

Sponsored by Sage@School, which helps 14 to 18 year olds develop their business and finance skills. Find out how your school could get £100 through a new referral reward scheme below or [click here](#).

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Focus onexpansion of Academy Chains

A couple of years ago, there were only a handful of academy chains and very few people, outside of the immediate vicinity in which they operated, would recognise their names. Now, chains of schools are increasingly becoming a significant feature of the education landscape in England.

To chart their rise and explore the implications of more and more schools becoming part of a chain, the National College commissioned a large scale report that was released last week. Led by policy analyst Robert Hill, the report examines the expansion of 48 "sponsored chains" of three or more academies and the 122 "converter chains".

[Please click here for a summary of the report.](#)

The report has been broadly welcomed by Union leaders. ASCL General Secretary Brian Lightman said,

"This report is an informative and timely analysis of the growing influence of this model of school organisation. It is evident that there is a great deal to learn and share from successful practice in academy chains but it is equally helpful that the report highlights the challenges and pitfalls to be avoided. The report will help us to harness those characteristics which have the greatest impact."

And NAHT General Secretary Russell Hobby commented: "The future lies in schools working together. That is without doubt and this report is a valuable contribution to understanding how this might work. There are many models for collaboration, however, and it would be wrong to rely exclusively on the sponsored academy chain. They have their place in the menu of solutions, but they are not a silver bullet and not guaranteed success: other federations, trusts and collaborations are all shown to work."

However, Association of Teachers and Lecturers General Secretary Mary Bousted criticised the report for failing to ask "key questions about chains".

She said: "The report describes a wide variety of practice in these new organisations, but ignores the trend towards the imposition on teachers of standard and sometimes inappropriate curriculum models and methods of teaching."

Bousted also voiced concerns that the lines of accountability within a chain were still unclear for parents. "Sponsors and leaders have to answer to no-one, but if parents' concerns are not answered by the school, who do they turn to?"

The research is particularly timely in the week that a private provider established by two City financiers, announced plans to run 2,000 schools. According to the TES, Clarendon Academies has held lengthy discussions with the Department for Education (DfE) and believes that by managing 10% of state schools it would generate financial surpluses that would be ploughed back into education and teachers' pay including the introduction of John Lewis-style bonuses for staff.

What's your view? Is the expansion of academy chains a good thing? Email your thoughts to think@schoolsnortheast.com

Further Reading:

- Download the full National College report: [The growth of academy chains: trends and implications for leaders and leadership](#).
- Greg Hurst in The Times: [public profile](#)
- [Academy chains do not guarantee success](#) (ASCL)
- [Balanced look at academy chains is welcome](#) (NAHT)
- [Start small, think big](#) (TES)
- [Academy chains warned against rapid expansion](#) (CYPN)

Response to last week's 'Focus On' Homework data

How much homework is enough? This was the question posed in last week's Focus On. We now have in-depth data from our Commercial Supporters Kirkland Rowell Surveys (part of GL Performance), which may help you to decide.

In surveys conducted over the past 18 months, responses from over 420,000 parents and 650,000 pupils from 1,900 schools highlighted some interesting trends in homework levels.

[Click here to download the full report today.](#)

Local news by area

Darlington

- [Students help primary school pupils](#) (The Northern Echo)

Durham

- [County Durham Catholic schools 'at risk' from cuts](#) (Journal Live)
- [Inspiration for teens](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [New headteacher gives Olympics high priority](#) (The Northern Echo)

Hartlepool

- [Teen health bus hits the roads](#) (Hartlepool Mail)
- [The key to success](#) (Hartlepool Mail)
- [Easter sports fun in Hartlepool](#) (Hartlepool Mail)

Middlesbrough

- [A royal date for Yarm School's new arts centre](#) (Gazette Live)
- [Unity City Academy in Middlesbrough 'inadequate' says Ofsted](#) (Gazette Live)

Newcastle

- [Students learn that child's play can be a risky business](#) (News Guardian)
- ['Failing' Walbottle Village Primary School gets top Ofsted mark](#) (Chronicle Live)
- [Pupils plan CD to raise cash for British Legion](#) (Chronicle Live)
- [Royal Grammar School's bursary fund hits £5m mark](#) (Journal Live)

