

GATHERround

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

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Welcome!

On 8th May we will witness the result of the most unpredictable general election in post-war Britain. Whichever party or parties are in charge, we will no doubt have a new Secretary of State for Education who will want to make their mark as did those before them in 'reforming', 'reviewing', 'revolutionising' or 'transforming' education. See if you can remember what positive, lasting legacies these previous ministers left:

1994-1997 Gillian Shephard (Con)
1997-2001 David Blunkett (Lab)
2001-2002 Estelle Morris (Lab)
2002-2004 Charles Clarke (Lab)
2004-2006 Ruth Kelly (Lab)
2006-2007 Alan Johnson (Lab)
2007-2010 Ed Balls (Lab)
2010-2014 Michael Gove (Con)
2014-2015 Nicky Morgan (Con)

So, 9 ministers in 20 years. Do you have fond memories of any of them? Do you think any of them contributed greatly to schools and education in general? Do you remember any of them except perhaps one very recent incumbent? The last minister to have his name attached to an initiative was Kenneth Baker in 1988 for his 'Baker Days' which were 5 training days stolen from teachers' holidays. What would you like the next minister to do? Let us have your thoughts.

E-mail us at: info@ga-ther.org

Post on the Forum at: www.ga-ther.org

Tweet us: @ga_ther

1. School Funding

Governors in maintained schools will have set their budgets for the 2015/16 financial year based on the sum of money they receive through their local authority. Central government funding allocations are always a concern for us in this area because the East Riding of Yorkshire, always poorly-funded, is now the lowest-funded local authority for education provision in England. To put this into sharp focus, the Association for School and College Leaders (ASCL) has come up with some startling figures which claim that in 2015/16, schools in the ten best-funded areas in England receive on average £6,297 per pupil, compared with the East Riding's £4293.81 per pupil. This results in, for example, an average-sized secondary school of 920 pupils located in the East Riding having an overall budget allocation of £1.9 million less than a similar school located in a highly-funded area; a figure ASCL estimates is enough to pay the total cost of 40 full-time teachers. How can this possibly be?



It all comes down to the outdated and complex formula used to work out the needs of each area. You can find more detail about the formula in Section 6 of the *GATHER Guide for Governors*. The resulting basic amount per pupil is called the Schools' Block Element of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). At only £4293.81 per pupil, the East Riding receives about half the sum allocated to schools in some London boroughs and even the demographically similar county of Somerset receives £4,343.44 per pupil - a difference of £49.63 per pupil, resulting in a DSG shortfall to the East Riding of **over two million pounds**. Have a look at the full allocation list [here](#).

As if all this wasn't bad enough, on 26th March the Institute for Fiscal Studies said that schools in England will have less to spend per pupil over the next five years, regardless of who wins the election. This pre-election report, based on parties' spending pledges, said schools will face budget cuts over the next parliament. When the extra costs of teachers' pensions, national insurance contributions and wage increases are included, the real-terms reduction in schools' spending could be as much as 12%, the report said.

There is a national campaign group called f40 which represents the lowest education-funded local authorities in England. The f40 mission is to convince the government to change the current iniquitous funding formula described above. They want equality and fairness in education funding to local authorities and, in turn, schools.

GATHER is working with f40 and the East Riding Council to make the case for better funding for the East Riding. We have presented a briefing paper (which you'll find in the Resources section of our website) to all prospective MPs whose constituencies cover the East Riding, about the current atrocious funding allocation, asking them what they intend to do to improve it. This was reported in the East Riding Mail on 24th April. We see this as an ongoing issue so if you have any evidence of hardship in your school suffered through poor funding - things like compulsory redundancies or inability to hire experienced staff - please let us know by going on to the forum and telling us. You may also like to have a look at the website [f40 - The Campaign for Fairer Funding in Education](#)

2. Headteacher stress

In January, the DfE published the document [‘National Standards of Excellence for Headteachers’](#). It is designed to prescribe the values, skills, qualities and ambitions that all good headteachers need to possess if they are going to lead their schools successfully. The preamble says:

“The values and ambitions of headteachers determine the achievements of schools. They are accountable for the education of current and future generations of children. Their leadership has a decisive impact on the quality of teaching and pupils’ achievements in the nation’s classrooms. Headteachers, together with those responsible for governance, are guardians of the nation’s schools.”

What a responsibility! At least we governors merit a passing mention but we must all recognise that the role of headteacher can be a very lonely one upon whose shoulders it seems the fate of their school rests. The job is now akin to that of a football manager - if your team doesn’t score the goals, you’re out.



