

GATHERround

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

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Welcome!

Easter will soon be upon us and this serves as a reminder of just how quickly the academic year passes. Each term seems to bring ever more changes in the world of education for governors to act upon and some seem designed to catch us completely unawares. What was important one year seems to fade into insignificance the next. Remember the furore about safeguarding that had governors worried that a hole in the school fence might lead to special measures? Or how important National Curriculum levels were deemed to be - now cast aside in favour of new assessment procedures? Currently we have to consider 'Britishness' in our schools; something that had not been at the forefront of anyone's minds until the 'Trojan Horse' incident last year.

Talking of 'Britishness', the English language is constantly changing too. Remember when a 'train station' was a 'railway station', a 'multiplex' was 'the pictures' and 'a text' was a book you studied at school? So it is with school governance in that what was a 'body' has now become a 'board'. From now on, because we are so up to speed with modern parlance we will refer to the 'governing body' as the 'governing board'.

We hope you find articles of interest in this newsletter and remember, if you have any news or views -

E-mail them to us at: info@ga-ther.org
Post them on the Forum at: www.ga-ther.org
Tweet them to us: [@ga_ther](https://twitter.com/ga_ther)

1. 2015 Conference report

Over 140 delegates from East Riding and Hull schools attended the seventh annual Governors' Conference at Bishop Burton College on Saturday 14th March. The theme of this year's conference was *'What Really Matters in your School?'* and as the title implies, the focus was upon the strategic responsibilities that governing boards have in addressing those things - and not just the statutory ones - that make their schools operate to best effect.



Delegates gather at the GATHER conference

The day opened with short welcomes and introductions from GATHER Chair Sue Gollop and Vice Chair Vince Barrett. An overview of the National Leaders in Governance (NLG) programme was presented by Sam Gorman, Chair of Governors at Longcroft School in Beverley who talked about the value of undertaking the national leader training and outlined the support the NLG offers to governors. Next, our local authority GATHER colleagues thanked their schools for attending and to close the first session Vanessa Harvey Samuel, City Manager, Learning and Skills with Hull and Kevin Hall, Director of Children, Families and Schools in the East Riding talked about the generally upward trends in achievement being made in their respective local authorities but reminded us that, although this trend is welcome, there is still much to do.



Sir John Holman

The keynote speaker was Sir John Holman who is Emeritus Professor of chemistry at the University of York and senior education adviser to the Wellcome Trust. He has wide experience education and governance, having been headteacher of Watford Grammar School and a governor in five schools and he currently chairs an academy trust. Sir John based his keynote speech on the three main elements of his recent publication *'A Framework for Governance'*, a copy of which has been sent to all schools. These are: Governing Principles; Setting the Strategy; and Monitoring the Strategy. Sir John engaged the audience in proactively defining the role of school governors, what they would expect a good school to be doing and how governors could have a significant part to play in making sure those things happened. We were given some very practical questions that we should be asking of our senior leaders such as 'Does the school have a clear vision and strategic priorities?' and 'Are we properly engaged with our school community, the wider school sector and the outside world?' Sir John illustrated the points he made with some anecdotes of his time both as a headteacher and a governor. As an example: following a very lengthy and time-consuming issue that had arisen at his school when he was headteacher, a very probing question was put to him by his chair of governors. The question was 'What could we have done to make sure this didn't happen in the first place?' The questions we ask don't always have to be high level strategic ones!

Finally, a conference delegate was heard to ask a question of their own: 'How can we get Sir John to come and tell every governing body what he's just told us?'

After an excellent lunch we were given a real treat. This year we saw a demonstration of the musical skills of pupils from not one but two schools. Music teacher Rob Elliott of Archbishop Sentamu Academy in Hull was accompanied by three pupils from the academy and his son who attends All Saints' Junior School in Hessle. We heard a fabulous medley of modern songs and a beautiful violin rendition of a 1920's classic 'Putting on the Ritz'. Here are the artists at work:



From left to right: Lois Denton with a soulful version of 'Budapest' by George Ezra; Amber Bunce performing a fine rendition of Ella Henderson's 'Yours'; Faye Holdstocke doing a better job than Adele at singing Bob Dylan's 'To Make You Feel My Love' and Blair Elliot putting on the Ritz in fine style. Far right is the ensemble with proud music teacher and dad Rob Elliott. The young people were a credit to themselves and their schools and, as with past conferences, provided one of the highlights of the day.

