



# GATHER round



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

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## Season's Greetings

'Tis the season to be jolly once more and what better start could there be to the festive season than the concerts, nativity plays and parties in your schools? We hope that these will bring a celebratory end to a successful term in your work as governors and we wish everyone a happy and relaxing Christmas and New Year.

We have a new website and you'll find it at [www.ga-ther.org](http://www.ga-ther.org). Read more about this in Section 10.

You can now communicate with us and tell us what you think via our new Facebook page at the address below. GATHER moves with the times!

We hope you enjoy your twice-termly editions of GATHERround. We try to provide a mix of local and national education issues and we're always on the lookout for stories from member schools about the amazing things they're doing or news they want to share. Great examples of these are the Martongate project outlined in Section 6 and Joe Buchan's Book Review in Section 9. Please let us know if you have anything going on which may be of interest to other governors; That's what we're all about - sharing good practice!

Have you any news or views?

E-mail them to us at: [info@ga-ther.org](mailto:info@ga-ther.org)

Tweet us at [@ga\\_ther.org](https://twitter.com/ga_ther.org)

Find us on Facebook at

[www.facebook.com/groups/GATHER.Governors](https://www.facebook.com/groups/GATHER.Governors)

## 1. GAtHER AGM

We held our AGM preceding the autumn seminar at Wolfreton School on Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> October when, sadly, we only had 24 governors present, representing 12 schools. Our Chair Sue Gollop spoke very positively of the events we've held and the activities we've been involved in over the past 12 months and praised this newsletter, despite the fact that she thinks the editor sometimes writes some scurrilous articles! She did go on to say though, that the ability for us to be able to say what we feel about national and local education policy demonstrates our independence as an organisation. Sue sounded a cautionary note about our future due to the potential effect that academisation may be having on governors' associations nationally. Although schools in the City of Hull are now almost all academies and we have retained the membership of several, there is no doubt that some MATs have the final say on whether their constituent academies can be members. Sue also noted that, despite invitation, no senior director of education services in Hull had come to give us an update on developments in the city.

Elections for the posts of Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer and Secretary followed and the current holders were returned unopposed. They are respectively, Sue Gollop, Vince Barrett, Mike Heslop-Mullens and Janet Slater. The new role of Membership Secretary was proposed and John Suddaby was elected.

## 2. GAtHER Autumn Seminar

Following the AGM, we were very pleased to welcome this year's speaker, Natasha Barley, (right, addressing governors and Izzy the guide dog), Director of the Hull and East Yorkshire Children's University (HEYCU). Natasha treated us to an enthusiastic and passionate overview of the work of charity which has been running in Hull for 21 years but has only recently expanded its activities into the East Riding. Its focus over those years has



been to enable children who are deprived through poverty, growing up in workless households, are parentless or in care, to have access to the life opportunities that other children enjoy through familial support. A large number of the children they work with have never left their town or city and some have never even left the estates that they live on. The experiences which HEYCU provides are designed to raise aspirations, build self-esteem, raise confidence and improve resilience. These experiences are grouped under the headings 'I'm Thinking of the Future'; 'I'm Ambitious'; 'I'm Intelligent'; 'I'm Fit and Healthy' and 'I'm Proud of my City'. (*Reminds me of the 'Every Child Matters' headings pre-2010 - Ed*). Natasha gave us some wonderful examples of the activities they provide such as the London Experience, the BBC Experience and the RSPB Experience and was so enthusiastic about the benefits she has seen for children and their positive personal development that I think we all wanted to sign up for them ourselves! You'll find much more detail about HEYCU at [www.hullchildrensuniversity.com](http://www.hullchildrensuniversity.com) You can also phone them on 01482 466045 or email them at [info@hullchildrensuniversity.com](mailto:info@hullchildrensuniversity.com). It's a great

shame more governors weren't present to hear about the work of HEYCU and we thank Natasha for a truly inspirational presentation.

