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- Details on free teacher training for secondary schools worth £280 from Sage@school

Focus on...have you done your homework?

Head Teachers who have been doing their homework this week will know all about Education Secretary Michael Gove's plans to scrap homework guidelines. From now on homework policy will be at the discretion of the Head Teacher. The move, according to a Government spokesperson, is designed to free Head Teachers from 'unnecessary bureaucratic guidance' and follows complaints from campaigners, including TV presenter Kirstie Allsop, that homework 'limits family time together and the real ways kids learn.'

A Department for Education spokesman said 'We trust Head Teachers to set the homework policy for their school. They know their pupils best and should be free to make these decisions.'

Under the guidelines, which came into force in 1998, primary schools are supposed to set one hour of homework a week for pupils aged five to seven, rising to half an hour per night for pupils aged seven to 11. In secondary schools, homework should be 45 to 90 minutes per night for students aged 11 to 14, while those aged 14 to 16 should be given 90 to 150 minutes per night.

Despite removing the guidance the Department has said that it continues to believe that homework is 'part and parcel' of a good education, and the Teaching and Learning section of the new Ofsted framework includes criteria on 'the extent to which teachers enable pupils to develop the skills to learn for themselves, where appropriate, including setting appropriate homework to develop their understanding'.

Education commentators have responded to the announcement by stressing the importance of quality over quantity in relation to homework. Russell Hobby, General Secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers stated 'If homework is properly connected to lessons, and regularly marked, it works. Just setting large volumes of homework for the sake of meeting targets doesn't work. Sensible discretion on the part of Head Teachers, to ensure the schools' homework policy reinforces their teaching strategy, is fine.'

Some critics have raised concerns about the unintended consequences of the policy change. Chris McGovern, chairman of the Campaign for Real Education, in The Sunday Telegraph argued that 'The danger is that schools will use this as an excuse to dilute the amount of homework. Middle-class

children will do their homework anyway. Guidance for children who are coming from more deprived backgrounds is probably more important.'

For Head Teachers planning to revisit their schools homework policy there are countless reports, blogs and websites to inform your thinking.

The Sutton Trust's Pupil Premium Toolkit, which analyses the cost and impact of a wide range of 'interventions', assesses that homework has a moderate impact for a low cost, whilst the research strongly suggests that it is more valuable at secondary school level and much less effective for children of primary school age. The toolkit highlights that there is an optimum level of 1-2 hours per school day (more for older pupils) but that the effects of homework tail off as the time students spend increases and stresses the importance of effective feedback and integration with lesson time. With one study discovering that A-level students who spent seven hours or more on homework per week achieved results that were only a third of a grade higher than students of the same sex and ability who did homework for less than two hours a week. These findings are backed up by a review of homework by the [National Foundation for Educational Research in 2001](#).

In the Guardian, blogger and Assistant Head Teacher Eugene Spiers shares the outcomes of a number of [homework experiments he conducted in his school](#) and the Guardian's Teacher Network includes [tips from practitioners](#) to improve homework provision.

If you are looking for international evidence, Focus on Effectiveness, a website that summarises educational research and evidence from the US, has [compiled a list of essential features of effective homework](#), and the [OECD's PISA assessments](#) make interesting reading in relation to the potential negative impacts of parents helping with homework.

With Gove suggesting extending the school day to give more time for supported study in school and a 2009 poll by The Association of Teachers and Lecturers' annual conference voting in favour of abolishing homework for primary school pupil's, some Heads may be questioning the value of setting any homework at all. The [Innovation Unit urges Head Teacher to explore three ideas for homework including scrapping it altogether](#).