The conference workshops held throughout the day were designed to address topics that built upon Sir John's presentation. The areas covered were assessment without levels in the primary phase; proposed 2016 secondary school performance measures and the secondary curriculum; the impact of technology on learning and progress; governing board self-review; holding your head teacher and other senior leaders to account and Philosophy for Children, a project for raising standards and preparing students for life and work in the 21st century. All were topical and well attended.

Our thanks go to the many people who help to make our conferences successful: to the staff at Bishop Burton College for providing us with excellent conference facilities and lunch; to Sue Gollop and Janet Slater of GATHER Council for doing all the groundwork in booking presenters and liaising with the college; to Wendy Grundy, East Riding Area Improvement Adviser and Maria Bannister, Hull Senior Education Officer for all their hard work in administering the arrangements for the conference; to the workshop presenters; to the Hull and East Riding staff who gave up their Saturday to help with everything on the day and especially to the young people for such stirring performances.

Early indications are that the event was an enormous success with a high percentage of evaluation respondents saying that they felt the event was helpful to them and rating it as 'Good' or 'Very Good'. We'll include a detailed analysis of responses in the next edition of GATHERround.

We'll soon be starting to plan the 2016 conference so please give us some ideas about what and who you'd like to see and hear next year and we'll do our best to provide it.

2. Inspection special offer: Get one, get another one free



On 15th January, Ofsted announced its intention to carry out two inspections on the same day in some schools in order to ensure that individual inspectors' judgments are consistent. They are calling it 'reliability testing' after Sean Harford, Ofsted's national director for schools, announced that Ofsted has not done enough to guarantee that inspections are reliable or that two or more inspectors in the same school on the same day would give it the same rating. Under the plan, two HMIs will be sent into selected schools to conduct independent inspections and their findings and judgments will be compared.

This might appear to be a good thing in that Ofsted is keen to demonstrate that all their inspectors are fair, impartial and will all arrive at the same judgements as they carry out their inspections. As governors we will need to be very clear about how these simultaneous inspections are carried out should two inspectors suddenly arrive to carry out a 'double'. Here are a few questions you might like to ask before they start:

- Will you both be inspecting the same teachers at work?
- Will you both be inspecting the same lessons together at the same time?
- Will you both interview the same governors and senior leaders at the same time?
- Will you both speak to the same pupils/parents/teaching assistants at the same time?

If the answer to any of these questions is 'no' or 'we work independently' then inevitably they will not have exactly the same experience and are likely to come to different judgements depending upon who they either observe or speak to. This has also been pointed out by leaders in education. Brian Lightman, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders said it was "a welcome step" that Ofsted had recognised there was an issue of reliability as an inaccurate verdict could have "disastrous" implications for a school. He went on to say:

"However, if it [Ofsted] is going to proceed with double inspections, there needs to be proper quality assurance and absolute transparency about the detail of the process. Inspectors also need to have regards to the already heavy workload that the inspection process creates. Double inspections will inevitably mean more pressure for schools."

In a similar vein, Dr Mary Bousted, general secretary of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) summed up the situation neatly when she said:

"It is incomprehensible that Ofsted has waited 23 years to investigate whether or not its judgements are reliable when the consequences for schools are so devastating if they are judged to be poor."

Read about Ofsted's double inspection plans [here](#)

3. In a different league

The so-called 'league table' of GCSE results for secondary schools in England was published on 29th January to a huge chorus of disapproval from headteachers. This is because the rules on which examination outcomes can be published have changed quite dramatically, resulting in the number of schools nationally failing to meet the

government's benchmark of 5 A*-C GCSEs (including English and maths) doubling to 330. The changes include tougher, more academic exams, a ban on re-sit results being included and a number of qualifications being stripped from the tables altogether. Bizarrely, many renowned private schools are now at the bottom of the tables because their pupils study qualifications such as International GCSEs or the International Baccalaureate exams that have ceased to be recognised in the tables. Schools such as Eton, Harrow, Winchester and St Paul's consequently scored 0% in the benchmark measure. Many state schools have also lost out as vocational qualifications which previously equated to up to four GCSEs have also been removed from the table.