Our second speaker of the evening was the East Riding's Director of Children and Family Services, Kevin Hall, who was optimistic about the progress being made by East Riding primary and secondary schools and academies, which are year-on-year achieving improved outcomes for children and young people, placing the authority in the top third of all local authority education services nationally. Kevin was particularly pleased with the result of a recent Ofsted inspection of his department which focused on the provision for young people leaving care. The experiences and progress of looked-after children, services for children who need help and protection, and the adoption service were all ranked as 'good' as was leadership, management and governance.

Kevin went on to say that this is encouraging at a time when central government is continuing to devolve responsibilities away from local authorities and was pleased to report that the MATs already operating in the East Riding - and those currently in development - are continuing to work in collaboration with the LA. Kevin was particularly pleased, and proud, to note the continuous support education receives from the East Riding of Yorkshire Council, which is almost unprecedented in today's climate of austerity. ERYC has generously funded a further two years of the East Riding School Improvement Partnership (ERSIP) which will enable East Riding schools to continue to work together in the pursuit of continuous improvement. ERSIP has also been able to fund termly conferences with nationally renowned speakers for headteachers, with one conference set aside for both headteachers and chairs of governors.

Kevin was thanked for his very positive update on the work of his department and it is hoped that we as an independent organisation will continue to work in close liaison with our East Riding colleagues - particularly Lisa Devine, School Governance and LA Ofsted Development Officer, who has been tremendous in her support of our work. We also owe a vote of thanks to Maria Bannister, Hull's School Effectiveness Officer (Governance) who is also a great supporter. We will be working with Maria to forge closer ties with Education and Learning Department in the City of Hull.

### 3. Wheels Come off Academy Trust (WCAT)

We were only three days into the new term when Wakefield City Academy Trust (WCAT) announced it was giving up the running of all its 21 schools. An urgent statement by the Trust's board on 8th September said it had reviewed all aspects of the organisation, particularly the quality of its education provision. It went on to say:

*"Having undertaken this comprehensive review, led by an experienced CEO, our conclusion is that the trust does not have the capacity to facilitate the rapid improvement our academies need and our students deserve. Consequently, the board has requested that the Department for Education work with it to place our academies with new sponsors."*

That statement rather flies in the face of their strapline (right) because it leaves 7 secondary schools and 14 primaries without



WAKEFIELD CITY ACADEMIES TRUST  
*Achieving excellence through partnership*

an effective body to oversee their performance and provide services such as HR, CPD, payroll, premises and finance. Until DfE re-brokers the schools, WCAT's funding agreement with the EFA has to continue which will inevitably have a damaging effect on the morale of schools as they wait. The one in our area, Goole High School, is likely to be placed with Delta Academies Trust, based in Knottingley near Wakefield, ironically.

WCAT itself has been in the headlines before. In 2016, its annual accounts revealed it paid £316,489 to an IT firm belonging to then chief executive Mike Ramsay. A two-year contract worth £123,012 was also awarded to HDR services, a company owned by his daughter for clerking work. Last November the TES reported that a leaked draft report showed there was "extreme concern" in government about WCAT, which faced a large deficit budget but paid its interim chief executive more than £82,000 for 15 weeks' work. No action was taken on this.



Predictably, once the awful news had broken, there followed a political row in the House of Commons. On 11th September, Education Secretary Justine Greening (left) was heckled after repeatedly sidestepping questions about the failings at WCAT. Instead of setting out what action the government will be taking, she attacked the Labour Party's education record, saying that she fundamentally disagreed that standards in England are falling, citing the place in the UK where standards are the worst is Wales, where Labour is in control.

When pressed, she did say that it was important to take (the undefined) swift action to have WCAT's schools re-brokered but would not be drawn on any timeline for re-brokering. Labour MP Yvette Cooper, MP for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford, (right) said Ms Greening's answer was "not good enough" and that it was time for a full review of the complete failure of local accountability in multi-academy trusts.



Both seem to have forgotten that academies as we know them today were established through the Labour Learning and Skills Act 2000 which amended the section of the Conservative Education Act 1996 relating to City Technology Colleges.