What's your view? What have you found to be the most effective approaches to homework? Has your school introduced new or innovative methods of setting homework? How do VLE's and web based systems such as [I am Learning](#) enhance the impact of homework? What do parents at your school think of homework – do they think there is too much, too little or is it just right? Email your thoughts to think@schoolsnortheast.com

- [Michael Gove scraps government homework guidelines](#) (BBC News)
- [Head Teachers given discretion over setting homework](#) (Telegraph)
- [Homework guidelines scrapped to give headteachers greater freedom](#) (Guardian)
- [Michael Gove Scraps Homework Guidelines](#) (Huffington Post)

Local news by area

Darlington

- [New football academy launched](#) (The Northern Echo)

Durham

- [Ofsted inspection praises County Durham services](#) (Journal Live)

Gateshead

- [White Mere Community Primary School in Gateshead marks World Book Day](#) (Journal Live)

Hartlepool

- [There's Wally at World Book Day](#) (Hartlepool Mail)
- [Impressive schools admission rates](#) (Hartlepool Mail)
- [Lauren's design is not to be sneezed at](#) (Hartlepool Mail)
- [Enterprising lessons in Fairtrade](#) (Hartlepool Mail)
- [A golden opportunity to mark 50th anniversary](#) (Hartlepool Mail)

Middlesbrough

- [Plans to axe crossing patrols near Middlesbrough schools](#) (Gazette Live)

Newcastle

- [Tom Berish gets in on the act at The King's School](#) (Chronicle Live)
- [Wallsend sixth former is off on an Arctic adventure](#) (Chronicle Live)
- [Literacy fund is a fitting tribute to popular teacher](#) (Chronicle Live)
- [Tyneside schoolchildren celebrate World Book Day](#) (Chronicle Live)
- [Swalwell school children enjoy curry class](#) (Chronicle Live)
- [Nick Forbes slams Newcastle College plan](#) (Chronicle Live)
- [Newcastle College free school plans blasted by Heaton Manor Head](#) (Journal Live)

North Tyneside

- [Rowing success for students](#) (The News Guardian)

Northumberland

- [Handover of campus marks end of £51m rebuilding programme](#) (The News Guardian)
- [Pupils given insight into the fire service](#) (News Post Leader)
- [Service delivers 1,000th session](#) (News Post Leader)
- [Feast fit for king a taste of times gone by](#) (News Post Leader)
- [Old school revamp planned](#) (Berwick Advertiser)
- [Head Teacher postpones retirement plan for 12 months](#) (Berwick Advertiser)
- [Creepy crawlies hold no fear for Kiln Hill Pre-School pupils](#) (Berwick Advertiser)
- [Drumming up support](#) (Northumberland Gazette)
- [World Book Day – slideshow](#) (Northumberland Gazette)
- [Hotbed of learning](#) (Northumberland Gazette)
- [Northumberland Church of England Academy at Ashington a big success](#) (Journal Live)
- [Pupils Look to China For Media Project](#) (Hexham Courant)
- [Youngsters help needy children](#) (Morpeth Herald)

Stockton

- [North Shore Health Academy pledges to act on damning Ofsted report](#) (Gazette Live)
- [Shopping park helps pupils learn to love reading](#) (The Northern Echo)

South Tyneside

- [Water supply problems close primary school](#) (Shields Gazette)

Sunderland

- [Pupils' toast to tragic teacher](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Sunderland life frozen in time capsule under new store](#) (Sunderland Echo)

- [School choirs battle it out in City Sings](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Sunderland children's centres remain open despite £1.7m budget cut](#) (CYPN)

Redcar

- [Olympics cash boost for Badger Hill Primary School in Brotton](#) (Gazette Live)

Regional

- [Utility savings 'can boost schools'](#) (Hartlepool Mail)
- [Schools win praise for pupils' work](#) (Journal Live)
- [North East secondary school admission success joy](#) (Journal Live)
- [Set your sights on Oxford](#) (The Northern Echo)
- [Criticism at plans to rebrand "satisfactory" schools as failing](#) (The Northern Echo)

Top national education news

Church schools shun poorest pupils

The Guardian and Telegraph report that England's faith state schools are failing to mirror their local communities by shunning the poorest pupils in their area. The reports quote data from the Department for Education showing that three-quarters of Catholic schools had a lower proportion of children from the most deprived backgrounds than the average for their local authority last year and three-quarters of Anglican primaries and two-thirds of secondaries took a smaller share of poor pupils.