The resulting levels of stress with the job these days is immeasurable. How can headteachers develop the attributes demanded in this document in an environment that has become dominated by political bullying and fear? Politicians from all sides continually use the education system to score points; heads are bullied into delivering ever-changing initiatives, usually based on the unsound theories of politicians who have not experienced anything of education other than as a pupil themselves. Increased competition between schools, the threat of forced academisation, unrealistic expectations of some parents and growing levels of personal accountability have all increased the pressure on school leaders.

In a speech on 2nd February, Eton-educated David Cameron vowed to wage an “all-out war on mediocrity” as he set out proposed new powers to shake up the performance of up to 3,500 schools. He said that any school in England judged to be requiring improvement by Ofsted will be forced to become an academy and put under new leadership unless it can show it has plans in place to bring about rapid change. Mr Cameron did not mention what would happen if a failing school happened to be an academy already.

The question is why would anyone want to put themselves up for a job that is so demanding and stressful? The answer has to be because they care - about their school, their staff and above all their pupils but what many of them need is emotional support and space to reflect on the job; to consider what they do well and what they could do better. Without such support, if problems are encountered heads may try to project an image of everything being OK to prevent the staff from worrying. That’s unsustainable. Where can they find support in their role? They should be able to turn to their governors - particularly the Chair - to discuss issues with and yet how many governing boards seriously consider the relationship between the Chair and the head? Did you know that every governing board has a statutory duty to maintain an overview of the headteacher’s

well-being and to ensure an appropriate work-life balance? Here are some statements for you to consider in order to address questions such as these. Can you, hand on heart, say you are doing all these things?

- Governors and the headteacher are clear about their respective roles and responsibilities. These are regularly discussed, reviewed and clarified.
- The governing board discusses and agrees strategies for ensuring the wellbeing and appropriate work/life balance of the head.
- Governors are aware of key times in the year when heads may be under more pressure.
- Governors fully support the head during inspections.
- The head is given opportunities for his/her own professional development.
- Annual performance and salary reviews are carried out effectively.

There are, of course, many more statements that could be listed here, but the important thing must be that that the head is provided with the time, the space and a person with whom they may safely ‘let off steam’ from time to time. Enter the Chair of Governors!

Read about one headteacher’s experience of stress [here](#)

3. Living in a Virtual World



On 24th March, Steve Woodhouse, executive headteacher of three of our member schools that comprise the Wolds Federation, appeared live on ITV’s Good Morning Britain where he spoke very eloquently about potential social and intellectual development problems for primary-age children from playing hours of 18-rated video and online games. Our congratulations go to Steve for presenting this issue so concisely on national television at such an unearthly hour. What he had to say got us thinking. The past ten years or so have seen an explosion in the growth of online gaming and cyber-gambling. Then there’s social networking which can inflict serious psychological damage on others, an activity commonly known as cyber-bullying. As governors, we need to understand the ways in which social networking sites are used inappropriately by some adults and by children who should not be accessing them in the first place.

A worrying aspect of this is that we now have a generation of school pupils haven’t experienced life without instant communication. Such communication, with absolutely anyone anywhere in the world is made all the more dangerous because many young users of such sites do so with unsecured profiles that have poor privacy settings allowing anyone to see their profile. This may lead to ‘friend’ requests from people they don’t know which increases the risk of inappropriate or dangerous contacts.

These are issues that we as governors must acknowledge and make sure we have in place policies and procedures that address the effects of and fallout from online activity. We are unlikely to be able to stop parents allowing their children to play online games or

access social sites so it's important for both primary and secondary schools to advise parents to:

- Check that their children's profile is set to private and that only accepted friends can see information that is posted.
- Monitor their child's use and talk to them about safe and appropriate online behaviour.
- Install the CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre) application from www.facebook.com/clickceop on their profile. This places a bookmark on their profile to CEOP and a Report Abuse button which has been known to deter potential offenders.
- Read the advice from Facebook www.facebook.com/safety/groups/parents
- Set up their own profile and insist their child accepts them as a 'friend' so they can see what is being posted online.

Sadly, schools' sessions for parents on e-safety issues such as these are notoriously badly attended because many parents may not understand the need to be vigilant or because they feel that this doesn't apply to either themselves or their children. Wrong. It does. Read more about this on our forum under 'Facebook, parents and teachers'.