There are myriad possible pitfalls in the academisation policy as it stands. MATs are not, as yet, inspected by Ofsted - unlike local authorities - but individual academies are. The new HMCI Amanda Spielman is pressing for this reform but meanwhile, this can mean that when a MAT has a large number of high-performing academies, it can take the credit for their success. Where the opposite is true, however, a MAT can blame the senior leaders in its academies for their poor performance. This means that Trusts themselves are largely unaccountable to the taxpayer. Only four of WCAT's academies are judged good or outstanding by Ofsted. How much of that is down to the way the MAT administered its academies? No-one knows for sure but at least in walking away, WCAT admitted that it has to carry the blame for this poor record. It must be time to address this ridiculous state of affairs.

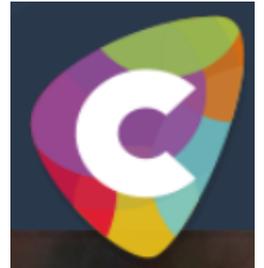
Of course, there are good MATs that administer their academies very efficiently but it has to be said that the more MATs there are, the greater the chances of bad ones like

WCAT emerging. The other consideration has to be that of MATs ‘cherry picking’ the schools they take leaving ‘orphan’ schools that no MAT wants to touch.

This is no way to run our education system. If this government remains in power until 2022, I predict there will be more failing MATs hitting the headlines, more re-brokering of schools, the creation of a large repository of ‘sink’ schools with no sponsor and a call for the reinstatement of something resembling the ‘School Boards’ which were abolished by the Education Act 1902 and replaced with Local Education Authorities which were also effectively abolished in 2010.

#### 4. When one MAT closes...

...another one opens, this time much closer to home. Three East Riding secondary schools have formed a Multi-Academy Trust. Wolfreton School, Hessle High School and Cottingham High School have formed The Consortium Academy Trust (TCAT, new logo, right) which also includes Penshurst Primary School in Hessle, (part of the former Hessle Academy Community Trust) and most recently, Cottingham Croxby Primary School. They are currently negotiating to take over the running of South Holderness Technology College, which is in special measures, and hope eventually to include as many as 15 schools in the locality.



The three secondary schools have been working together with a joint sixth form for the last 25 years, a collaboration known as The Consortium. This has endured, despite Cottingham High School becoming a free-standing academy on 2010 and Hessle High School following in 2012 while Wolfreton School remained an East Riding maintained school. All the schools in the new MAT are GATHER members so we'll look forward to hearing how the MAT is developing. We wish the new TCAT every success and hope that we can continue to inform and support their new local governing boards.

From what we have seen in the growth of MATs over the past seven years or so, it could be argued that the most successful ones are those built upon expertise in education such as TCAT but it's very difficult to obtain a list from DfE or the Education Funding agency of which academies are in a national MAT that's run by business people such as the Harris Federation, the David Ross Education Trust, Oasis Community Learning or EACT and those that operate on a local level such as the Education Alliance based in Melton. There are now over 1300 MATs operating, none of which are presently accountable to Ofsted as they aren't inspected. As stated earlier, the new Chief Inspector has voiced her concern about this and so there will doubtless be a feature on what she's proposing in due course.

#### 5. D'you want fries with your education?

In the last edition of GATHERround, I reported on the new Hull West and Hessle MP Emma Hardy (right) taking up a position on the cross-party commons Education Select Committee and predicted a great future for her in speaking out on educational issue that affect us. It didn't take her long to get started. Addressing a fringe event on leadership in schools at the Labour Party conference in Brighton at the end of September, she said that some academy chains are running their academies like



McDonald's, making them all look the same and serving up the same menu wherever they are in the country. She thought this to be “appalling and wrong”, saying she had spoken with a headteacher in her constituency (*Anyone know who? - Ed*) whose academy is part of a national MAT. This headteacher had told her that she had no choice or flexibility in curriculum delivery, meaning that local topics and the achievements of Hull people throughout history could not be taught as she was given the curriculum and told how to deliver it by the Trust Board of her MAT. Emma went on to say that the argument peddled by David Cameron and Nicky Morgan that academisation gave schools more autonomy was “an illusion”. “It has certainly not brought more autonomy to any of the headteachers I’ve spoken to,” she said. Has anyone reading this spoken to her?

