Grammar School won the Northern Council for Further Education (NCFE)’s School of the Month Award for March 2017 for its delivery of NCFE’s V Cert in Engineering. Aimed at 14-16 year olds, V Certs have been developed by NCFE in line with DfE requirements for GCSE equivalent qualifications so have the same level of rigour as GCSEs but often include project-based assessments, which means schools and pupils can work more flexibly around the qualification and have a greater opportunity to use their creativity and imagination. V Certs count as part of the Progress 8 measure and hold performance points.

Daniel Bibbington, Head of Design and Technology at Beverley Grammar School, said: “We chose to deliver NCFE’s V Certs because we found that the qualifications provided more

opportunities for pupils to engage in practical hands-on making, in comparison with other vocational qualifications.

“We’ve seen pupils of all ability groups make very good progress on the course - more so than with their other subjects. Through the delivery of V Certs, we have an engaged, high achieving cohort of pupils who thoroughly enjoy their engineering lessons.”

Laura Mulligan, Engineering Teacher at the school, commented: “The learners have all found the course really interesting. We have mixed ability groups and some learners are interested in pursuing engineering at a higher level, whereas others are more vocationally inclined and plan to seek out an apprenticeship route. V Certs give scope for both routes.”

Congratulations to Beverley Grammar. It will be interesting to see how these qualifications tie into the new ‘T’ Level Framework.

6. Governor recruitment

We invited schools to tell us of any governor vacancies so that we could advertise them here in GATHERround. We’re delighted to do just that for Welton Primary School whose Chair of Governors Martin Webster tells us that his board has three governor vacancies. Ideally, they are seeking people with experience in data analysis, marketing and strategic planning but any willing volunteer is welcome to express an interest. Welton Primary School is located in a new housing development in Brough and opened in its current premises in 2003 with 98 pupils transferring from its original building. Today, the school caters for 350+ pupils and has recently opened its second three-classroom extension to accommodate these expanding numbers.

Welton Primary School is rated by Ofsted as ‘good with outstanding features’ and, after Martin heard John Tomsett’s keynote speech at our March conference, he is encouraging a concentration by everyone in school on ensuring that all the small jobs are done well to hopefully contribute to an ‘outstanding’ judgement next time around.

If you or anyone you know is interested in putting their name forward for co-option on to Welton Primary School’s governing board, Martin can be contacted for further details on martinwebster@live.co.uk

We do hope that this free advertising feature will help you if you need to recruit governors. If you would like to use the service, simply email us with the skills you’re seeking and a bit about your school. All potential new governors will of course, be subject to an enhanced DBS check.

7. Ask GATHER

I am a new governor after having retired after many years in industry working in HR. I have Safer Recruitment training so I’m surprised to find that I’m not invited to sit on the interview panel for all appointments to my school. I’ve been told that this will only be necessary when the time comes for us to appoint a deputy head or headteacher. Is it up to my headteacher to say no governors on interview panels - unless it’s for a member of SLT - or should this be a decision for the Board? How do other schools involve their governors in recruitment?

You don't say whether your school is an academy within a MAT or a local authority maintained school but recruitment procedures will be very similar in both. Firstly, it's not just up to the headteacher to decide on governor representation on interviewing panels; that's for the governing board to decide but insisting on a governor attending every interview is neither necessary nor desirable. There are, however, times when governors must be involved.

In maintained schools, the appointment of Headteachers and Deputy Heads must be carried out by a selection process that includes, by statute, at least 3 governors. As the local authority will be the employer of the successful candidate, an LA rep will also be involved in the process. For the appointment of other Senior Leaders, it's recommended that a governor is invited but appointments below that level are usually fully delegated to the Head. It needs to be borne in mind that for the appointment of, for instance, a part-time cover supervisor or a teaching assistant, the involvement of a governor may be seen as being over the top. Consequently it is not recommended that governors are involved in all appointments but there is no reason why a governor may not be invited to join a panel by the Headteacher if deemed to be appropriate.

The process is similar for appointments to academies but the big difference is that it is the Board of Trustees which will be all appointees' employer. Consequently, there may not be Local Governing Board representation on any interviewing panel although this is highly unlikely. The responsibilities for recruitment will be defined in your MAT's Scheme of Delegation so we do urge you to read this if you are a governor in an academy.

Whether you are a governor in a school or an academy, you are a volunteer and as such will have other demands on your time. This also applies to retired people such as yourself who are often busier than when they had a job so it's unlikely that a governor would be available for all appointments made by a school or academy. All governors will be kept informed of who's been appointed to what post and it's a good idea for governors, as a part of their monitoring visits schedule, to seek out new appointees to introduce themselves to them.

8. Goodbye to RAISEonline

All governing boards need to keep up to speed with whatever national data analysis system is in place so that they can keep tabs on how well their school is performing. It's important to have access to published data about our schools so that when Ofsted turn up we can demonstrate verifiable progress and talk knowledgably about key indicators.

We've had RAISEonline since 2009 and governors have grappled with the statistics it's yielded ever since but soon RAISE will be no more. DfE announced on 30th March that a new system has been developed to replace it and hope this will be up and running by early May. They also hope that they'll have thought of a new name for it by then. The new system will run alongside the current RAISEonline which will be available until 31st July. During this time, they will be asking for feedback through formal testing and user surveys built into the new system and will use this to develop it and release a final version before switching off RAISEonline altogether. In the meantime, you can see a short demonstration of the new system [here](#).

Of course, not all governors are necessarily interested in analysis of data and not all governors will have had access to RAISEonline. However, it has always been important

that school statistics and information drawn from them are discussed by a governors' achievement and standards committee. Any decisions taken by the head as a result should be summarised, shared with the governing body and recorded in the minutes of meetings.

If you're a governor who has been involved in school data analysis and are looking at the new system, please let us know whether you think it's an improvement.

9. And finally...

In case you hadn't noticed, there's a general election coming up on 8th June. No doubt party electioneering will be primarily focused on what each will do with Brexit negotiations after 8th June but as it's a general election, they will have to publish manifestos that include what plans they have for education. In a nutshell, here's what each of the major parties are likely to say they will do if they are elected:

The Conservative Party would open more new grammar and free schools and continue their push for total academisation. The school curriculum and assessment changes now taking place would remain and they say they will also (eventually) introduce a new funding formula for schools.

The Labour Party Labour would stop new grammar and free schools opening and restore some of the responsibilities for education to local authorities. They would also create a National Education Service (whatever that is), increase spending on education and provide free school meals for all primary age children, paid for by putting VAT on private school fees.

The Liberal Democrat Party would stop new grammar schools opening, protect school funding 'in real terms' and provide a broad, balanced curriculum to include financial literacy, first aid and emergency lifesaving skills, citizenship and age-appropriate sex and relationship education.

The UK Independence party would open a grammar school in every town, ensure access for all to high quality technical, specialist and comprehensive schools and return to a traditional primary curriculum, concentrating on 'the three Rs' and scrapping sex and relationship education for children under the age of 11.

These are certainly interesting times. Whatever the result of this election, it's going to be history in the making. Don't forget to vote!

We'll be back again in July, no doubt with commentary on what we can expect from the new government.