4. Gather in the GAtHER forum



Moving on now to our own networking site. The graphic on the left illustrates our intention in offering an online forum to all governors in our member schools; through sharing views and experiences, we can grow a strong tree of governance. A bit cheesy but nonetheless what we'd like to achieve. We now have well over 60 governors registered to use the forum but so far we've had comments posted by only two regular contributors. If you've registered but don't use the forum, please tell us why. If you haven't yet visited, do go and

have a browse around and feel free to express thoughts, views or opinions on anything to do with being a governor. Remember that we are a completely independent organisation and the forum is limited to registered users only so any views expressed cannot be accessed by visitors. Registering is easy. Go to www.ga-ther.org and:

1. Click on the 'Register for Forum' button.
2. Fill in the short form as in the example below:

Name of Governor: Joseph Soap. We'd prefer you to use your real name unless of course it really is Joe Soap!

E-mail address: e.g j.soap@coolmail.com. This needs to be a personal email address as your unique identifier. If your school issues governors with individual e-mail addresses, that's fine. We do not share e-mail addresses with anyone else.

School Name: Anytown Primary. This is straightforward but we do have some similarly named schools. If you know there is another school locally with the same or a similar name, please help us to identify you by, for instance, stating St Nicholas Primary (Beverley) or Driffield School (Secondary).

GAtHER membership number: e.g. **M0316132**. This is the number allocated to your school when you joined GAtHER. If you don't know what it is, ask your school's Business Manager or e-mail a request to us, stating your school's name. It is important to note this number as we are likely to introduce more member-only services that will require it to access them.

Once 'Request Registration' is clicked, this will be picked up by our website manager who will issue you with an individual username and password, using the email address you provided. You will then be able to log in to post questions, join in debates or air opinions on any aspect of governorship. Someone in a school somewhere will be so pleased that you've raised an issue that has been bothering them.

5. Annual Conference 2015 - what you said



We hosted our 7th Annual Governors' Conference in collaboration with East Riding and Hull Councils on 14th March at Bishop Burton College. We were pleased to welcome 135 governors and from the 93 evaluation forms returned, we can safely say the event was a 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 only slight criticism was a lack of signposting to the refectory - something we will put right next year.

The programme for the day was well received and the keynote speaker, Sir John Holman, was rated 100% as 'good' or 'very good'. Delegates found him to be 'thought provoking', 'practical', 'insightful' and 'inspiring'. An example comment was 'I felt he only scratched the surface and a whole morning could have easily been filled - excellent speaker.' Delegates were particularly grateful for provision of a copy of Sir John's *Framework for Governance* which linked to the main elements of his presentation. We thank Sir John for an enlightening keynote speech.

As for the workshops, all six of them received 'good' or 'very good' ratings from 95%+ of delegates attending. Particularly popular were 'Assessment Without Levels (Primary)' attended by 56 people and 'Holding Your Head Teacher and Other Senior Leaders to Account' attended by 39. We thank all our workshop leaders for their hard work in preparing and presenting such high-quality sessions.

The musical presentation by the 'Archie Family' - pupils from Archbishop Sentamu Academy - was enjoyed by all with many describing them as 'Outstanding' and 'Brilliant!' but some felt that it could have been put on over lunchtime or made optional at the end of the day in order to shorten the conference. We feel that children and young people should be at the centre of our role as governors and will therefore continue to offer schools the opportunity to showcase their talent, not just as a bolted-on option but as an important part of the programme. Sadly, one delegate commented that the singing was strange and they could not see what value it added, saying 'it would have been better if the students had spoken about learning'.

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 ‘establish a review and cycle of self-evaluation for the governing body’; ‘research assessment without levels’; ‘ask questions, especially about the changes to the curriculum and assessment’; ‘organise Link Governors meetings each term’; and interestingly ‘draw up a timetable for Senior Leaders to report to GB’.

We certainly got the impression that governors value the annual conference and so we are starting to plan the next one. Let us have any ideas you have for a theme, for a keynote speaker, for workshops or if you have a band of willing pupils keen to show us their talents, please let us know via the forum or e-mail.

A breakdown of the evaluations is available in the Resources section of our website.

6. The ‘Framework for Governance’

Many of the articles in our newsletters underline the strategic responsibilities that governors have in building a healthy and forward-looking organisation. Sir John Holman’s excellent keynote speech at our conference in March (see above) underlined the fact that governing boards have more responsibility and are held accountable more rigorously than ever before for strategic planning, development and monitoring in their schools. It is very timely, therefore, that The National Governors’ Association (NGA) and the Wellcome Trust have jointly developed the *Framework for Governance*, launched in January. This is a very useful document that complements our own GATHER Guide for Governors. It has the added bonus of being written by Sir John who set out so clearly at our conference how governors can evaluate their own practice. The Framework is based around twenty key questions for a governing board to ask itself. These address setting the strategic direction of a school and how to monitor progress against that strategy using high-level performance indicators that go much further than just exam results.