Northumberland

- [Handover of campus marks end of £51m rebuilding programme](#) (News Guardian)
- [Fancy dress Teachers and pupils mark World Book Day](#) (Berwick Advertiser)
- [Wark School's Willow Work Takes Root](#) (Hexham Courant)
- [Grant helps schools practise the appliance of science](#) (Hexham Courant)

Stockton

- [Headteacher selected for support role](#) (The Northern Echo)

South Tyneside

- [Schools scheme is top of the class](#) (Shields Gazette)
- [Kids go all out to get new skills](#) (Shields Gazette)
- [Second school set for Olympics event](#) (Shields Gazette)

Sunderland

- [Back to school for ex-Black Cats](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [College event for school pupils](#) (The Northern Echo)

Regional

- [North East School Awards launched](#) (Gazette Live)

Top national education news

Failing primary schools to be converted into academies

Last week there was further reporting about the Department for Education's plans to pull 100 primary schools out of local authority control and convert them into academies from September. In the biggest move of its kind, schools educating around 25,000 under-11s will be placed in the hands of third-party sponsors to address 'chronic underperformance'. It is intended that similar action will be taken with another 100 primaries by the end of the 2012/13 academic year.

[Failing primary schools to be converted into academies](#) (Daily Telegraph)

Gove warning against early GCSEs

Education Secretary, Michael Gove issued a warning to discourage what he says is the "damaging trend" of struggling pupils taking GCSEs early. In 2010 about a quarter of pupils took maths early and

a quarter took English early. Gove says research shows that "for many of these pupils early GCSE entry can be detrimental".

However, some teachers say that early entries can help increase focus for struggling pupils, as well as the most able. The number of early entries has risen dramatically over the past few years. In 2007 there were 67,000 early entries to English and maths. By 2010 that had risen to 326,000.

[Gove warning against early GCSEs](#) (BBC Online)

More than a third of schools judged not good enough

New statistics from Ofsted show that during the last three months of 2011 more than a third of schools were rated 'not good enough'. Recent figures showed 6% of the schools inspected were classed as 'inadequate' and 31% as 'satisfactory'. Ofsted wants to change the 'satisfactory' grade to 'requires improvement'.

The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) said inspectors visited lower achieving schools more often which skewed the figures. The figures showed that 46% of the 1,679 state schools inspected late last year were deemed 'good' and 18% were 'outstanding'.

[More than a third of schools judged not good enough](#) (BBC News)

Specialist language teachers 'urgently required'

A surge in the demand for the foreign languages at GCSE, has prompted urgent calls from the TDA to recruit modern foreign language teachers.

The number of modern foreign language teachers has declined in recent years largely because of the fall in the number of pupils studying language GCSEs and A-levels. However, the number of pupils set to sit language GCSEs next year has increased by 22% to 52%. The rise is thought to be tied to the English Baccalaureate, which requires a GCSE in a language among other subjects.

[Specialist language teachers 'urgently required'](#) (BBC News)

Events

Lunch with James Wharton, MP for Stockton South – Friday 16 March

These lunches are a great opportunity for Head Teachers to sit down with local MPs and discuss and debate the key challenges facing North East schools.

Join James Wharton, MP for Stockton South, this Friday, 16 March, at the [Judges Hotel](#) from 12pm until 2pm. Places at the lunches are free but are very limited and exclusive to Head Teachers. If you would like to attend a lunch please email r.clegg@schoolsnortheast.com or give us a call on (0191) 204 8866

Helen Goodman MP: Creating the link between Education and Industry – 28 March

With youth unemployment levels rising and local businesses experiencing skills shortages, it is clear that action needs to be taken to address these issues. Meet with Helen Goodman, MP for Bishop Auckland, to discuss the challenges involved in ensuring greater collaboration between education and industry.

The event will take place on 28 March at the South Durham Enterprise Agency between 1pm and 3pm.

If you would like any further information or would like to attend, please contact Andrew Hair on andrew.hair@parliament.uk.