Despite all these changes, however, an average 56.6% of pupils in state schools in England achieved the benchmark, down only slightly from 60.6% in 2013 under the old rules. In Hull and the East Riding, the 2014 average was 44.7% and 57.8% respectively. Schools with fewer than 40% of pupils reaching the benchmark are deemed to be failing with 6 schools in Hull and 2 in the East Riding now falling below this. However, there are 3 private schools in the two local authorities listed as scoring 0% for the reasons stated above and the Free School in Hull does not appear to have published any results at all. Are they all now failing? Not surprisingly, both private and state school heads now say the changes make the league tables nonsensical and irrelevant. Education Secretary Nicky Morgan insists the tables are still useful.

As governors, how do you feel about your school's position in the league? Is it a case of 'We're deservedly at the top of the table' or is it 'More lies, damned lies and statistics'? Please give us your thoughts.

4. Inspection of Academy chains

In another Ofsted story of particular interest to governors in academies, on 23rd January Secretary of State for Education, Nicky Morgan, announced that Ofsted will be allowed to take a 'closer look' at the work of multi-academy trusts (MATs) that run chains of academies and to publish information about their performance. The move comes after months of wrangling between Ms Morgan and Ofsted chief Sir Michael Wilshaw. Sir Michael made repeated calls last year to be given explicit powers to inspect the head offices of academy chains, in the same way that Ofsted inspects local authority children's services. Ms Morgan, and her predecessor Michael Gove, had argued that Ofsted did not need to be given additional powers to examine the overall management of MATs but there does now seem to be a dawning realisation that well over half of England's secondary schools are now academies and the larger MATs control as many or more academies than some local authorities do maintained schools - and of course, LAs' management of their schools IS subject to Ofsted inspection. It's interesting that Ms Morgan's proposals for MAT accountability do not match the existing inspection regime for LAs. This is what's proposed:

- Ofsted will make 'batch' inspections of academies that are all run by the same trust and inspectors will meet with staff from the MAT shortly after these inspections have taken place. They will share and discuss the evidence gathered and collect and consider further evidence to demonstrate the impact of the MAT's work with its academies.

- Inspectors will then draw together the range of evidence and make a balanced assessment of the work of the MAT with the academies inspected.
- Ofsted will then publish a ‘letter’ (i.e. not a report) outlining its findings but Ms Morgan says that any published findings must make clear which of the MAT’s academies have been inspected and which have not and it should also provide information about the performance of those academies which have not been inspected as a part of the ‘batch’, so that the wider position across the MAT can be understood.

In short, this is not an official inspection or judgement of the effectiveness of the management of a MAT as a whole but a view shared and agreed between a MAT and Ofsted about how its academies are performing following their individual Ofsted inspections. An added difficulty with this proposal is that some MATs run academies across England. We have academies in our own area that are run by MATs based hundreds of miles away.

Read more about the proposals [here](#). Do you think that inspections of LA children’s services and MATs should be run to the same specification? If you are a governor in a MAT academy, do you feel that it serves you well as governors?

5. Academies - a change for the better?

Here’s another academy issue, this time about the performance of individual academies. The cross-party Commons Education Select Committee published a report on 27th January that says there is no evidence that academies and free schools have had any effect on raising standards across the system. It states that MPs have concerns about the general oversight of both academy sponsors and chains (as described in the previous article) and warned that the initial success of sponsored academies created under the last Labour government has not necessarily followed for schools that have converted since 2010. The report says:

“Some chains, such as Harris, have proved very effective at raising attainment, while others achieve worse outcomes than comparable mainstream schools,”

About 60% of secondary schools are now academies but only 13% of primaries have converted. Graham Stuart, Committee Chair and Conservative MP for Beverley and Holderness warned that ‘stand-alone’ convertor academies risk becoming isolated:

“Current evidence does not prove that academies raise standards overall or for disadvantaged children. While some chains have clearly raised attainment, others achieve worse outcomes, creating huge disparities within the academy sector and compared to other mainstream schools. Nearly half of all academies are not part of a chain. By being ‘stand-alone’, these schools risk becoming isolated from others and as such as both less likely to contribute to others and less supported if they begin to fail. In future, Ofsted should require evidence of effective partnership with another institution before any school can be judged ‘outstanding.’”