All schools should have been e-mailed a copy of the *Framework for Governance*, which is also available to download free of charge [here](#)

7. Sickness or skiving?



"I DO have a note from my doctor,
but nobody can read it!"

There seems to be a growing problem nationally - schools that have agreed a policy which requires an official doctors’ note to explain every child’s absence. Apparently, GPs across the country are saying that appointment time is being wasted because schools are increasingly insisting on medical evidence that an absent child is sick. This follows the government’s drive to ensure maximum attendance with parental fines for unauthorised absences. Consequently, schools are concerned that if they allow sickness absences covered only by parental notes, they may find that they are in breach of the requirement not to allow unauthorised absences. Parents are equally concerned that if they keep their child off school for a minor illness, they may receive a fine for their child’s unauthorised absence.

Some doctors' surgeries have written to schools asking them to rescind the policy and informing parents that they will have to pay for a sickness note for minor illnesses. The DfE rather unhelpfully says it is up to schools to decide if they require evidence that a child is sick and it does not have to be a doctor's note. What does it have to be then?

We are not aware that this is yet an issue here in Hull and the East Riding. Let us know what policies you have in place for addressing pupils' sickness absences and whether these have caused any problems for your school.

8. Ask GATHER

This is where we consider questions about governance. Whilst the advice we offer is based on the facts we have been given, governors will need to think carefully about any actions they may take as a result of our advice in the context of their own school. Here's a question that seems to have arisen in a number of governing boards.



“Our long-serving Clerk is taking early retirement. He was employed by the LA clerking service, which of course we paid for via a service level agreement. We are going to replace him with our School Business Manager which we feel will have several advantages:

- *She is already a Governing Board member and so knows the school well*
- *She is also a member of the Finance Committee and so understands how the school budget is spent*
- *She is an excellent note-taker and minute-writer*
- *We would save money by not having to pay for an external Clerk.*

We feel we will get the best of all worlds by recruiting our own Clerk but is there anything else we need to consider before we offer her the role?”

The short answer to this one is yes, there are a number of considerations that need to be made. Firstly, governing boards are free to determine who will be their Clerk but they must be satisfied that whoever is selected fulfils the following criteria:

- Are they completely impartial in their recording of meetings? If the Clerk is simultaneously a member of the GB, it is very difficult for them to maintain a neutral position when items of interest to them are discussed. Knowing the school well can work against impartiality. Furthermore, taking an active part in discussions and accurately recording minutes at the same time is asking a lot of one person.
- Do they have a working knowledge of government policies that affect the whole spectrum of the school's work? A person already employed at the school may have a good understanding of a particular aspect linked to the job they do - in your case the budget - but key roles of a good clerk include advising and guiding the governing board on legislation as well as taking minutes.

From what you say, it looks as though you intend to offer your School Business Manager the role of Clerk without any additional remuneration. There is no doubt that the job has become much more demanding which can be difficult for a Clerk who has another full-time role within the school. As well as producing agendas, copying any accompanying papers and recording minutes, a good Clerk will need to attend regular training sessions to keep them up to date. This is in addition to researching forthcoming legislation and producing briefing papers for governors. All these things will have been a part of the clerking service you have been paying for and the extra burden placed upon your SBM Clerk may mean that she is less efficient in one or both of the key roles she has within the school. Remember that Ofsted are particularly keen on finding out how well-informed the governors are and an efficient and knowledgeable Clerk is central to this.

The role of the Clerk is a crucial one in ensuring the smooth running of the governing board and deserves respect and recognition. It is all too easy to assume that all they do is attend meetings and record what's said. As we hope we have illustrated here, it is a job in itself and not one to be tacked on to the job description of someone else. Our advice is to look at the LA and other clerking services available to you locally - and pay for that service. It is money well spent.

9. And finally...

We hope you find the articles in GATHERround useful. We occasionally get feedback about some of the articles which is mostly positive but criticisms have been that the current 10 pages is too long, the text too dense and there aren't enough pictures. It seems that 5 pages is the maximum for an online document and that people stop reading after that. We intend to publish a weekly online forum update to keep everyone up to speed on the topics being discussed so we could put the stories behind the headlines on there. If you've got this far, you are clearly an avid a GATHERround reader so you might choose to keep it as it is. Please tell us how you'd like us to give you our news.