Resources and Opportunities

British Student Film Festival 2012

The British Student Film Festival from **30 March – 30 April 2012** is looking for talented film installation artists to showcase their work in a pop up exhibition space. Pupils can submit entries to the first leg of the British Student Film Festival, which will be held at the Boiler Shop in Newcastle.

To submit a film to be part of the festival please get in touch with Neil Burke on 0191 4404410 or email at neil@rywu.org.uk. Closing date is **Friday 23 March 2012**.

London 2012 World Sport Day

Monday 25 June 2012 is the final UK-wide Get Set event before the Games begin, giving thousands of schools and communities the chance to celebrate the athletes and cultures of the world.

- To prepare for the day follow these simple steps:
- Put the date in your diaries.
- Request your free celebration pack from the website. Schools in the Get Set network will automatically be sent a bumper edition of the pack, so schools should join the network at www.london2012.com/getset if they want to receive even more goodies.
- Start planning for World Sport Day. Schools in the Get Set network should send their plans to worldsportday@london2012.com to be in with a chance of winning some great prizes such as test event tickets, pin badges and even a visit from the London 2012 mascots.
- Whatever you're doing on World Sport Day, make sure you set aside some time on the day to bring the whole school together to have fun creating flags of countries across the globe.

'Recommend a Teacher' to receive £100 worth of vouchers for your school

SCHOOLS NorthEast Commercial Supporter, Sage@School, recently introduced a new referral reward scheme. 'Recommend a Teacher' gives you the opportunity to receive £100 worth of vouchers for your school when you recommend any teacher who then signs up to the Sage@School programme.

Sage@School will specifically be of interest to Head Teachers, deputy heads, teachers and Heads of Department in business-related subjects who are looking to introduce new, innovative and practical teaching methods. Plus, you can also recommend teachers from other schools, so you can gain more rewards for your school if they sign up too.

Find out about the Recommend a Teacher scheme [here](#).

School to School

In this feature, we ask a local Head give us a brief insight into their school. This week we spoke to Hilary French from Central Newcastle High School, an independent day school in Newcastle for girls aged 3 to 18.

Our school is... a Centre of Excellence with a longstanding reputation for educating girls. It is a lively, vibrant and exciting place to be.

Our school motto/mission/vision is...At Central high we stimulate girls' intellectual curiosity and help them to reach their full potential. We want the girls to have a zest for life and learning and to

have respect for themselves and others. Making sure they understand the value of community and how they can be good citizens now and in the future is an important message.

Our school is good at... harnessing creative energy and producing amazing results.

Our school is working on... understanding how recent research on teaching and learning can be put into practice in order to enhance the learning experience and to further our expertise on how girls learn effectively.

The biggest challenges for our school are... fitting everything in to the day, week, term, year when we have such motivated, energetic and talented young women to educate!

We think other schools would be interested in our... School Council. We have a very proactive School Council, called the Forum, chaired by the Head Girl. The Forum has influenced many areas of school life in recent years and has been involved in developing new systems for rewards and sanctions, as well as new structures for our House system including vertical House Families for Years 6 to 13. The Forum members play a big part in helping to recruit staff as candidates now have to face a student panel. In addition our Forum also helps to organise many fun charity based activities and events.

We would be interested in hearing from other schools about... how we can work together to share expertise and devise joint projects that give excellent learning opportunities for all concerned. We have recently completed is a green project with Richardson Dees Primary School in Wallsend. Our Sixth Form girls worked with the children to design a reusable water bottle. It was a great experience for all and provided a platform to learn more about the environment and how we look after our planet.

Question from last week's school is... How do we get the message across that the state sector produces excellent and improving results? – “This is a hard one for me to answer. I do think, however, that in our region we have some excellent schools and we should celebrate more the successes of all our young people through the local and national press. In the media there is a very strong focus on examination results whereas we should also be giving credit to other essential skills and achievements required for the workplace - something that is crucial to our future as a nation.

Our question to next week's school is... Which statesman or politician (living or dead) would you invite into your school and why?

In the last 7 days we learnt...

Click the links below to go straight to the story.

- [Daily exercise 'significantly improves pupils' test scores'](#)
- [Heavy bags are deforming children](#)
- [Roald Dahl is voted teachers' favourite author](#)
- [School exams subjected to equality checks to stamp out bias](#)

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.