Church leaders have defended the figures saying that schools often had wider catchment areas than other schools.

- [Faith schools 'using covert selection to reject the poor'](#) (Telegraph)
- [Church schools shun poorest pupils](#) (Guardian)

School admissions see massive differences between areas

Figures emerged this week indicating that the largest number of pupils receiving their first choice of secondary school was recorded in several areas including Hartlepool, where at least 98 per cent of pupils gained their preferred school.

These figures contrasts with areas such as London, which has seen large numbers of pupils rejected from their first choice school. In some towns and cities, children missed out on as many as six secondary schools. An analysis of council data shows that the rejection rate is being driven by competition to get into grammar schools and a new generation of independent academies and free schools.

- [School admissions: half of pupils rejected in some towns](#) (Telegraph)
- [Secondary school places in England to be announced](#) (BBC News)

Only three per cent of academies sponsor weaker schools

According to the TES only 3% of the 1,243 schools that have taken up Education Secretary Michael Gove's offer to become an academy are sponsoring a 'weaker school'.

The report argues that the figures demonstrate how few converters are complying with the Government's drive to get them to take 'weaker schools under their wings'. The figures contrast with

Mr Gove's statement in a speech in January that there had been an 'outpouring of desire' among academy converters to help other schools.

- [Small figure, big issue](#) (TES)

Events

KS1/ Foundation level Maths training seminar – 12 March

Looking for fun and engaging ways to teach Maths at Foundation/KS1? Durham based Schools' Company 'Staying Ahead' is bringing innovative programme Little 'Big Maths' to the North East for a training session for teachers and school leaders. Led by Shonette Bason, the session is at the Wynard Rooms on Monday 12 March and you can purchase tickets and find out more by [clicking here](#).

Improving results through online play, seminar – 13 March

New SCHOOL NorthEast Commercial Supporter, I am Learning, is hosting a seminar to demonstrate how their innovative online learning tool can help improve results. Used by hundreds of secondary and primary schools across the globe, I am Learning is a UK leader in engaging and motivating pupils in games-based revision learning with more than 100,000 questions, supporting all subjects across GCSE and Key Stage 3.

This free seminar will draw on the success of Darlington School of Mathematics and Science (DSMS), which utilised I am Learning to achieve their best ever GCSE results, as reported in this recent press coverage [Learning from generation Xbox](#).

The sessions will be held on Tuesday 13 March at 10.30am, 1.30pm or 3.30pm at the Darlington College of Maths and Science (formerly Branksome Science College).

To book a place, please email david@iamlearning.co.uk, stating which session you would like to attend.

Creative Enquiry Based Learning CPD - 22 March and 23 March

Cap-a-Pie Associates is hosting a series of professional development workshops to inspire more curious and independent learners, move teaching and learning from good to outstanding, and develop an innovative curriculum that raises attainment.

These courses will take place on Thursday 22 and Friday 23 March from 9.30am - 4.30am at the Toffee Factory Newcastle. There is a 15% discount for SCHOOLS NorthEast members (£136 + VAT per day). For more information click here www.cap-a-pie.co.uk/courses or contact Sally Fixter on 0191 3759046 to book a place.

Special Educational Needs and Disability Conference - 25 April

SENtral Consultants Ltd is hosting a one day conference with national keynote speakers and seminars to keep schools up to date with the latest developments in SEND.

The event will take place at Hardwick Hall Hotel, Sedgefield on 25 April 2012. For more information please [click here](#) or contact Kath Alley (07773287275) or email info@sentralconsultants.co.uk

Resources and Opportunities

Free teacher training for secondary schools worth £280

Looking for an innovative and practical way to give your students a clear understanding of business and financial processes? Sage@School is offering to train two teachers for the price of one for a limited time when you buy a Teacher & Student Package – a great saving of £280.

Become a Sage Certified teacher and help your students develop the practical business and finance skills they need for a brighter future. [Find out more here.](#)

Free Consultation with an expert from Principled Learning

Feeling stuck with how to promote sustainable whole school improvement? Need a fresh perspective on what you are doing?