Here is one of our local MPs, a senior member of the coalition government, saying that the success of academisation has proved to be variable to say the least. Are you a governor in an academy in Hull or East Riding? Does the report accurately reflect your experiences? Let us know. You can read the whole report [here](#)

6. Pupils' mental health

Mental health has been given a high profile in the media over recent months and there is now recognition that a significant number of young people may suffer with mental health problems as they go through their education. Numerous reasons for this have been put forward; the psychological effects of cyber-bullying and social networking; the effects of complex family and living arrangements; increased pressure to perform well academically and peer pressure to be perfect in every way. All may have a bearing on the mental and social well-being of impressionable adolescents. Tragically, over the last few years, we have lost at least three young people in our area through suicide - each case resulting in calls for more to be done to ensure that it will never happen again. But it does.

In response, the Economic and Financial think tank CentreForum has published a report '*Wellbeing and mental health of pupils in English secondary schools.*' The report contains the results of a survey of headteachers conducted by the CentreForum Mental Health Commission. It identifies gaps in the treatment of mental health needs in schools across England, with 54% of head teachers finding their local mental health service to be ineffective in supporting pupils. Almost half of the head teachers surveyed believe that their increasing workloads are impacting on their ability to identify pupils' mental health problems at a time when mental health problems in schools are on the rise. The survey also finds:

- Confidence in child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) were even lower among head teachers at pupil referral units (37%) and special educational needs schools (43%).
- 47% of all schools surveyed say that an increased workload is lessening their ability to identify mental health problems at the earliest possible point.
- 65% of schools do not assess the severity of mental health needs among their pupils. Yet where such screening tools are used, 85 per cent of schools reported it to be effective.

Nick Clegg MP, Deputy Prime Minister, said:

"Schools would never ignore a child with a physical health problem, so the same should be true of mental ill health too. Early intervention is crucial in tackling mental health problems, which is why school leaders have a major role to play. In government we have already set up a cross government mental health task force to evaluate current provision, and the Liberal Democrat manifesto will set out our plans to ensure that children and young people can access the services they need."

Norman Lamb MP, Care and Support Minister, said:

"I am committed to improving mental health care for children and young people - that's why I've formed a task force to advise on improvements. Crucially, members include experts from the education sector and we're engaging young people directly to get their views. We've also invested £3 million in MindEd, a website to help anyone working with children - from teachers to dinner ladies and sports coaches to Scouts leaders - to make sure children get the mental health support they need."

If you are a governor in a secondary school, have you ever discussed the issue of pupils' mental health? [Download](#) the report.

7. Ask GATHER

Here we offer advice on the day-to-day issues that governors may face in their role. Whilst all advice is offered based on the facts we have been given, governors will need to consider any actions they may take as a result of our advice in the context of their own school. Governors are now becoming involved in carrying out their school's performance-related pay policy and so in this issue we are focusing on topical questions put to us about appraisal and performance-related pay. As you will see in the cases we highlight here, being a member of a Pay Committee can be very challenging!

“I'm the Chair of Governors in a large maintained secondary school and we are setting the headteachers' pay following the appraisal process. All the targets that we set the previous year were met and we want to continue to reward our valued headteacher in order to retain them. The problem we have is that the headteacher is at the top of the pay scale for our school group and so we have nowhere to go regarding increasing pay. What can we do?”