Hull schools are now nearly all academies working within a MAT while most East Riding schools, notably the primary schools, are still LA maintained. What I have found interesting is that some academies still call themselves ‘school’ on their websites while others insist on the term ‘academy’. Is this an indicator of the ‘branding’ that Emma speaks about? If you are a governor in an academy, we’d love to hear your views on the changes that academisation has brought about. Good and bad. Tell us!

## 6. Martongate sails to success

Martongate Primary School in Bridlington has provided us with a magnificent example of what can be achieved when staff, parents and governors work together to enhance the school’s learning environment. In September 2015, the school’s new Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) leader presented a plan to governors for the refurbishment and enhancement of the EYFS outside play area. Governors backed the plan and Committee Chair John Suddaby was nominated as project manager to work with headteacher David Carruthers. For a school located in a seaside town, it



*Steady away*

was agreed that a boating theme should be adopted with a feature focal point. A Pirate Boat! All the project team had to do was find an old boat (preferably free of charge), fill it with sand and hey presto, a big sandpit! Easier said than done and governors had to overcome many hurdles before their vision could become reality. Eventually it was discovered that an old mooring boat in Bridlington harbour was awaiting disposal by the Harbour Masters. The team wasted no



*Nearly finished*

time. They enlisted the help of a parent who offered a lorry for transport and another who provided a tele-loader with driver and labour to lift the boat on to the lorry, drive it to school, unload and position it and chock it up safely. Of course, some TLC had to be applied to the boat and Health and Safety checks carried out before it could be used by children and this was helped by a donation from Tesco's ‘Bags of Help’ initiative. The school’s EYFS now boasts a wonderful outside learning area. What a great example of what can be achieved by staff, governors and parents working together. You can read John’s full report of the project [here](#).

## 7. Ask GATHER

*I'm a governor in a large maintained primary school and we've been in Ofsted's 'Requires Improvement' category for nearly two years. Our last Head took early retirement at the end of last year and we appointed a new one who's now been with us for a term. My concern is that the new head is behaving like a bull in a china shop - changing perfectly good tried and tested systems and grilling every member of staff to see if they can be blamed in any way for the school's past performance. This is having an unsettling effect on us all and is destroying the caring, friendly ethos that we've worked so hard to build up over the years. I believe some parents have raised concerns although none have yet made a formal complaint to us as the governing body. I feel that we're losing our authority as governors as the head doesn't seem to take our views into account at all. I also feel sorry for our faithful long-serving teachers and I am thinking of suggesting to our Chair that I will be the governor responsible for staff welfare so that they can come to me and sound off and I can then inform the governing body of their concerns.*

This is a complex although quite common problem for governors. Whenever somebody new comes in as the head of a school, they will inevitably want to make some changes, particularly if you've appointed them to improve the school.

As a maintained school, there will have been governors on the selection and interviewing panels for the new Head. Presumably, the governors charged with making the appointment did so based on detailed job and person specifications and the views of stakeholders in your school and offered the job to the candidate who best fulfilled those requirements. That said, people can display very different traits once they start in a job and it seems that your concern is based solely on this premise. As governors, you have the right to monitor the work of the headteacher and will carry out his or her performance management review in due course. Before making a big issue of this, you as governors clearly want to see improvements being made but without upsetting the status quo. You talk about tried and tested systems being changed but were they really suitable or were they 'the way we always do things here'? Is the head really 'grilling' people or attempting to look at everyone's role to see if the current staffing structure is sound? You must give your new head a chance to discover what needs to be done - as things clearly do need to change - and all senior leaders, including yourselves as governors will need to work together to agree and approve whatever school development plan comes out of all this.

Finally, do NOT set yourself up as a sounding board for aggrieved staff. If you 'take sides' in what they are saying and insist the head adopts a different approach, this will undermine both the head and the governors and you will be seen to be meddling in the day-to-day running of the school which is not governors' responsibility. Your school will have in place complaint and grievance procedures and if anyone feels they have grounds for either, they must go through the official channels defined in your policies. If things escalate to the point where agreement cannot be reached, then you will need to contact your Local Authority for advice and arbitration. We hope it doesn't come to that.