Principled Learning is offering all SCHOOLS NorthEast members the opportunity for one of their experts to visit your school for an initial consultation on how they can help you to think differently about school improvement. Contact joycem@principledlearning.co.uk to book an appointment for Principled Learning to visit your school.

Do you have students that would benefit from a summer of study at Yale University?

The Sutton Trust is running a new programme to give bright, non-privileged state school students a taste of life at a US university. The initiative aims to widen the pool of talented UK youngsters studying in America, so that the brightest can take advantage of the opportunities on offer across the Pond. The programme will centre on a one week summer school at Yale University, with additional events and application support in the UK, before and after.

All costs, including travel and accommodation, will be met by the Sutton Trust. Applications are open until 9 March. [Click here to apply now.](#)

Vacancy for Royal Academy of Engineering Regional STEM Teacher Coordinators

The Royal Academy of Engineering is seeking to appoint an experienced and resourceful teacher of a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) subject who can enthuse other teachers and support the development of STEM in their local schools. The role of the Teacher Coordinator involves establishing a network of local schools and providing support, guidance and training for the teachers of STEM subjects in those schools.

The Academy already has 16 Teacher Coordinators in post across the UK and is looking to add to this number. They are particularly keen to receive applications from mathematics and ICT teachers in the North East.

The Teacher Coordinator role is typically half a day per week and is paid. Successful applicants will not be expected to leave their current teaching role. Full details of the roles and application process are available from the [Academy website](#). The closing date for applications is midday on Monday 19 March.

Welcome to new Commercial Supporters

SCHOOLS NorthEast has a growing network of Commercial Supporters who help us to be able to continue to work on behalf of North East schools. The network offers opportunities for schools to interact with organisations that provide a range of products and services to education many of whom offer special discounts and unique provisions for SCHOOLS NorthEast member school.

This week we are delighted to welcome [Tyncan](#), [Dickinson Dees](#) and [D3 Associates](#) to SCHOOLS NorthEast. Visit the [SCHOOLS NorthEast Marketplace](#) to keep up to date with the latest offers, case studies and events.

School to School

In this feature, we ask a local Head to give us a brief insight into their school. This week we spoke to Martin Clinton from Stockton Sixth Form College.

Our school is... an excellent stepping stone between school and university/ work.

Our school motto/mission/vision is...Supporting Student Success.

Our school is good at...nurturing and developing each individual.

Our school is working on...constantly improving the student experience.

The biggest challenges for our school are...maintaining and improving results despite the funding cuts.

We think other schools would be interest in our...Specialist Tutor System and our newly refurbished Pastoral area and Art and Media Studies facilities.

We would be interested in hearing from other schools about...Level 2 programmes that are engaging and motivating.

Question from last week's school is: 'How will you continue to build student aspiration In the face of a more difficult examination regime and record youth unemployment?'

This is going to be a challenge given all the negativity in the media. Adding to the misery I believe it may be 20 years (as in the interwar period) before we get out of the current malaise. However, in the future just as then, well qualified hardworking individuals are much more likely to get work than others. The trend to having an increasingly well qualified workforce to compete globally will not change.

Our question to next week's school is... 'How do we get the message across that the state sector produces excellent and improving results?'

In the last 7 days we learnt...

Click the links below to go straight to the story.

- [Schoolchildren can use an iPhone but cannot tie their shoelaces](#)
- [School governors 'should be paid'](#)
- [School music lessons lack music](#)
- [Teen pregnancies are the lowest in 40 years](#)
- [Funniest exam answers become internet sensation](#)

Have a great week!

The SCHOOLS NorthEast Weekly Update goes out to every Head Teacher in the North East every Tuesday, but if anybody else in your school or LA would like to receive the Update, please send their name and email address to r.clegg@schoolsnortheast.com.

Plus if you have any issues you would like to see covered in the Update, or any other comments, I would love to hear from you at the above address.