The first thing to say is that as a maintained school, you must have appointed an external adviser to support the governors charged with appraising the headteacher. The adviser's role is to guide you in the process but not to recommend any pay awards. You seem to have decided that your headteacher deserves to be paid at a point above your school's Individual School Range (ISR). It is possible to extend the Leadership Pay Group for your school by up to 25% in order to reward good performance but this may only be postponing the problem until that point is also reached. There are other considerations before you make an award outside the pay scale such as are you going to apply the same premise to your deputy(ies) when they reach the top of the scale? This consideration is important not only for making your appraisal process fair but also for maintaining appropriate pay differentials for senior leaders, whilst being conscious of knock-on budgetary effects. The final decision is of course yours but your headteacher will be aware of the school's ISR and should acknowledge that they have now reached the top of the pay range for your school and that extra pay year-on-year for as long as they remain at the school will not be possible. It is for them to decide whether they want to seek a new challenge in another school or stay to continue to build upon their success in your school.

“Our governing board approved the Performance Related Pay Policy that came into force from September 2014 and the Pay Committee is considering results of the first appraisals upon which decisions about the amount we pay each teacher will be made. I'm not on the Pay Committee but I have a real concern because a teacher that I know is very good because they taught my son has been appraised as 'requiring improvement' and so may not receive any increase in their pay next year. The Pay Committee has endorsed this judgement and I think this is most unfair as I'm not the only one that thinks this teacher deserves to be treated better than this. How can I influence the decision made?”

We're afraid that there will be many cases nationally like the one you describe but the PRP policy and the way it is delivered has, as you say, been agreed by your governing board. Appraisers will have been named and trained and the

timetable for the process defined. As governors, we have to trust that teachers are appraised in accordance with this process and that all appraisers maintain impartiality. Governors (usually members of a delegated Pay Committee such as yours) must consider all pay recommendations and either ratify them or contest them based upon all the information made available to them. They must be able to demonstrate that all their decisions are made objectively and in compliance with the school's PRP policies and equalities legislation. Individual governors' opinions about a particular teacher's effectiveness, or indeed those of anyone else who has not been involved in the PRP process, are likely to be overruled by the written and other evidence generated by the official process. Of course, every appraised teacher has the right to appeal against decisions made so you must be sure that you have a robust appeals procedure in place.

"I am a member of my school's governors' Pay Committee and we have been asked to consider the case of a teacher who has been appraised and has met two of the set targets but has not met the third target which was to be judged as at least 'good' in the teaching of all observed lessons. Of four observations, two were judged as 'outstanding' and one as 'good' but the fourth was deemed to be 'requiring improvement'. Do we automatically have to refuse an incremental pay rise because of this?"

The simplest way to address this is to state that in all cases, any missed target will result in no pay award being made. However, a well-constructed Pay Policy should not state this as it's a policy for judging the quality of people's work and not tins of beans. In this particular case, we recommend looking at a much wider evidence base before coming to any decision. Ask questions such as how is this teacher's performance over time perceived by the headteacher, parents, pupils and other teachers? Are the pupils in their class(es) making expected progress? What has the level of attainment of this teacher's pupils been in the past? Were there any mitigating circumstances such as the teacher feeling unwell on the day of the fourth lesson observation? Once you have considered the evidence yielded from questions such as these, and it points to the teacher being competent, you may exercise professional discretion and allow the award if that is what you agree. If you decide not to make the award, it is likely that the teacher in question will appeal against the decision and so it is very important that, should this happen, you have absolutely watertight and demonstrable reasons for your decision.

8. Check out your school lunches

We wrote about the case of the 'Packed Lunch Police' in *GATHERround* issue 6. Now it's the turn of lunches served in schools. As governors we're sure you will from time to time have partaken of a lunch in your school but did you know that all food prepared and served on school premises is now subject to very stringent regulations? This follows Jamie Oliver's revelation some time ago of the horrors of turkey twizzlers and other comestibles of questionable quality served up in schools. As a result, the quality of school food has improved tremendously over the past few years and now must pay regard to things like additives, allergens, nutritional values and portion sizes. It is important that both you as a governor and your pupils' parents are aware of the need for this strict regulation and

understand what schools are required to do in the preparation and serving of food. It's likely that many parents will not fully understand the need for schools to consider food content and portion size. Do you remember parents passing burgers through school fences when Jamie Oliver first brought this to our attention? We consider it a good idea to publish school food guidelines for parents so that at least they will have some idea of the legislation to which schools must conform. You'll find some excellent help with this at www.schoolfoodplan.com In connection with this, we've heard recently of a parent in one of our schools posting a complaint about perceived small lunch portion sizes on Facebook which was then picked up by the local press and published as a sensational story in a local paper without any contact with the school. Have you been subject to a Facebook campaign on this or any school matter? Let us know of your experiences and we'll put them in an article about the use of social networking sites and effects on schools. Anonymity guaranteed!