## 8. Fire Drills

Are you familiar with your school's fire drill procedures, when they have taken place and the policy on evacuation of buildings? A Suffolk head teacher who lied about fire drills

taking place has been banned from teaching. An inquest panel found it had been falsely stated in documents that fire drills had been carried out when they hadn't and said this amounted to "serious dishonesty". It also found there had been a failure to "ensure a risk assessment for a personal evacuation plan was in place" for people needing help getting out of the school buildings. This is wool-pulling over governors' eyes on a grand scale but I can see no reference to governors' lack of knowledge about what was going on in the BBC news report that you can read [here](#). Might be worth checking your fire drill records!

## 9. Book Review

### **Challenge 2017: How Governors Can Challenge School Leaders Effectively** Paperback - 23 Aug 2017 by David Marriott

As governors, we all need to keep up to date with developments in education and there is a wealth of material out there about school governance. The problem is, how do we know what will be useful to us? To help with that, here is a book review written by governor Joe Buchan. Some of you may be familiar with the book's author, David Marriott's views on governance through his blog that Joe refers to in his review. If you aren't familiar with it, you can find it at [www.thegovernor.org.uk](http://www.thegovernor.org.uk) It's well worth a visit!

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I asked if I could submit a book review to share what I found to be a very helpful book. There is so much that governors have to think about that a book which is clear, interesting and precise is invaluable.

Being a regular reader of David Marriott's blog, I was really looking forward to this book. It more than met the high expectations I had. Whatever your level of experience as a governor, you will find this book invaluable. There is a comprehensive view of what challenge means in practical terms. I had never fully come to grips with something that can be viewed in quite an aggressive way. It has definitely enhanced my understanding. Vignettes are provided to illustrate the points being made and provide situations that most of us will be able to identify with.

You will find it a relatively quick first read. However, I am sure you will want to return to sections and consider in more detail. I am especially pleased that it is written in a very positive way. This book deserves to be high profile for what it has to offer. I can recommend it without reservation.

If you'd like to read more about this book or order it online, [click here](#)

If anyone else has read or seen anything that you think would be useful to governors, please email us your thoughts. They will be gratefully received!

## 10. GATHER Website and Forum

We now have a website that's up and running and we'll post links to items of news and details of the events we run such as the annual conference and seminar. You can also apply for GATHER membership via the site or contact us with any issues or concerns using the 'Contact Us' proforma. The site is much more straightforward than the one we had

before and urgent information that requires action such as making bookings will appear in the Latest News' box on the front page.

That's the good news. Not so good is the development of the forum. We did get it working and we hoped that governors would register to have discussions about aspects of their role. Within two days we had 12000 register of which 4 were real governors. The rest were spammers so we've had to close the forum until such time that we can sort the spam problem out. It does, however, beg the question about whether we need a forum at all now that we have a Facebook page. Please do let us know what you think about a forum and whether we still need to have one.

## 11. GAtHER Annual Conference 2018

Here's plenty of advance notice for our next annual conference for governors which will be held at our usual venue of Bishop Burton College on **Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2018**. Speakers and workshops are still to be decided but it will be a rather special one as it's our 10<sup>th</sup> conference. In recognition of this we'll be making awards to governors in a number of categories such as 'Outstanding primary governor'; 'Outstanding Secondary Governor'; 'Outstanding Early Years Governor' and 'Best New Governor'. These will be nominated by you and all nominations will be judged by a panel of experts (experts yet to be confirmed). There will be further details on our website soon after Christmas and in the next edition of GAtHERround due out in January.

## 12. And finally...

It won't have come as a great surprise that there was nothing for Education in the Chancellor's autumn budget statement. There'll be more on this in the next issue.

As a local governors' association, it's our role to provide information and support to governors alongside that provided by each Local Authority. An LA event that we are most certainly supporting is the new East Riding Governors' Termly Forum. All ER governors are welcome to attend to learn about new initiatives and responsibilities and there are opportunities to share practice and liaise with colleagues from throughout the East Riding. The first forum was held at County Hall Beverley on 30<sup>th</sup> November and subsequent dates are Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> March and Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> July. We hope governors will attend in droves! You can book a place by going to [www.eridingcpd.net](http://www.eridingcpd.net) and searching for item number 102.

Have a great festive break. We'll be back in January with more governor news and views!