9. Careers and Congratulations!

Last November, Kevin Logan, careers co-ordinator at one of our member schools, Malet Lambert secondary in Hull, won the 'Careers Educator of the Year' award at the CDI conference in Glasgow. This is a national and very prestigious award which reflects a great deal of hard work and commitment in ensuring that young people are prepared for moving on from school. Pictured right is Kevin receiving his award from Lindsay Comalie of Imperial College London and Susan Calman, Scottish writer, actress and comedian. This was a part of Stephen's acceptance speech:



"It's a great privilege and honour to have received this award. Quality careers education, information, advice and guidance is essential in preparing young people for their future. I am very fortunate to work with a great team of careers staff, teachers, headteacher, supportive community and governing body who work together to provide the very best opportunities for our young people."

I quote from Stephen's speech because, as he rightly says, the support of governors is so important in the provision of good careers education and guidance. Well done to all.

Our congratulations also go to Suzanne Mason, careers co-ordinator at Hornsea School Language College for arranging a very successful careers exhibition during January. A wide range of further education providers and colleges were in attendance to inform and advise pupils and the event proved to be particularly beneficial for Year 11s thinking about their next steps in life. Parents and pupils were full of praise for the school for opening their eyes to opportunities that can help kick-start their career path. Suzanne said:

"Independent and impartial careers advice is now imperative in schools and all pupils from Year 8 to Year 13 should be provided with it."

Hear, hear! Again, congratulations to all involved.

10. In My Opinion: Able to Succeed?

Vince Barrett expresses his views on the latest highly critical Ofsted report on the state of secondary education in England published on 4th March. This report, entitled '*The most able students - an update on progress since June 2013*' stated that the most able pupils in non-selective schools are still not being challenged sufficiently to achieve the highest levels of attainment and also said that secondary schools are complacent in not stretching their brightest pupils - those that enter Year 7 at level 5 or above whom the report says should all go on to achieve A or A* grades at GCSE. This report appears to me to be flawed in a number of ways. Firstly, how is 'complacency' measured? Do you as a governor consider your school to be 'complacent'? Are you in the comfortable position of having been judged as 'good' or even 'outstanding' some years ago and now resting on your laurels? Or are you in a less advantaged position where it might be tempting to say 'Well what can you expect from the kids from round here?' Secondly, the report relies heavily on research that says children always develop at a linear rate and what they do at the age of 10 will lead to predicted outcomes at the age of 16 - or else! A lot can and does happen during adolescence (see article 6 on page 7) that should surely be taken into account. Thirdly, comparisons are made with the attainment of pupils in private education which it is said could and should be matched in the state sector. This seems a bit rich in that many top private schools recorded 0% in the recently published league tables (see article 3 on page on page 4). Finally, the survey of schools visited when compiling the report is hardly representative of the 3000+ secondary schools and 16000+ primary schools in England. HMI visited just 40 non-selective secondary schools and 10 primary schools to assess the teaching, curriculum and guidance they provide for their most able students. Read the report [here](#) and please give us your views.

11. Keeping you up to speed

There is so much that governors need to be aware of in order to discharge their duties effectively and we hope the items we bring to you in this newsletter are helpful in keeping you informed. Having said that, we are an independent association and, although we work very closely with colleagues in our partner local authorities, we can't always know about everything that's happening within each LA. Consequently, we hope you are aware of and read the local governor newsletters published by your local council. In the East Riding, this is '*Governor News*' which you'll find [here](#) and in Hull it's '*In Touch*' which is [here](#). Both are excellent and contain news of local events and training available to governors.